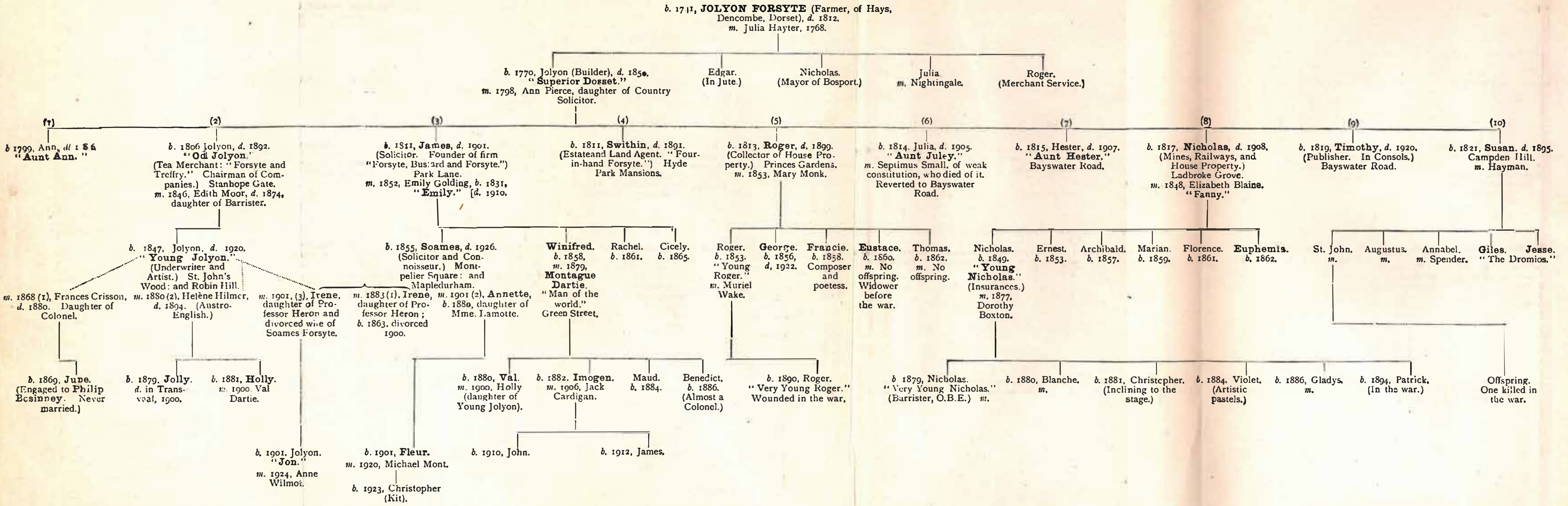
FORSYTE FAMILY TREE.


b. 1741, JOLYON FORSYTE (Farmer, of Hays, Dencombe, Dorset), d. 1812. m. Julia Hayter, 1768.
b. 1770, Jolyon (Builder), d. 1850. "Superior Dosset." m. 1798, Ann Pierce, daughter of Country Solicitor.
Edgar. (In Jute.)
Nicholas. (Mayor of Bosport.)
Julia m. Nightingale.
Roger. (Merchant Service.)
(1) b 1799, Ann, d. 1886. "Aunt Ann."
(2) b. 1806 Jolyon, d. 1892. "Old Jolyon." (Tea Merchant: "Forsyte and Treffry." Chairman of Companies.) Stanhope Gate. m. 1846, Edith Moor, d. 1874, daughter of Barrister.
(3) b. 1811, James, d. 1901. (Solicitor. Founder of firm "Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte.") Park Lane. m. 1852, Emily Golding, b. 1831, "Emily." [d. 1910.
(4) b. 1811, Swithin, d. 1891. (Estate and Land Agent. "Four-in-hand Forsyte.") Hyde Park Mansions.
(5) b. 1813, Roger, d. 1899. (Collector of House Property.) Princes Gardens. m. 1853, Mary Monk.
(6) b. 1814, Julia, d. 1905. "Aunt Juley." m. Septimus Small, of weak constitution, who died of it. Reverted to Bayswater Road.
(7) b. 1815, Hester, d. 1907. "Aunt Hester." Bayswater Road.
(8) b. 1817, Nicholas, d. 1908. (Mines, Railways, and House Property.) Ladbroke Grove. m. 1848, Elizabeth Blaine. "Fanny."
(9) b. 1819, Timothy, d. 1920. (Publisher. In Consols.) Bayswater Road.
(10) b. 1821, Susan, d. 1895. Campden Hill. m. Hayman.
b. 1847, Jolyon, d. 1920. "Young Jolyon." (Underwriter and Artist.) St. John's Wood: and Robin Hill.
m. 1868 (1), Frances Crisson, d. 1880. Daughter of Colonel.
m. 1880 (2), Helène Hilmer, d. 1894. (Austro-English.)
m. 1901, (3), Irene, daughter of Professor Heron and divorced wife of Soames Forsyte.
b. 1855, Soames, d. 1926. (Solicitor and Connoisseur.) Montpelier Square: and Mapledurham.
m. 1883 (1), Irene, daughter of Professor Heron; b. 1863, divorced 1900.
m. 1901 (2), Annette, b. 1880, daughter of Mme. Lamotte.
Winifred. b. 1858, m. 1879, Montague Dartie. "Man of the world." Green Street.
Rachel. b. 1861.
Cicely. b. 1865.
Roger. b. 1853. "Young Roger." m. Muriel Wake.
George. b. 1856, d. 1922.
Francie. b. 1858. Composer and poetess.
Eustace. b. 1860. m. No offspring. Widower before the war.
Thomas. b. 1862. m. No offspring.
Nicholas. b. 1849. "Young Nicholas." (Insurances.) m. 1877, Dorothy Boxton.
Ernest. b. 1853.
Archibald. b. 1857.
Marian. b. 1859.
Florence. b. 1861.
Euphemia. b. 1862.
St. John. m.
Augustus. m.
Annabel. m. Spender.
Giles. Jesse. "The Dromios."
b. 1869, June. (Engaged to Philip Bosinney. Never married.)
b. 1879, Jolly. d. in Transvaal, 1900.
b. 1881, Holly. m. 1900 Val Dartie.
b. 1880, Val. m. 1900, Holly (daughter of Young Jolyon).
b. 1882, Imogen. m. 1906, Jack Cardigan.
Maud. b. 1884.
Benedict. b. 1886. (Almost a Colonel.)
b. 1890, Roger. "Very Young Roger." Wounded in the war.
b. 1879, Nicholas. "Very Young Nicholas." (Barrister, O.B.E.) m.
b. 1880, Blanche. m.
b. 1881, Christopher. (Inclining to the stage.)
b. 1884, Violet. (Artistic pastels.)
b. 1886, Gladys. m.
b. 1894, Patrick. (In the war.)
Offspring. One killed in the war.
b. 1901, Jolyon. "Jon." m. 1924, Anne Wilmot.
b. 1901, Fleur. m. 1920, Michael Mont.
b. 1923, Christopher (Kit).
b. 1910, John.
b. 1912, James.

The Salvation of [a] Swithin' Forsyte

I

Swithin Forsyte lay in bed. The corners of his mouth under his white moustache drooped towards his double chin. He panted:

"My doctor says I'm in a bad way, James."

His twin-brother placed his hand behind his ear. "I can't hear you. They tell me I ought to take a cure. There's always a cure wanted for something. Emily had a cure."

Swithin replied: "You mumble so. I hear my man, Adolph. I trained him.... You ought to have an ear-trumpet. You're getting very shaky, James."

There was silence; then James Forsyte, as if galvanised, remarked: "I s'pose you've made your will. I s'pose you've left your money to the family; you've nobody else to leave it to. There was Danson died the other day, and left his money to a hospital."

The hairs of Swithin's white moustache bristled. "My fool of a doctor told me to make my will," he said, "I hate a fellow who tells you to make your will. My appetite's good; I ate a partridge last night. I'm all the better for eating. He told me to leave off champagne! I eat a good breakfast. I'm not eighty. You're the same age, James. You look very shaky."

James Forsyte said: "You ought to have another opinion. Have Blank; he's the first man now. I had him for Emily; cost me two hundred guineas. He sent her to Homburg; that's the first place now. The Prince was there — everybody goes there."

Swithin Forsyte answered: "I don't get any sleep at night, now I can't get out; and I've bought a new carriage — gave a pot of money for it. D' you ever have bronchitis? They tell me champagne's dangerous; it's my belief I couldn't take a better thing."

James Forsyte rose.

"You ought to have another opinion. Emily sent her love; she would have come in, but she had to go to Niagara. Everybody goes there; it's the place now. Rachel goes every morning: she overdoes it — she'll be laid up one of these days. There's a fancy ball there to-night; the Duke gives the prizes."

Swithin Forsyte said angrily: "I can't get things properly cooked here; at the club I get spinach decently done." The bed-clothes jerked at the tremor of his legs.

James Forsyte replied: "You must have done well with Tintos; you must have made a lot of money by them. Your ground-rents must be falling in, too. You must have any amount you don't know what to do with." He mouthed the words, as if his lips were watering.

Swithin Forsyte glared. "Money!" he said; "my doctor's bill's enormous."

James Forsyte stretched out a cold, damp hand "Goodbye! You ought to have another opinion. I can't keep the horses waiting: they're a new pair — stood me in three hundred. You ought to take care of yourself. I shall speak to Blank about you. You ought to have him — everybody says he's the first man. Good-bye!"

Swithin Forsyte continued to stare at the ceiling. He thought: 'A poor thing, James! a selfish beggar! Must be worth a couple of hundred thousand!' He wheezed, meditating on life....

He was ill and lonely. For many years he had been lonely, and for two years ill; but as he had smoked his first cigar, so he would live his life-stoutly, to its predestined end. Every day he was driven to the club; sitting forward on the spring cushions of a single brougham, his hands on his knees, swaying a little, strangely solemn. He ascended the steps into that marble hall — the folds of his chin wedged into the aperture of his collar — walking squarely with a stick. Later he would dine, eating majestically, and savouring his food, behind a bottle of champagne set in an ice-pail — his waistcoat defended by a napkin, his eyes rolling a little or glued in a stare on the waiter. Never did he suffer his head or back to droop, for it was not distinguished so to do.

Because he was old and deaf, he spoke to no one; and no one spoke to him. The club gossip, an Irishman, said to each newcomer: "Old Forsyte! Look at 'um! Must ha' had something in his life to sour 'um!" But Swithin had had nothing in his life to sour him.

For many days now he had lain in bed in a room exuding silver, crimson, and electric light, smelling of opopanax and of cigars. The curtains were drawn, the firelight gleamed; on a table by his bed were a jug of barley-water and the Times. He made an attempt to read, failed, and fell again to thinking. His face with its square chin, looked like a block of pale leather bedded in the pillow. It was lonely! A woman in the room would have made all the difference! Why had he never married? He breathed hard, staring froglike at the ceiling; a memory had come into his mind. It was a long time ago — forty odd years — but it seemed like yesterday....

It happened when he was thirty-eight, for the first and only time in his life travelling on the Continent, with his twin-brother James and a man named Traquair. On the way from Germany to Venice, he had found himself at the Hotel Goldene Alp at Salzburg. It was late August, and weather for the gods: sunshine on the walls and the shadows of the vine-leaves, and at night, the moonlight, and again on the walls the shadows of the vine-leaves. Averse to the suggestions of other people, Swithin had refused to visit the Citadel; he had spent the day alone in the window of his bedroom, smoking a succession of cigars, and disparaging the appearance of the passers-by. After dinner he was driven by boredom into the streets. His chest puffed out like a pigeon's, and with something of a pigeon's cold and inquiring eye, he strutted, annoyed at the frequency of uniforms, which seemed to him both needless and offensive. His spleen rose at this crowd of foreigners, who spoke an unintelligible language, wore hair on their faces, and smoked bad tobacco. 'A queer lot!' he thought. The sound of music from a cafe attracted him; he walked in, vaguely moved by a wish for the distinction of adventure, without the trouble which adventure usually brought with it; spurred too, perhaps, by an after-dinner demon. The cafe was the bier-halle of the 'Fifties, with a door at either end, and lighted by a large wooden lantern. On a small dais three musicians were fiddling. Solitary men, or groups, sat at some dozen tables, and the waiters hurried about replenishing glasses; the air was thick with smoke. Swithin sat down. "Wine!" he said sternly. The astonished waiter brought him wine. Swithin pointed to a beer glass on the table. "Here!" he said, with the same ferocity. The waiter poured out the wine. 'Ah!' thought Swithin, 'they can understand if they like.' A group of officers close by were laughing; Swithin stared at them uneasily. A hollow cough sounded almost in his ear. To his left a man sat reading, with his elbows on the corners of a journal, and his gaunt shoulders raised almost to his eyes. He had a thin, long nose, broadening suddenly at the nostrils; a black-brown beard, spread in a savage fan over his chest; what was visible of the face was the colour of old parchment. A strange, wild, haughty-looking creature! Swithin observed his clothes with some displeasure — they were the clothes of a journalist or strolling actor. And yet he was impressed. This was singular. How could he be impressed by a fellow in such clothes! The man reached out a hand, covered with black hairs, and took up a tumbler that contained a dark-coloured fluid. ‘Brandy!’ thought Swithin. The crash of a falling chair startled him — his neighbour had risen. He was of immense height, and very thin; his great beard seemed to splash away from his mouth; he was glaring at the group of officers, and speaking. Swithin made out two words: “Hunde! Deutsche Hunde!” ‘Hounds! Dutch hounds!’ he thought: ‘Rather strong!’ One of the officers had jumped up, and now drew his sword. The tall man swung his chair up, and brought it down with a thud. Everybody round started up and closed on him. The tall man cried out, “To me, Magyars!”

Swithin grinned. The tall man fighting such odds excited his unwilling admiration; he had a momentary impulse to go to his assistance. ‘Only get a broken nose!’ he thought, and looked for a safe corner. But at that moment a thrown lemon struck him on the jaw. He jumped out of his chair and rushed at the officers. The Hungarian, swinging his chair, threw him a look of gratitude — Swithin glowed with momentary admiration of himself. A sword blade grazed his — arm; he felt a sudden dislike of the Hungarian. ‘This is too much,’ he thought, and, catching up a chair, flung it at the wooden lantern. There was a crash — faces and swords vanished. He struck a match, and by the light of it bolted for the door. A second later he was in the street.

II

A voice said in English, “God bless you, brother!”

Swithin looked round, and saw the tall Hungarian holding out his hand. He took it, thinking, ‘What a fool I’ve been!’ There was something in the Hungarian’s gesture which said, “You are worthy of me!”

It was annoying, but rather impressive. The man seemed even taller than before; there was a cut on his cheek, the blood from which was trickling down his beard. “You English!” he said. “I saw you stone Haynau — I saw you cheer Kossuth. The free blood of your people cries out to us.” He looked at Swithin. “You are a big man, you have a big soul — and strong, how you flung them down! Ha!” Swithin had an impulse to take to his heels. “My name,” said the Hungarian, “is Boleskey. You are my friend.” His English was good.

‘Bulsh-kai-ee, Burlsh-kai-ee,’ thought Swithin; ‘what a devil of a name!’ “Mine,” he said sulkily, “is Forsyte.”

The Hungarian repeated it.

“You’ve had a nasty jab on the cheek,” said Swithin; the sight of the matted beard was making him feel sick. The Hungarian put his fingers to his cheek, brought them away wet, stared at them, then with an indifferent air gathered a wisp of his beard and crammed it against the cut.

“Ugh!” said Swithin. “Here! Take my handkerchief!”

The Hungarian bowed. “Thank you!” he said; “I couldn’t think of it! Thank you a thousand times!”

“Take it!” growled Swithin; it seemed to him suddenly of the first importance. He thrust the handkerchief into the Hungarian’s hand, and felt a pain in his arm. ‘There!’ he thought, ‘I’ve strained a muscle.’

The Hungarian kept muttering, regardless of passers-by, “Swine! How you threw them over! Two or three cracked heads, anyway — the cowardly swine!”

“Look here!” said Swithin suddenly; “which is my way to the Goldene Alp?”

The Hungarian replied, “But you are coming with me, for a glass of wine?”

Swithin looked at the ground. ‘Not if I know it!’ he thought.

“Ah!” said the Hungarian with dignity, “you do not wish for my friendship!”

‘Touchy beggar!’ thought Swithin. “Of course,” he stammered, “if you put it in that way—”

The Hungarian bowed, murmuring, “Forgive me!”

They had not gone a dozen steps before a youth, with a beardless face and hollow cheeks, accosted them. “For the love of Christ, gentlemen,” he said, “help me!”

“Are you a German?” asked Boleskey.

“Yes,” said the youth.

“Then you may rot!”

“Master, look here!” Tearing open his coat, the youth displayed his skin, and a leather belt drawn tight round it. Again Swithin felt that desire to take to his heels. He was filled with horrid forebodings — a sense of perpending intimacy with things such as no gentleman had dealings with.

The Hungarian crossed himself. “Brother,” he said to the youth, “come you in!”

Swithin looked at them askance, and followed. By a dim light they groped their way up some stairs into a large room, into which the moon was shining through a window bulging over the street. A lamp burned low; there was a smell of spirits and tobacco, with a faint, peculiar scent, as of rose leaves. In one corner stood a czymbal, in another a great pile of newspapers. On the wall hung some old-fashioned pistols, and a rosary of yellow beads. Everything was tidily arranged, but dusty. Near an open fireplace was a table with the remains of a meal. The ceiling, floor, and walls were all of dark wood. In spite of the strange disharmony, the room had a sort of refinement. The Hungarian took a bottle out of a cupboard and, filling some glasses, handed one to Swithin. Swithin put it gingerly to his nose. ‘You never know your luck! Come!’ he thought, tilting it slowly into his mouth. It was thick, too sweet, but of a fine flavour.

“Brothers!” said the Hungarian, refilling, “your healths!”

The youth tossed off his wine. And Swithin this time did the same; he pitied this poor devil of a youth now. “Come round to-morrow!” he said, “I’ll give you a shirt or two.” When the youth was gone, however, he remembered with relief that he had not given his address.

‘Better so,’ he reflected. ‘A humbug, no doubt.’

“What was that you said to him?” he asked of the Hungarian.

“I said,” answered Boleskey, “‘You have eaten and drunk; and now you are my enemy!’”

“Quite right!” said Swithin, “quite right! A beggar is every man’s enemy.”

“You do not understand,” the Hungarian replied politely. “While he was a beggar — I, too, have had to beg” (Swithin thought, ‘Good God! this is awful!’), “but now that he is no longer hungry, what is he but a German? No Austrian dog soils my floors!”

His nostrils, as it seemed to Swithin, had distended in an unpleasant fashion; and a wholly unnecessary raucousness invaded his voice. “I am an exile — all of my blood are exiles. Those Godless dogs!” Swithin hurriedly assented.

As he spoke, a face peeped in at the door.

“Rozsi!” said the Hungarian. A young girl came in. She was rather short, with a deliciously round figure and a thick plait of hair. She smiled, and showed her even teeth; her little, bright, wide-set grey eyes glanced from one man to the other. Her face was round, too, high in the cheekbones, the colour of wild roses, with brows that had a twist-up at the corners. With a gesture of alarm, she put her hand to her cheek, and called, “Margit!” An older girl appeared, taller, with fine shoulders, large eyes, a pretty mouth, and what Swithin described to himself afterwards as a “pudding” nose. Both girls, with little cooing sounds, began attending to their father’s face.

Swithin turned his back to them. His arm pained him.

‘This is what comes of interfering,’ he thought sulkily; ‘I might have had my neck broken!’ Suddenly a soft palm was placed in his, two eyes, half-fascinated, half-shy, looked at him; then a voice called, “Rozsi!” the door was slammed, he was alone again with the Hungarian, harassed by a sense of soft disturbance.

“Your daughter’s name is Rosy?” he said; “we have it in England — from rose, a flower.”

“Rozsi (Rozgi),” the Hungarian replied; “your English is a hard tongue, harder than French, German, or Czechish, harder than Russian, or Roumanian — I know no more.”

“What?” said Swithin, “six languages?” Privately he thought, ‘He knows how to lie, anyway.’

“If you lived in a country like mine,” muttered the Hungarian, “with all men’s hands against you! A free people — dying — but not dead!”

Swithin could not imagine what he was talking of. This man’s face, with its linen bandage, gloomy eyes, and great black wisps of beard, his fierce mutterings, and hollow cough, were all most unpleasant. He seemed to be suffering from some kind of mental dog-bite. His emotion indeed appeared so indecent, so uncontrolled and open, that its obvious sincerity produced a sort of awe in Swithin. It was like being forced to look into a furnace. Boleskey stopped roaming up and down. “You think it’s over?” he said; “I tell you, in the breast of each one of us Magyars there is a hell. What is sweeter than life? What is more sacred than each breath we draw? Ah! my country!” These words were uttered so slowly, with such intense mournfulness, that Swithin’s jaw relaxed; he converted the movement to a yawn.

“Tell me,” said Boleskey, “what would you do if the French conquered you?”

Swithin smiled. Then suddenly, as though something had hurt him, he grunted, “The ‘Froggies’? Let ’em try!”

“Drink!” said Boleskey—”there is nothing like it”; he filled Swithin’s glass. “I will tell you my story.”

Swithin rose hurriedly. “It’s late,” he said. “This is good stuff, though; have you much of it?”

“It is the last bottle.”

“What?” said Swithin; “and you gave it to a beggar?”

“My name is Boleskey — Stefan,” the Hungarian said, raising his head; “of the Komorn Boleskeys.” The simplicity of this phrase — as who shall say: What need of further description? — made an impression on Swithin; he stopped to listen. Boleskey’s story went on and on. “There were many abuses,” boomed his deep voice, “much wrong done — much cowardice. I could see clouds gathering — rolling over our plains. The Austrian wished to strangle the breath of our mouths — to take from us the shadow of our liberty — the shadow — all we had. Two years ago — the year of ‘48, when every man and boy answered the great voice — brother, a dog’s life! — to use a pen when all of your blood are fighting, but it was decreed for me! My son was killed; my brothers taken — and myself was thrown out like a dog — I had written out my heart, I had written out all the blood that was in my body!” He seemed to tower, a gaunt shadow of a man, with gloomy, flickering eyes staring at the wall.

Swithin rose, and stammered, “Much obliged — very interesting.” Boleskey made no effort to detain him, but continued staring at the wall. “Good-night!” said Swithin, and stamped heavily downstairs.

III

When at last Swithin reached the Goldene Alp, he found his brother and friend standing uneasily at the door. Traquair, a prematurely dried-up man, with whiskers and a Scotch accent, remarked, “Ye’re airly, man!” Swithin growled something unintelligible, and swung up to bed. He discovered a slight cut on his arm. He was in a savage temper — the elements had conspired to show him things he did not want to see; yet now and then a memory of Rozsi, of her soft palm in his, a sense of having been stroked and flattered, came over him. During breakfast next morning his brother and Traquair announced their intention of moving on. James Forsyte, indeed, remarked that it was no place for a “collector,” since all the “old” shops were in the hands of Jews or very grasping persons — he had discovered this at once. Swithin pushed his cup aside. “You may do what you like,” he said, “I’m staying here.”

James Forsyte replied, tumbling over his own words: “Why! what do you want to stay here for? There’s nothing for you to do here — there’s nothing to see here, unless you go up the Citadel, an’ you won’t do that.”

Swithin growled, “Who says so?” Having gratified his perversity, he felt in a better temper. He had slung his arm in a silk sash, and accounted for it by saying he had slipped. Later he went out and walked on to the bridge. In the brilliant sunshine spires were glistening against the pearly background of the hills; the town had a clean, joyous air. Swithin glanced at the Citadel and thought, ‘Looks a strong place! Shouldn’t wonder if it were impregnable!’ And this for some occult reason gave him pleasure. It occurred to him suddenly to go and look for the Hungarian’s house.

About noon, after a hunt of two hours, he was gazing about him blankly, pale with heat, but more obstinate than ever, when a voice above him called, “Mister!” He looked up and saw Rozsi. She was leaning her round chin on her round hand, gazing down at him with her deepset, clever eyes. When Swithin removed his hat, she clapped her hands. Again he had the sense of being admired, caressed. With a careless air, that sat grotesquely on his tall square person, he walked up to the door; both girls stood in the passage. Swithin felt a confused desire to speak in some foreign tongue. “Maam’selles,” he began, “er — bong jour-er, your father — pare, comment?”

“We also speak English,” said the elder girl; “will you come in, please?”

Swithin swallowed a misgiving, and entered. The room had a worn appearance by daylight, as if it had always been the nest of tragic or vivid lives. He sat down, and his eyes said: “I am a stranger, but don’t try to get the better of me, please — that is impossible.” The girls looked at him in silence. Rozsi wore a rather short skirt of black stuff, a white shirt, and across her shoulders an embroidered yoke; her sister was dressed in dark green, with a coral necklace; both girls had their hair in plaits. After a minute Rozsi touched the sleeve of his hurt arm.

“It’s nothing!” muttered Swithin.

“Father fought with a chair, but you had no chair,” she said in a wondering voice.

He doubled the fist of his sound arm and struck a blow at space. To his amazement she began to laugh. Nettled at this, he put his hand beneath the heavy table and lifted it. Rozsi clapped her hands. “Ah I now I see — how strong you are!” She made him a curtsey and whisked round to the window. He found the quick intelligence of her eyes confusing; sometimes they seemed to look beyond him at something invisible — this, too, confused him. From Margit he learned that they had been two years in England, where their father had made his living by teaching languages; they had now been a year in Salzburg.

“We wait,” suddenly said. Rozsi; and Margit, with a solemn face, repeated, “We wait.”

Swithin’s eyes swelled a little with his desire to see what they were waiting for. How queer they were, with their eyes that gazed beyond him! He looked at their figures. ‘She would pay for dressing,’ he thought, and he tried to imagine Rozsi in a skirt with proper flounces, a thin waist, and hair drawn back over her ears. She would pay for dressing, with that supple figure, fluffy hair, and little hands! And instantly his own hands, face, and clothes disturbed him. He got up, examined the pistols on the wall, and felt resentment at the faded, dusty room. ‘Smells like a pot-house!’ he thought. He sat down again close to Rozsi.

“Do you love to dance?” she asked; “to dance is to live. First you hear the music — how your feet itch! It is wonderful! You begin slow, quick — quicker; you fly — you know nothing — your feet are in the air. It is wonderful!”

A slow flush had mounted into Swithin’s face.

“Ah!” continued Rozsi, her eyes fixed on him, “when I am dancing — out there I see the plains — your feet go one — two — three — quick, quick, quick, quicker — you fly.”

She stretched herself, a shiver seemed to pass all down her. “Margit! dance!” and, to Swithin’s consternation, the two girls — their hands on each other’s shoulders — began shuffling their feet and swaying to and fro. Their heads were thrown back, their eyes half-closed; suddenly the step quickened, they swung to one side, then to the other, and began whirling round in front of him. The sudden fragrance of rose leaves enveloped him. Round they flew again. While they were still dancing, Boleskey came into the room. He caught Swithin by both hands.

“Brother, welcome! Ah! your arm is hurt! I do not forget.” His yellow face and deep-set eyes expressed a dignified gratitude. “Let me introduce to you my friend Baron Kasteliz.”

Swithin bowed to a man with a small forehead, who had appeared softly, and stood with his gloved hands touching his waist. Swithin conceived a sudden aversion for this catlike man. About Boleskey there was that which made contempt impossible — the sense of comradeship begotten in the fight; the man’s height; something lofty and savage in his face; and an obscure instinct that it would not pay to show distaste; but this Kasteliz, with his neat jaw, low brow, and velvety, volcanic look, excited his proper English animosity. “Your friends are mine,” murmured Kasteliz. He spoke with suavity, and hissed his s’s. A long, vibrating twang quavered through the room. Swithin turned and saw Rozsi sitting at the czymbal; the notes rang under the little hammers in her hands, incessant, metallic, rising and falling with that strange melody. Kasteliz had fixed his glowing eyes on her; Boleskey, nodding his head, was staring at the floor; Margit, with a pale face, stood like a statue.

‘What can they see in it?’ thought Swithin; ‘it’s not a tune.’ He took up his hat. Rozsi saw him and stopped; her lips had parted with a faintly dismayed expression. His sense of personal injury diminished; he even felt a little sorry for her. She jumped up from her seat and twirled round with a pout. An inspiration seized on Swithin. “Come and dine with me,” he said to Boleskey, “to-morrow — the

Goldene Alp — bring your friend.” He felt the eyes of the whole room on him — the Hungarian’s fine eyes; Margit’s wide glance; the narrow, hot gaze of Kasteliz; and lastly — Rozsi’s. A glow of satisfaction ran down his spine. When he emerged into the street he thought gloomily, ‘Now I’ve done it!’ And not for some paces did he look round; then, with a forced smile, turned and removed his hat to the faces at the window.

Notwithstanding this moment of gloom, however, he was in an exalted state all day, and at dinner kept looking at his brother and Traquair enigmatically. ‘What do they know of life?’ he thought; ‘they might be here a year and get no farther.’ He made jokes, and pinned the menu to the waiter’s coat-tails. “I like this place,” he said, “I shall spend three weeks here.” James, whose lips were on the point of taking in a plum, looked at him uneasily.

IV

On the day of the dinner Swithin suffered a good deal. He reflected gloomily on Boleskey's clothes. He had fixed an early hour — there would be fewer people to see them. When the time approached he attired himself with a certain neat splendour, and though his arm was still sore, left off the sling....

Nearly three hours afterwards he left the Goldene Alp between his guests. It was sunset, and along the riverbank the houses stood out, unsoftened by the dusk; the streets were full of people hurrying home. Swithin had a hazy vision of empty bottles, of the ground before his feet, and the accessibility of all the world. Dim recollections of the good things he had said, of his brother and Traquair seated in the background eating ordinary meals with inquiring, acid visages, caused perpetual smiles to break out on his face, and he steered himself stubbornly, to prove that he was a better man than either' of his guests. He knew, vaguely, that he was going somewhere with an object; Rozsi's face kept dancing before him, like a promise. Once or twice he gave Kasteliz a glassy stare. Towards Boleskey, on the other hand, he felt quite warm, and recalled with admiration the way he had set his glass down empty, time after time. 'I like to see him take his liquor,' he thought; 'the fellow's a gentleman, after all.' Boleskey strode on, savagely inattentive to everything; and Kasteliz had become more like a cat than ever. It was nearly dark when they reached a narrow street close to the cathedral. They stopped at a door held open by an old woman. The change from the fresh air to a heated corridor, the noise of the door closed behind him, the old woman's anxious glances, sobered Swithin.

"I tell her," said Boleskey, "that I reply for you as for my son."

Swithin was angry. What business had this man to reply for him!

They passed into a large room, crowded with men all women; Swithin noticed that they all looked fit him. He stared at them in turn — they seemed of all classes, some in black coats or silk dresses, others in the clothes of work-people; one man, a cobbler, still wore his leather apron, as if he had rushed there straight from his work. Laying his hand on Swithin's arm, Boleskey evidently began explaining who he was; hands were extended, people beyond reach bowed to him. Swithin acknowledged the greetings with a stiff motion of his head; then seeing other people dropping into seats, he, too, sat down. Some one whispered his name — Margit and Rozsi were just behind him.

"Welcome!" said Margit; but Swithin was looking at Rozsi. Her face was so alive and quivering! 'What's the excitement all about?' he thought. 'How pretty she looks!' She blushed, drew in her hands with a quick tense movement, and gazed again beyond him into the room. 'What is it?' thought Swithin; he had a longing to lean back and kiss her lips. He tried angrily to see what she was seeing in those faces turned all one way.

Boleskey rose to speak. No one moved; not a sound could be heard but the tone of his deep voice. On and on he went, fierce and solemn, and with the rise of his voice, all those faces-fair or swarthy — seemed to be glowing with one and the same feeling. Swithin felt the white heat in those faces — it was not decent! In that whole speech he only understood the one word—"Magyar" which came again and again. He almost dozed off at last. The twang of a czymbal woke him. 'What?' he thought, 'more of that infernal music!' Margit, leaning over him, whispered: "Listen! Racoczy! It is forbidden!" Swithin saw that Rozsi was no longer in her seat; it was she who was striking those forbidden notes. He looked round — everywhere the same unmoving faces, the same entrancement, and fierce stillness. The music sounded muffled, as if it, too, were bursting its heart in silence. Swithin felt within him a touch of panic. Was this a den of tigers? The way these people listened, the ferocity of their stillness, was frightful...! He gripped his chair and broke into a perspiration; was there no chance to get away? 'When it stops,' he thought, 'there'll be a rush!' But there was only a greater silence. It flashed across him that any hostile person coming in then would be torn to pieces. A woman sobbed. The whole thing was beyond words unpleasant. He rose, and edged his way furtively towards the doorway. There was a cry of "Police!" The whole crowd came pressing after him. Swithin would soon have been out, but a little behind he caught sight of Rozsi swept off her feet. Her frightened eyes angered him. 'She doesn't deserve it,' he thought sulkily; 'letting all this loose!' and forced his way back to her. She clung to him, and a fever went stealing through his veins; he butted forward at the crowd, holding her tight. When they were outside he let her go.

"I was afraid," she said.

"Afraid!" muttered Swithin; "I should think so." No longer touching her, he felt his grievance revive.

"But you are so strong," she murmured.

"This is no place for you," growled Swithin, "I'm going to see you home."

"Oh!" cried Rozsi; "but papa and — Margit!"

"That's their look-out!" and he hurried her away.

She slid her hand under his arm; the soft curves of her form brushed him gently, each touch only augmented his ill-humour. He burned with a perverse rage, as if all the passions in him were simmering and ready to boil over; it was as if a poison were trying to work its way out of him, through the layers of his stolid flesh. He maintained a dogged silence; Rozsi, too, said nothing, but when they reached the door, she drew her hand away.

"You are angry!" she said.

"Angry," muttered Swithin; "no! How d'you make that out?" He had a torturing desire to kiss her.

"Yes, you are angry," she repeated; "I wait here for papa and Margit."

Swithin also waited, wedged against the wall. Once or twice, for his sight was sharp, he saw her steal a look at him, a beseeching look, and hardened his heart with a kind of pleasure. After five minutes Boleskey, Margit, and Kasteliz appeared. Seeing Rozsi they broke into exclamations of relief, and Kasteliz, with a glance at Swithin, put his lips to her hand. Rozsi's look said, "Wouldn't you like to do that?" Swithin turned short on his heel, and walked away.

V

All night he hardly slept, suffering from fever, for the first time in his life. Once he jumped out of bed, lighted a candle, and going to the glass, scrutinised himself long and anxiously. After this he fell asleep, but had frightful dreams. His first thought when he woke was, ‘My liver’s out of order!’ and, thrusting his head into cold water, he dressed hastily and went out. He soon left the house behind. Dew covered everything; blackbirds whistled in the bushes; the air was fresh and sweet. He had not been up so early since he was a boy. Why was he walking through a damp wood at this hour of the morning? Something intolerable and unfamiliar must have sent him out. No fellow in his senses would do such a thing! He came to a dead stop, and began unsteadily to walk back. Regaining the hotel, he went to bed again, and dreamed that in some wild country he was living in a room full of insects, where a housemaid — Rozsi — holding a broom, looked at him with mournful eyes. There seemed an unexplained need for immediate departure; he begged her to forward his things; and shake them out carefully before she put them into the trunk. He understood that the charge for sending would be twenty-two shillings, thought it a great deal, and had the horrors of indecision. “No,” he muttered, “pack, and take them myself.” The housemaid turned suddenly into a lean creature; and he awoke with a sore feeling in his heart.

His eye fell on his wet boots. The whole thing was scaring, and jumping up, he began to throw his clothes into his trunks. It was twelve o’clock before he went down, and found his brother and Traquair still at the table arranging an itinerary; he surprised them by saying that he too was coming; and without further explanation set to work to eat. James had heard that there were salt-mines in the neighbourhood — his proposal was to start, and halt an hour or so on the road for their inspection; he said: “Everybody’ll ask you if you’ve seen the salt-mines: I shouldn’t like to say I hadn’t seen the salt-mines. What’s the good, they’d say, of your going there if you haven’t seen the salt-mines?” He wondered, too, if they need fee the second waiter — an idle chap!

A discussion followed; but Swithin ate on glumly, conscious that his mind was set on larger affairs. Suddenly on the far side of the street Rozsi and her sister passed, with little baskets on their arms. He started up, and at that moment Rozsi looked round — her face was the incarnation of enticement, the chin tilted, the lower lip thrust a little forward, her round neck curving back over her shoulder. Swithin muttered, “Make your own arrangements — leave me out!” and hurried from the room, leaving James beside himself with interest and alarm.

When he reached the street, however, the girls had disappeared. He hailed a carriage. “Drive!” he called to the man, with a flourish of his stick, and as soon as the wheels had begun to clatter on the stones he leaned back, looking sharply to right and left. He soon had to give up thought of finding them, but made the coachman turn round and round again. All day he drove about, far into the country, and kept urging the driver to use greater speed. He was in a strange state of hurry and elation. Finally, he dined at a little country inn; and this gave the measure of his disturbance — the dinner was atrocious.

Returning late in the evening he found a note written by Traquair. “Are you in your senses, man?” it asked; “we have no more time to waste idling about here. If you want to rejoin us, come on to Danielli’s Hotel, Venice.” Swithin chuckled when he read it, and feeling frightfully tired, went to bed and slept like a log.

VI

Three weeks later he was still in Salzburg, no longer at the Goldene Alp, but in rooms over a shop near the Boleskeys'. He had spent a small fortune in the purchase of flowers. Margit would croon over them, but Rozsi, with a sober "Many tanks!" as if they were her right, would look long at herself in the glass, and pin one into her hair. Swithin ceased to wonder; he ceased to wonder at anything they did. One evening he found Boleskey deep in conversation with a pale, dishevelled-looking person.

"Our friend Mr. Forsyte — Count D....," said Boleskey.

Swithin experienced a faint, unavoidable emotion; but looking at the Count's trousers, he thought: 'Doesn't look much like one!' And with an ironic bow to the silent girls, he turned, and took his hat. But when he had reached the bottom of the dark stairs he heard footsteps. Rozsi came running down, looked out at the door, and put her hands up to her breast as if disappointed; suddenly with a quick glance round she saw him. Swithin caught her arm. She slipped away, and her face seemed to bubble with defiance or laughter; she ran up three steps, stopped, looked at him across her shoulder, and fled on up the stairs. Swithin went out bewildered and annoyed.

'What was she going to say to me?' he kept thinking. During these three weeks he had asked himself all sorts of questions: whether he were being made a fool of; whether she were in love with him; what he was doing there, and sometimes at night, with all his candles burning as if he wanted light, the breeze blowing on him through the window, his cigar, half-smoked, in his hand, he sat, an hour or more, staring at the wall. 'Enough of this!' he thought every morning. Twice he packed fully — once he ordered his travelling carriage, but countermanded it the following day. What definitely he hoped, intended, resolved, he could not have said. He was always thinking of Rozsi, he could not read the riddle in her face — she held him in a vice, notwithstanding that everything about her threatened the very fetishes of his existence. And Boleskey! Whenever he looked at him he thought, 'If he were only clean?' and mechanically fingered his own well-tied cravatte. To talk with the fellow, too, was like being forced to look at things which had no place in the light of day. Freedom, equality, self-sacrifice!

'Why can't he settle down at some business,' he thought, 'instead of all this talk?' Boleskey's sudden diffidences, self-depreciation, fits of despair, irritated him. "Morbid beggar!" he would mutter; "thank God I haven't a thin skin." And proud too! Extraordinary! An impecunious fellow like that! One evening, moreover, Boleskey had returned home drunk. Swithin had hustled him away into his bedroom, helped him to undress, and stayed until he was asleep. 'Too much of a good thing!' he thought, 'before his own daughters, too!' It was after this that he ordered his travelling carriage. The other occasion on which he packed was one evening, when not only Boleskey, but Rozsi herself had picked chicken bones with her fingers.

Often in the mornings he would go to the Mirabell Garden to smoke his cigar; there, in stolid contemplation of the statues — rows of half-heroic men carrying off half-distressful females — he would spend an hour pleasantly, his hat tilted to keep the sun off his nose. The day after Rozsi had fled from him on the stairs, he came there as usual. It was a morning of blue sky and sunlight glowing on the old prim garden, on its yew-trees, and serio-comic statues, and walls covered with apricots and plums. When Swithin approached his usual seat, who should be sitting there but Rozsi—"Good-morning," he stammered; "you knew this was my seat then?"

Rozsi looked at the ground. "Yes," she answered.

Swithin felt bewildered. "Do you know," he said, "you treat me very funnily?"

To his surprise Rozsi put her little soft hand down and touched his; then, without a word, sprang up and rushed away. It took him a minute to recover. There were people present; he did not like to run, but overtook her on the bridge, and slipped her hand beneath his arm.

"You shouldn't have done that," he said; "you shouldn't have run away from me, you know."

Rozsi laughed. Swithin withdrew his arm; a desire to shake her seized him. He walked some way before he said, "Will you have the goodness to tell me what you came to that seat for?"

Rozsi flashed a look at him. "To-morrow is the fete," she answered.

Swithin muttered, "Is that all?"

"If you do not take us, we cannot go."

"Suppose I refuse," he said sullenly, "there are plenty of others."

Rozsi bent her head, scurrying along. "No," she murmured, "if you do not go — I do not wish."

Swithin drew her hand back within his arm. How round and soft it was! He tried to see her face. When she was nearly home he said goodbye, not wishing, for some dark reason, to be seen with her. He watched till she had disappeared; then slowly retraced his steps to the Mirabell Garden. When he came to where she had been sitting, he slowly lighted his cigar, and for a long time after it was smoked out remained there in the silent presence of the statues.

VII

A crowd of people wandered round the booths, and Swithin found himself obliged to give the girls his arms. ‘Like a little Cockney clerk!’ he thought. His indignation passed unnoticed; they talked, they laughed, each sight and sound in all the hurly-burly seemed to go straight into their hearts. He eyed them ironically — their eager voices, and little coos of sympathy seemed to him vulgar. In the thick of the crowd he slipped his arm out of Margit’s, but, just as he thought that he was free, the unwelcome hand slid up again. He tried again, but again Margit reappeared, serene, and full of pleasant humour; and his failure this time appeared to him in a comic light. But when Rozsi leaned across him, the glow of her round cheek, her curving lip, the inscrutable grey gleam of her eyes, sent a thrill of longing through him. He was obliged to stand by while they parleyed with a gipsy, whose matted locks and skinny hands inspired him with a not unwarranted disgust. “Folly!” he muttered, as Rozsi held out her palm. The old woman mumbled, and shot a malignant look at him. Rozsi drew back her hand, and crossed herself. ‘Folly!’ Swithin thought again; and seizing the girls’ arms, he hurried them away.

“What did the old hag say?” he asked.

Rozsi shook her head.

“You don’t mean that you believe?”

Her eyes were full of tears. “The gipsies are wise,” she murmured.

“Come, what did she tell you?”

This time Rozsi looked hurriedly round, and slipped away into the crowd. After a hunt they found her, and Swithin, who was scared, growled: “You shouldn’t do such things — it’s not respectable.”

On higher ground, in the centre of a clear space, a military band was playing. For the privilege of entering this charmed circle Swithin paid three kronen, choosing naturally the best seats. He ordered wine, too, watching Rozsi out of the corner of his eye as he poured it out. The protecting tenderness of yesterday was all lost in this medley. It was every man for himself, after all! The colour had deepened again in her cheeks, she laughed, pouting her lips. Suddenly she put her glass aside. “Thank you, very much,” she said, “it is enough!”

Margit, whose pretty mouth was all smiles, cried, “Lieber Gott! is it not good-life?” It was not a question Swithin could undertake to answer. The band began to play a waltz. “Now they will dance. Lieber Gott! and are the lights not wonderful?” Lamps were flickering beneath the trees like a swarm of fireflies. There was a hum as from a gigantic beehive. Passers-by lifted their faces, then vanished into the crowd; Rozsi stood gazing at them spellbound, as if their very going and coming were a delight.

The space was soon full of whirling couples. Rozsi’s head began to beat time. “O Margit!” she whispered.

Swithin’s face had assumed a solemn, uneasy expression. A man raising his hat, offered his arm to Margit. She glanced back across her shoulder to reassure Swithin. “It is a friend,” she said.

Swithin looked at Rozsi — her eyes were bright, her lips tremulous. He slipped his hand along the table and touched her fingers. Then she flashed a look at him — appeal, reproach, tenderness, all were expressed in it. Was she expecting him to dance? Did she want to mix with the rift-raff there; wish him to make an exhibition of himself in this hurly-burly? A voice said, “Good-evening!” Before them stood Kasteliz, in a dark coat tightly buttoned at the waist.

“You are not dancing, Rozsi Kozsanony?” (Miss Rozsi). “Let me, then, have the pleasure.” He held out his arm. Swithin stared in front of him. In the very act of going she gave him a look that said as plain as words: “Will you not?” But for answer he turned his eyes away, and when he looked again she was gone. He paid the score and made his way into the crowd. But as he went she danced by close to him, all flushed and panting. She hung back as if to stop him, and he caught the glistening of tears. Then he lost sight of her again. To be deserted the first minute he was alone with her, and for that jackanapes with the small head and the volcanic glances! It was too much! And suddenly it occurred to him that she was alone with Kasteliz — alone at night, and far from home. ‘Well,’ he thought, ‘what do I care?’ and shouldered his way on through the crowd. It served him right for mixing with such people here. He left the fair, but the further he went, the more he nursed his rage, the more heinous seemed her offence, the sharper grew his jealousy. “A beggarly baron!” was his thought.

A figure came alongside — it was Boleskey. One look showed Swithin his condition. Drunk again! This was the last straw!

Unfortunately Boleskey had recognised him. He seemed violently excited. “Where — where are my daughters?” he began.

Swithin brushed past, but Boleskey caught his arm. “Listen — brother!” he said; “news of my country! After to-morrow....”

“Keep it to yourself!” growled Swithin, wrenching his arm free. He went straight to his lodgings, and, lying on the hard sofa of his unlighted sitting-room, gave himself up to bitter thoughts. But in spite of all his anger, Rozsi’s supply-moving figure, with its pouting lips, and roguish appealing eyes, still haunted him.

VIII

Next morning there was not a carriage to be had, and Swithin was compelled to put off his departure till the morrow. The day was grey and misty; he wandered about with the strained, inquiring look of a lost dog in his eyes.

Late in the afternoon he went back to his lodgings. In a corner of the sitting-room stood Rozsi. The thrill of triumph, the sense of appeasement, the emotion, that seized on him, crept through to his lips in a faint smile. Rozsi made no sound, her face was hidden by her hands. And this silence of hers weighed on Swithin. She was forcing him to break it. What was behind her hands? His own face was visible! Why didn't she speak? Why was she here? Alone? That was not right surely.

Suddenly Rozsi dropped her hands; her flushed face was quivering — it seemed as though a word, a sign, even, might bring a burst of tears.

He walked over to the window. 'I must give her time!' he thought; then seized by unreasoning terror at this silence, spun round, and caught her by the arms. Rozsi held back from him, swayed forward and buried her face on his breast....

Half an hour later Swithin was pacing up and down his room. The scent of rose leaves had not yet died away. A glove lay on the floor; he picked it up, and for a long time stood weighing it in his hand. All sorts of confused thoughts and feelings haunted him. It was the purest and least selfish moment of his life, this moment after she had yielded. But that pure gratitude at her fiery, simple abnegation did not last; it was followed by a petty sense of triumph, and by uneasiness. He was still weighing the little glove in his hand, when he had another visitor. It was Kasteliz.

"What can I do for you?" Swithin asked ironically.

The Hungarian seemed suffering from excitement. Why had Swithin left his charges the night before? What excuse had he to make? What sort of conduct did he call this?

Swithin, very like a bull-dog at that moment, answered: What business was it of his?

The business of a gentleman! What right had the Englishman to pursue a young girl?

"Pursue?" said Swithin; "you've been spying, then?"

"Spying — I — Kasteliz — Maurus Johann — an insult!"

"Insult!" sneered Swithin; "d'you mean to tell me you weren't in the street just now?"

Kasteliz answered with a hiss, "If you do not leave the city I will make you, with my sword — do you understand?"

"And if you do not leave my room I will throw you out of the window!"

For some minutes Kasteliz spoke in pure Hungarian while Swithin waited, with a forced smile and a fixed look in his eye. He did not understand Hungarian.

"If you are still in the city to-morrow evening," said Kasteliz at last in English, "I will spit you in the street."

Swithin turned to the window and watched his visitor's retiring back with a queer mixture of amusement, stubbornness, and anxiety. 'Well,' he thought, 'I suppose he'll run me through!' The thought was unpleasant; and it kept recurring, but it only served to harden his determination. His head was busy with plans for seeing Rozsi; his blood on fire with the kisses she had given him.

IX

Swithin was long in deciding to go forth next day. He had made up his mind not to go to Rozsi till five o'clock. 'Mustn't make myself too cheap,' he thought. It was a little past that hour when he at last sallied out, and with a beating heart walked towards Boleskey's. He looked up at the window, more than half expecting to see Rozsi there; but she was not, and he noticed with faint surprise that the window was not open; the plants, too, outside, looked singularly arid. He knocked. No one came. He beat a fierce tattoo. At last the door was opened by a man with a reddish beard, and one of those sardonic faces only to be seen on shoemakers of Teutonic origin.

"What do you want, making all this noise?" he asked in German.

Swithin pointed up the stairs. The man grinned, and shook his head.

"I want to go up," said Swithin.

The cobbler shrugged his shoulders, and Swithin rushed upstairs. The rooms were empty. The furniture remained, but all signs of life were gone. One of his own bouquets, faded, stood in a glass; the ashes of a fire were barely cold; little scraps of paper strewed the hearth; already the room smelt musty. He went into the bedrooms, and with a feeling of stupefaction stood staring at the girls' beds, side by side against the wall. A bit of ribbon caught his eye; he picked it up and put it in his pocket — it was a piece of evidence that she had once existed. By the mirror some pins were dropped about; a little powder had been spilled. He looked at his own disquiet face and thought, 'I've been cheated!'

The shoemaker's voice aroused him. "Tausend Teufel! Eilen Sie, nur! Zeit is Geld! Kann nich' Langer warten!" Slowly he descended.

"Where have they gone?" asked Swithin painfully. "A pound for every English word you speak. A pound!" and he made an O with his fingers.

The corners of the shoemaker's lips curled. "Geld! Mf! Eilen Sie, nur!"

But in Swithin a sullen anger had begun to burn. "If you don't tell me," he said, "it'll be the worse for you."

"Sind ein komischer Kerl!" remarked the shoemaker. "Hier ist meine Frau!"

A battered-looking woman came hurrying down the passage, calling out in German, "Don't let him go!"

With a snarling sound the shoemaker turned his back, and shambled off.

The woman furtively thrust a letter into Swithin's hand, and furtively waited.

The letter was from Rozsi.

"Forgive me" — it ran—"that I leave you and do not say goodbye. To-day our father had the call from our dear Father-town so long awaited. In two hours we are ready. I pray to the Virgin to keep you ever safe, and that you do not quite forget me. — Your unforgetting good friend, ROZSI."

When Swithin read it his first sensation was that of a man sinking in a bog; then his obstinacy stiffened. 'I won't be done,' he thought. Taking out a sovereign he tried to make the woman comprehend that she could earn it, by telling him where they had gone. He got her finally to write the words out in his pocket-book, gave her the sovereign, and hurried to the Goldene Alp, where there was a waiter who spoke English. The translation given him was this:

"At three o'clock they start in a carriage on the road to Linz — they have bad horses — the Herr also rides a white horse."

Swithin at once hailed a carriage and started at full gallop on the road to Linz. Outside the Mirabell Garden he caught sight of Kasteliz and grinned at him. 'I've sold him anyway,' he thought; 'for all their talk, they're no good, these foreigners!'

His spirits rose, but soon fell again. What chance had he of catching them? They had three hours' start! Still, the roads were heavy from the rain of the last two nights — they had luggage and bad horses; his own were good, his driver bribed — he might overtake them by ten o'clock! But did he want to? What a fool he had been not to bring his luggage; he would then have had a respectable position. What a brute he would look without a change of shirt, or anything to shave with! He saw himself with horror, all bristly, and in soiled linen. People would think him mad. 'I've given myself away,' flashed across him, 'what the devil can I say to them?' and he stared sullenly at the driver's back. He read Rozsi's letter again; it had a scent of her. And in the growing darkness, jolted by the swinging of the carriage, he suffered tortures from his prudence, tortures from his passion.

It grew colder and dark. He turned the collar of his coat up to his ears. He had visions of Piccadilly. This wild-goose chase appeared suddenly a dangerous, unfathomable business. Lights, fellowship, security! 'Never again!' he brooded; 'why won't they let me alone?' But it was not clear whether by 'they' he meant the conventions, the Boleskeys, his passions, or those haunting memories of Rozsi. If he had only had a bag with him! What was he going to say? What was he going to get by this? He received no answer to these questions. The darkness itself was less obscure than his sensations. From time to time he took out his watch. At each village the driver made inquiries. It was past ten when he stopped the carriage with a jerk. The stars were bright as steel, and by the side of the road a reedy lake showed in the moonlight. Swithin shivered. A man on a horse had halted in the centre of the road. "Drive on!" called Swithin, with a stolid face. It turned out to be Boleskey, who, on a gaunt white horse, looked like some winged creature. He stood where he could bar the progress of the carriage, holding out a pistol.

'Theatrical beggar!' thought Swithin, with a nervous smile. He made no sign of recognition. Slowly Boleskey brought his lean horse up to the carriage. When he saw who was within he showed astonishment and joy.

"You?" he cried, slapping his hand on his attenuated thigh, and leaning over till his beard touched Swithin. "You have come? You followed us?"

"It seems so," Swithin grunted out.

"You throw in your lot with us. Is it possible? You — you are a knight-errant then!"

"Good God!" said Swithin. Boleskey, flogging his dejected steed, cantered forward in the moonlight. He came back, bringing an old cloak, which he insisted on wrapping round Swithin's shoulders. He handed him, too, a capacious flask.

"How cold you look!" he said. "Wonderful! Wonderful! you English!" His grateful eyes never left Swithin for a moment. They had come up to the heels of the other carriage now, but Swithin, hunched in the cloak, did not try to see what was in front of him. To the bottom of his soul he resented the Hungarian’s gratitude. He remarked at last, with wasted irony:

“You’re in a hurry, it seems!”

“If we had wings,” Boleskey answered, “we would use them.”

“Wings!” muttered Swithin thickly; “legs are good enough for me.”

X

Arrived at the inn where they were to pass the night, Swithin waited, hoping to get into the house without a “scene,” but when at last he alighted the girls were in the doorway, and Margit greeted him with an admiring murmur, in which, however, he seemed to detect irony. Rozsi, pale and tremulous, with a half-scared look, gave him her hand, and, quickly withdrawing it, shrank behind her sister. When they had gone up to their room Swithin sought Boleskey. His spirits had risen remarkably. “Tell the landlord to get us supper,” he said; “we’ll crack a bottle to our luck.” He hurried on the landlord’s preparations. The window of the room faced a wood, so near that he could almost touch the trees. The scent from the pines blew in on him. He turned away from that scented darkness, and began to draw the corks of winebottles. The sound seemed to conjure up Boleskey. He came in, splashed all over, smelling slightly of stables; soon after, Margit appeared, fresh and serene, but Rozsi did not come.

“Where is your sister?” Swithin said. Rozsi, it seemed, was tired. “It will do her good to eat,” said Swithin. And Boleskey, murmuring, “She must drink to our country,” went out to summon her, Margit followed him, while Swithin cut up a chicken. They came back without her. She had “a megrim of the spirit.”

Swithin’s face fell. “Look here!” he said, “I’ll go and try. Don’t wait for me.”

“Yes,” answered Boleskey, sinking mournfully into a chair; “try, brother, try-by all means, try.”

Swithin walked down the corridor with an odd, sweet, sinking sensation in his chest; and tapped on Rozsi’s door. In a minute, she peeped forth, with her hair loose, and wondering eyes.

“Rozsi,” he stammered, “what makes you afraid of me, now?”

She stared at him, but did not answer.

“Why won’t you come?”

Still she did not speak, but suddenly stretched out to him her bare arm. Swithin pressed his face to it. With a shiver, she whispered above him, “I will come,” and gently shut the door.

Swithin stealthily retraced his steps, and paused a minute outside the sitting-room to regain his self-control.

The sight of Boleskey with a bottle in his hand steadied him.

“She is coming,” he said. And very soon she did come, her thick hair roughly twisted in a plait.

Swithin sat between the girls; but did not talk, for he was really hungry. Boleskey too was silent, plunged in gloom; Rozsi was dumb; Margit alone chattered.

“You will come to our Father-town? We shall have things to show you. Rozsi, what things we will show him!” Rozsi, with a little appealing movement of her hands, repeated, “What things we will show you!” She seemed suddenly to find her voice, and with glowing cheeks, mouths full, and eyes bright as squirrels’, they chattered reminiscences of the “dear Father-town,” of “dear friends,” of the “dear home.”

‘A poor place!’ Swithin could not help thinking. This enthusiasm seemed to him common; but he was careful to assume a look of interest, feeding on the glances flashed at him from Rozsi’s restless eyes.

As the wine waned Boleskey grew more and more gloomy, but now and then a sort of gleaming flicker passed over his face. He rose to his feet at last.

“Let us not forget,” he said, “that we go perhaps to ruin, to death; in the face of all this we go, because our country needs — in this there is no credit, neither to me nor to you, my daughters; but for this noble Englishman, what shall we say? Give thanks to God for a great heart. He comes — not for country, not for fame, not for money, but to help the weak and the oppressed. Let us drink, then, to him; let us drink again and again to heroic Forsyte!” In the midst of the dead silence, Swithin caught the look of suppliant mockery in Rozsi’s eyes. He glanced at the Hungarian. Was he laughing at him? But Boleskey, after drinking up his wine, had sunk again into his seat; and there suddenly, to the surprise of all, he began to snore. Margit rose and, bending over him like a mother, murmured: “He is tired — it is the ride!” She raised him in her strong arms, and leaning on her shoulder Boleskey staggered from the room. Swithin and Rozsi were left alone. He slid his hand towards her hand that lay so close, on the rough table-cloth. It seemed to await his touch. Something gave way in him, and words came welling up; for the moment he forgot himself, forgot everything but that he was near her. Her head dropped on his shoulder, he breathed the perfume of her hair. “Good-night!” she whispered, and the whisper was like a kiss; yet before he could stop her she was gone. Her footsteps died away in the passage, but Swithin sat gazing intently at a single bright drop of spilt wine quivering on the table’s edge. In that moment she, in her helplessness and emotion, was all in all to him — his life nothing; all the real things — his conventions, convictions, training, and himself — all seemed remote, behind a mist of passion and strange chivalry. Carefully with a bit of bread he soaked up the bright drop; and suddenly he thought: ‘This is tremendous!’ For a long time he stood there in the window, close to the dark pine-trees.

XI

In the early morning he awoke, full of the discomfort of this strange place and the medley of his dreams. Lying, with his nose peeping over the quilt, he was visited by a horrible suspicion. When he could bear it no longer, he started up in bed. What if it were all a plot to get him to marry her? The thought was treacherous, and inspired in him a faint disgust. Still, she might be ignorant of it! But was she so innocent? What innocent girl would have come to his room like that? What innocent girl? Her father, who pretended to be caring only for his country? It was not probable that any man was such a fool; it was all part of the game-a scheming rascal! Kasteliz, too — his threats! They intended him to marry her! And the horrid idea was strengthened by his reverence for marriage. It was the proper, the respectable condition; he was genuinely afraid of this other sort of liaison — it was somehow too primitive! And yet the thought of that marriage made his blood run cold. Considering that she had already yielded, it would be all the more monstrous! With the cold, fatal clearness of the morning light he now for the first time saw his position in its full bearings. And, like a fish pulled out of water, he gasped at what was disclosed. Sullen resentment against this attempt to force him settled deep into his soul.

He seated himself on the bed, holding his head in his hands, solemnly thinking out what such marriage meant. In the first place it meant ridicule, in the next place ridicule, in the last place ridicule. She would eat chicken bones with her fingers — those fingers his lips still burned to kiss. She would dance wildly with other men. She would talk of her “dear Father-town,” and all the time her eyes would look beyond him, some where or other into some d — d place he knew nothing of. He sprang up and paced the room, and for a moment thought he would go mad.

They meant him to marry her! Even she — she meant him to marry her! Her tantalising inscrutability; her sudden little tendernesses; her quick laughter; her swift, burning kisses; even the movements of her hands; her tears — all were evidence against her. Not one of these things that Nature made her do counted on her side, but how they fanned his longing, his desire, and distress! He went to the glass and tried to part his hair with his fingers, but being rather fine, it fell into lank streaks. There was no comfort to be got from it. He drew his muddy boots on. Suddenly he thought: ‘If I could see her alone, I could arrive at some arrangement!’ Then, with a sense of stupefaction, he made the discovery that no arrangement could possibly be made that would not be dangerous, even desperate. He seized his hat, and, like a rabbit that has been fired at, bolted from the room. He plodded along amongst the damp woods with his head down, and resentment and dismay in his heart. But, as the sun rose, and the air grew sweet with pine scent, he slowly regained a sort of equability. After all, she had already yielded; it was not as if...! And the tramp of his own footsteps lulled him into feeling that it would all come right.

‘Look at the thing practically,’ he thought. The faster he walked the firmer became his conviction that he could still see it through. He took out his watch — it was past seven — he began to hasten back. In the yard of the inn his driver was harnessing the horses; Swithin went up to him.

“Who told you to put them in?” he asked.

The driver answered, “Der Herr.”

Swithin turned away. ‘In ten minutes,’ he thought, ‘I shall be in that carriage again, with this going on in my head! Driving away from England, from all I’m used to-driving to-what?’ Could he face it? Could he face all that he had been through that morning; face it day after day, night after night? Looking up, he saw Rozsi at her open window gazing down at him; never had she looked sweeter, more roguish. An inexplicable terror seized on him; he ran across the yard and jumped into his carriage. “To Salzburg!” he cried; “drive on!” And rattling out of the yard without a look behind, he flung a sovereign at the hostler. Flying back along the road faster even than he had come, with pale face, and eyes blank and staring like a pug-dog’s, Swithin spoke no single word; nor, till he had reached the door of his lodgings, did he suffer the driver to draw rein.

XII

Towards evening, five days later, Swithin, yellow and travel-worn, was ferried in a gondola to Danielli's Hotel. His brother, who was on the steps, looked at him with an apprehensive curiosity.

"Why, it's you!" he mumbled. "So you've got here safe?"

"Safe?" growled Swithin.

James replied, "I thought you wouldn't leave your friends!" Then, with a jerk of suspicion, "You haven't brought your friends?"

"What friends?" growled Swithin.

James changed the subject. "You don't look the thing," he said.

"Really!" muttered Swithin; "what's that to you?"

He appeared at dinner that night, but fell asleep over his coffee. Neither Traquair nor James asked him any further question, nor did they allude to Salzburg; and during the four days which concluded the stay in Venice Swithin went about with his head up, but his eyes half-closed like a dazed man. Only after they had taken ship at Genoa did he show signs of any healthy interest in life, when, finding that a man on board was perpetually strumming, he locked the piano up and pitched the key into the sea.

That winter in London he behaved much as usual, but fits of moroseness would seize on him, during which he was not pleasant to approach.

One evening when he was walking with a friend in Piccadilly, a girl coming from a side-street accosted him in German. Swithin, after staring at her in silence for some seconds, handed her a five-pound note, to the great amazement of his friend; nor could he himself have explained the meaning of this freak of generosity.

Of Rozsi he never heard again....

This, then, was the substance of what he remembered as he lay ill in bed. Stretching out his hand he pressed the bell. His valet appeared, crossing the room like a cat; a Swede, who had been with Swithin many years; a little man with a dried face and fierce moustache, morbidly sharp nerves, and a queer devotion to his master.

Swithin made a feeble gesture. "Adolf," he said, "I'm very bad."

"Yes, sir!"

"Why do you stand there like a cow?" asked Swithin; "can't you see I'm very bad?"

"Yes, sir!" The valet's face twitched as though it masked the dance of obscure emotions.

"I shall feel better after dinner. What time is it?"

"Five o'clock."

"I thought it was more. The afternoons are very long."

"Yes, sir!" Swithin sighed, as though he had expected the consolation of denial.

"Very likely I shall have a nap. Bring up hot water at half-past six and shave me before dinner."

The valet moved towards the door. Swithin raised himself.

"What did Mr. James say to you?"

"He said you ought to have another doctor; two doctors, he said, better than one. He said, also, he would look in again on his way 'home.'"

Swithin grunted, "Umph! What else did he say?"

"He said you didn't take care of yourself."

Swithin glared.

"Has anybody else been to see me?"

The valet turned away his eyes. "Mrs. Thomas Forsyte came last Monday fortnight."

"How long have I been ill?"

"Five weeks on Saturday."

"Do you think I'm very bad?"

Adolf's face was covered suddenly with crow's-feet. "You have no business to ask me question like that! I am not paid, sir, to answer question like that."

Swithin said faintly: "You're a peppery fool! Open a bottle of champagne!"

Adolf took a bottle of champagne — from a cupboard and held nippers to it. He fixed his eyes on Swithin. "The doctor said—"

"Open the bottle!"

"It is not—"

"Open the bottle — or I give you warning."

Adolf removed the cork. He wiped a glass elaborately, filled it, and bore it scrupulously to the bedside. Suddenly twirling his moustaches, he wrung his hands, and burst out: "It is poison."

Swithin grinned faintly. "You foreign fool!" he said. "Get out!"

The valet vanished.

'He forgot himself!' thought Swithin. Slowly he raised the glass, slowly put it back, and sank gasping on his pillows. Almost at once he fell asleep.

He dreamed that he was at his club, sitting after dinner in the crowded smoking-room, with its bright walls and trefoils of light. It was there that he sat every evening, patient, solemn, lonely, and sometimes fell asleep, his square, pale old face nodding to one side. He dreamed that he was gazing at the picture over the fireplace, of an old statesman with a high collar, supremely finished face, and sceptical eyebrows — the picture, smooth, and reticent as sealing-wax, of one who seemed for ever exhaling the narrow wisdom of final judgments. All round him, his fellow members were chattering. Only he himself, the old sick member, was silent. If fellows only knew what it was like to sit by yourself and feel ill all the time! What they were saying he had heard a hundred times. They were talking of investments, of cigars, horses, actresses, machinery. What was that? A foreign patent for cleaning boilers? There was no such thing; boilers couldn't be cleaned, any fool knew that! If an Englishman couldn't clean a boiler, no foreigner could clean one. He appealed to the old statesman's eyes. But for once those eyes seemed hesitating, blurred, wanting in finality. They vanished. In their place were Rozsi's little deep-set eyes, with their wide and far-off look; and as he gazed they seemed to grow bright as steel, and to speak to him. Slowly the whole face grew to be there, floating on the dark background of the picture; it was pink, aloof, unfathomable, enticing, with its fluffy hair and quick lips, just as he had last seen it. "Are you looking for something?" she seemed to say: "I could show you."

"I have everything safe enough," answered Swithin, and in his sleep he groaned.

He felt the touch of fingers on his forehead. 'I'm dreaming,' he thought in his dream.

She had vanished; and far away, from behind the picture, came a sound of footsteps.

Aloud, in his sleep, Swithin muttered: "I've missed it."

Again he heard the rustling of those light footsteps, and close in his ear a sound, like a sob. He awoke; the sob was his own. Great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. 'What is it?' he thought; 'what have I lost?' Slowly his mind travelled over his investments; he could not think of any single one that was unsafe. What was it, then, that he had lost? Struggling on his pillows, he clutched the wine-glass. His lips touched the wine. 'This isn't the "Heidseck"!' he thought angrily, and before the reality of that displeasure all the dim vision passed away. But as he bent to drink, something snapped, and, with a sigh, Swithin Forsyte died above the bubbles....

When James Forsyte came in again on his way home, the valet, trembling took his hat and stick.

"How's your master?"

"My master is dead, sir!"

"Dead! He can't be! I left him safe an hour ago."

On the bed Swithin's body was doubled like a sack; his hand still grasped the glass.

James Forsyte paused. "Swithin!" he said, and with his hand to his ear he waited for an answer; but none came, and slowly in the glass a last bubble rose and burst.

December 1900.

ON 'CHANGE

THE BUCKLES OF SUPERIOR DOSSET, 1821-1863

In the year 1821 ‘Superior Dosset’ Forsyte came to Town — if not precisely on a milk-white pony. According to the testimony of Aunt Ann, noted for precision, to young Jolyon on holiday from Eton, the migration from Bosport was in fact tribal and effected in two post-shays and the Highflyer coach.

“It was after our dear Mother’s death, and our father — that is your grandfather, Jo dear — was very taciturn on the journey; he was never a man who showed his feelings. I had your Aunt Susan in arms, and your Uncle Timothy — two years old, such an interesting child, in the first post-shay with your grandfather. And your dear father, he was so dependable and very like you — he must have been fifteen then, just your age — he had your Aunts Juley and Hester with him and your Uncle Nicholas, who was four, in the second post-shay; and your Uncles James and Swithin and Roger were on the coach. I am afraid Swithin was very naughty with his pea-shooter on the journey. We started early in the morning, and we all went for the night to your Great-Uncle Edgar’s at Primrose Hill. I remember he still wore knee-breeches and a very large bunch of seals. Of course, WE were all in black. Your grandfather wore black for two years after our dear mother’s death; he felt it very much, though he never said anything.”

“What was he like, Auntie?”

“Strongly-built, my dear, with a high colour. In those days they drank a great deal of wine, especially Madeira.”

“But what was he?”

“He began as a mason, dear.”

“A Freemason?”

“Not at first. A stonemason. You see, HIS father was a farmer, and he apprenticed your grandfather to a stonemason, so that he should learn all about building. I think it was a very wise decision, because in those days there were such opportunities for builders, so your grandfather soon made his way. He was becoming quite a warm man when we came to London.” And Aunt Ann’s shrewd eyes appraised her nephew.

He had risen, and was standing, slender in his first tailcoat, against the mantelpiece, looking downward at his boots. Elegant the dear boy looked, but a little embarrassed, as if his nerves had received a shock. Of course, he was at Eton among the nobility. And she said with decision:

“We should never be ashamed of our origin, dear Jo. The Forsytes are very good country stock, and have always been men of their word, and that is the great thing. And our dear mother was a lady in every respect. Her name was Pierce — a Devonshire family — and she was the daughter of a solicitor at Bosport who was very respected. He died bankrupt because his partner ran away with some funds, and all his fortune went to make up the loss. She had a sweet face and was most particular how we spoke and behaved. This is her miniature.”

Young Jolyon moved over and saw an oval face with fair hair parted in the middle and drawn in curves across the forehead, dark grey eyes looking up at him from rather deep beneath the brows, a chin with a delicate point, and shoulders shrouded in lace.

“Your grandfather was devoted to her in his way. For years after we first came to London he worked all day long, and at night I used to see him sitting up in his little study with his plans and his estimates — he couldn’t bear to go to bed. And then he took to horse exercise. It was such a mercy.”

Young Jolyon looked up. His brow had cleared, as if his grandfather had at last done something creditable.

“Of course, on the farm, when he was a boy, he used to ride. And when he took to it again, he went riding every day until his gout got too bad.”

“Oh! had he gout, too, Aunt Ann?”

“Yes, dear, gout was much more prevalent then than it is now. In some ways your grandfather was rather like your Uncle Swithin, only much shorter. He was fond of a horse, and quite a judge of wine.”

Young Jolyon caressed his waistcoat, as if smothering emotion at these marks of gentility, subtle enough to see that his Aunt was watching him for signs of snobbery.

“Where did you live, Auntie?”

“Well, at first, dear, we took a house on Primrose Hill close to your Great-Uncle Edgar. We lived there many years till we moved into a house of our own that your grandfather built, in St. John’s Wood; and there we lived till his death in 1850, when we came here, of course, with your Uncle Timothy.”

“What sort of houses did my grandfather build, Auntie?”

“I don’t know that I ever saw any, dear, except the one we lived in. But I believe they were always very good value. At first I think they were mostly out Fulham way, and some were at Brighton, but later they were in St. John’s Wood. That was then the coming part of London. He was not at all what is called a Jerry-builder. He had a funny nickname among his cronies —‘Superior Dosset’.”

“Why?”

“Well, for one thing he never liked being called a Dorsetshire man, he always said he was born just over the border in Devonshire, though the parish was in Dorset and the Church, but he always looked down on Dorsetshire people — he used to say they were a cocky lot — he had funny expressions; and that made them tease him. He was quite a character. Some people, of course, might have called him perverse.”

“And how did he dress, Auntie?”

Aunt Ann replaced the miniature with her long thin fingers, and from the little drawer took forth another.

“That is your grandfather, my dear — painted in 1820 just before our dear mother’s death.”

Young Jolyon saw a florid face, clean-shaven, with eyebrows running a little up and bumps above them, a wide rather fleshy mouth, a straight broad nose, a broad cleft chin; light eyes that seemed to hold a jape under their thick lids; brown hair brushed back from a well-formed forehead, a neck swathed in a white stock, a blue coat short-waisted and with tails, a double waistcoat light-coloured, a bunch of seals on a black ribbon — no lower half to him at all.

“Did he wear trousers?”

“Yes, dear, generally buff, I think, till after our mother death. But in the evening he wore knee-breeches, and his shoes had buckles. I still have them. Some day I shall give them to you, because after your dear father you will be the head of the family, just as my father was in his day.”

“Oh! was my grandfather the eldest too?”

“Yes, like his father before him; the name Jolyon goes with that. You must never forget that, dear Jo. It is a great responsibility.”

“I’d rather have the buckles without the responsibility, Auntie.”

His Aunt lowered her spectacles till they were below the aquilinity of her nose. So, she could see her nephew better, and her thin fingers with three rings and pointed nails interlaced slowly, as if tatting some slow conclusion. Dear Jo! Was he being taught to take things lightly? Eton — it was nice, of course, and very distinguished, but perhaps a little dangerous! And her eyes chased him down from the wave of fair hair on his forehead to the straps confining his trousers to his boots. Was he not becoming a little foppish?

“Your grandfather, dear, always took his position seriously. I could tell you a story —”

“Hooray!”

Aunt Ann frowned. Yes! It WOULD do him good to hear.

“It was in the year when your dear father and his friend Nick Treffry had just set up for themselves in tea. That would be about six years after we came to London. Your grandfather had done very well with his building, so that he had been able to give all the boys a good education; your Uncle Nicholas especially was such a promising little chap, and your Uncle James was just in his articles — he was admitted a solicitor afterwards on his twenty-first birthday, and that is the earliest possible. But in spite of all the expense we were to him, your grandfather had put by quite a lot of money; though we were still living on Primrose Hill and so we saw a great deal of your Uncle Edgar; and, indeed, your grandfather had invested some of his money in your Uncle’s business —”

“What was that, Auntie?”

“Jute, dear. Your grandfather was not a partner with him, but he was interested. Uncle Edgar was not at all like your grandfather; he was a very amiable man, but rather weak, and I am afraid he paid too much attention to other people’s advice. Anyway he was tempted to gamble for what I think is called ‘the rise.’ And very foolishly he did not consult your grandfather. So, of course, when your grandfather heard of it, he was in a regular stew. You see I took a little of our dear mother's place, and I can remember him saying: 'What on earth is the chap about — weak-kneed beggar — gambling for a rise! Mark my words, Ann, he'll be in Queer Street in no time!'"

Aunt Ann paused, recalling that far scene. The stocky figure of her father bent forward over the mahogany of the old dining table now in the room below, his broad, short-fingered hand suddenly clenching, the flush of blood below his eyes, screwed up in the visioning of Queer Street.

"And was he, Auntie?"

"Yes, dear. It was that dreadful year when everything went down suddenly, especially jute. Poor Uncle Edgar was so amiable that he never seemed to realise that other people could be hard and greedy."

"Was he ruined, Auntie?"

"I was going to tell you. As I said, your grandfather was not in partnership with Uncle Edgar, and as soon as he heard what Uncle had done, he sold his investment and saved his bacon, as he would have called it. And then jute went down instead of up, and Uncle Edgar was threatened with bankruptcy. Your grandfather went through a dreadful time making up his mind whether to help him or not. You see, he knew it would mean years of set-back for him in his building business, and for all of us great economy and going without things that we were accustomed to. And he felt your uncle's conduct in not consulting him very much — he used to say bitter things about him. It all came to a head one evening when your Uncle Edgar cried — he was not a strong character. I can see him now: he had large red bandana handkerchiefs, and he sat there with his face all buried in one. Your grandfather was walking up and down talking about his expecting him to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for him, and he wasn't going to, not he. I thought he would have had a fit. And then, suddenly, he stopped and looked a long time at Uncle Edgar. 'Edgar,' he said, 'you're a poor fish. But I'm the head of the family, and I'm not going to see the name dishonoured. Here, get out, and tomorrow I'll see you through.'"

"And did he, Auntie?"

"Yes, Jo. It was a terrible sacrifice. But I think we were all glad; we were fond of Uncle Edgar, and it would have made such a scandal to have him go bankrupt, especially as he had not been quite straight. We never saw very much of him after, but he died better off than ever, entirely owing to your grandfather. So you see, dear, it doesn't do to take responsibility lightly." Her nephew had ceased to look at her, as if he had suddenly perceived why he had been told the story.

"I should have thought it did, Auntie, if he died better off than ever."

Aunt Ann smiled. Really, the dear boy was very naughty!

"Jo," she said, grave again, "I can tell you another story of your grandfather."

"Oh! do, Auntie!"

"This was in the thirties, very hard years for everybody; and your grandfather was building some houses in Brighton. He was always a man who cut his coat to fit his cloth; but he used to tell me that if he made five per cent. on his money with those houses, it would be all he could hope for. I remember it all very clearly because just then I was SO hoping he would do well, I had a special reason." Aunt Ann paused, seeing again her special reason in pegtop trousers looking down at her all braided and crinolined on the sofa; hearing again his voice, so manly, saying: 'Dear Ann, may I speak to your father?' hearing again her own answer: 'Please wait, dear Edward, Papa is so preoccupied just now. But if, as I hope, things go well — next year I shall, I trust, be able to leave him and the dear children.'

"What special reason, Auntie?"

"Oh! never mind that, dear. As I was saying, your grandfather was extremely anxious because those houses meant turning the corner of all his difficulties. It was a dreadful year, and I am sorry to say there was a great deal of chicanery."

"What is chicanery?"

"Chicanery, dear, means trying to get the better of your neighbour at all costs."

"Did grandfather get the better of anyone?"

Aunt Ann looked at her nephew sharply.

"No," she said, "they got the better of him, Jo."

"Oh! Go on, Auntie. How interesting! I do want to hear."

"Well, one day your grandfather came home from Brighton in a dreadful taking. It was a long time before I could quieten him down to tell me what had happened. It seems that three of those houses wouldn't dry. The first houses were all right, so of course your grandfather never suspected anything. But the man who supplied the building material had taken advantage to mix some of it with sea water instead of fresh. I could never make out what he gained by it, or whether he had done it out of ignorance, but your grandfather was convinced that he was a rascal. 'They won't dry, they won't dry,' he kept on saying. I think if he had died that moment those words would have been printed on his heart. You see, it meant ruination to his reputation as a builder. And then it seems somebody showed him a way by which he could make the houses seem dry although in wet weather they never really would be. That night I heard him, long after I went to bed, walking about in his room next door; but in the morning I heard him mutter: 'No, I'm jiggered if I will!' He had made up his mind, after a dreadful struggle, not to be party to any trick."

"And what happened then, Auntie?"

"Well, he just took those three houses down and built them afresh — it cost him thousands."

"Didn't he make the man who used the sea water pay?"

"He tried to, Jo; but the man went bankrupt. It aged your grandfather very much. We ALL felt it dreadfully."

Aunt Ann was silent, lost in memory of how she had felt it. Edward! . . . Her nephew's voice recalled her.

"Grandfather didn't go bankrupt himself, did he, Auntie?"

"No, Jo; but very nearly. Perhaps it was all for the best. It made him very respected, and in after years he was always glad that he had been so above-board."

She looked up startled; young Jolyon was examining her face in a peculiar manner.

"I expect YOU had a sad time, Auntie."

Aunt Ann's lips firmed themselves against the suspicion of being pitied.

"So you see, dear," she said, "your grandfather had good principles, and that is the great thing."

"Did he go to Church, and that?"

"Not very much. He was brought up to be a Wesleyan, so he never quite approved of Church. He used to say the service was full of fallals. Of course, WE all liked Church much better than Chapel, and he never interfered with our going."

"I expect he was glad not to go at all, really."

Aunt Ann covered her mouth with a little paper fan.

"You mustn't be flippant, dear."

"Oh! no, Auntie; I meant it."

"Well, Jo, I don't think I should call your grandfather a very religious man after our dear mother's death. He always grudged that so much."

"Did my father get on well with him?"

"Not very. Your father was so much our mother's boy."

"I see."

"Yes, dear, your grandfather was always so occupied that he hadn't much time for us children. I think he was perhaps fonder of me than of any of us."

"I expect that was because you were so good, Auntie."

"Hssh! Jo. You mustn't make fun of me. I was the only one old enough to talk to when our mother died."

"I thought you said my father was my age."

"Yes but in those days people did not talk to children as they do now."

Young Jolyon did not reply, but he tilted his chin slightly. Children!

"How much money did he leave, Auntie, after all that?"

"Thirty thousand pounds, dear, divided equally amongst the ten of us — he was very just."

Young Jolyon took out his watch; it was an old one of his father's, and he liked to take it out.

"I must go now, Auntie; I'm meeting a man at Madame Tussaud's. Oh! might I have those buckles?"

Aunt Ann's eyes lingered on him; he was her favourite, though to admit it was not in her character.

"Are you to be trusted with them, dear?"

"Of course I am."

"They're an heirloom, Jo. Don't you think we'd better wait till you're older?"

"Oh! Auntie, as if I wasn't —!"

Aunt Ann's fingers rummaged in the little drawer.

"Well, on condition that you take the greatest care of them. And you mustn't ever wear them, until you go to Court."

"Do they wear buckles at Court?"

"I believe so, dear. I have never been. Here they are."

From folds of tissue paper she took them out — of old blackish paste set in silver. Very discreetly, on the bit of black velvet to which they were attached, the two buckles gleamed.

Young Jolyon took them in his hand. Into which of his pockets would they go without spoiling a man's figure?

"I like them, Auntie."

"Yes, dear, they are genuine old paste. Have you somewhere safe to keep them?"

"Oh! yes, I've got lots of drawers." He placed the buckles in his tail coat pocket, and bent over to kiss his Aunt.

"You won't sit on them, Jo?"

"We never sit on our tails, Auntie."

His Aunt's eyes followed him wistfully to the door, where he turned to wave his hand. Dear Jo! He WAS growing up! Such a pleasure to see him always. He would be quite a distinguished-looking man some day, like his dear father, only with more advantages. But had she done right to give him the buckles? Was he not too young to realise the responsibility? She closed the little drawer whence she had taken them, and before her eyes there passed the pageant of old days — days of her childhood and her womanhood with no youth in between. Days of her own responsibility — mother to all the family from the age of twenty on! Just that one abortive courtship —'a lick and a promise,' Swithin would call it — snuffed out by sea water and her father's reputation. Did she regret it? No! How could she? If her father had not been honest about those houses — a man of his word — then, why then she could not have given his buckles to dear Jo, as symbols of headship and integrity. Edward! Well, he had married very happily after all. She had not grudged him the pleasure; his wife had soon had twins. Perhaps it was all for the best: they were always very good to her, her brothers and sisters that she had been a mother to, and it was such a pleasure to see their dear little children growing up. Why, Soamey would be coming in directly on his way back from the Zoo; it was his eighth birthday and she had his present ready; a box of bricks, so that he could build himself a house — like his grandfather, only not — not with sea water . . . Ah! . . . Um! . . . Just a little nap, perhaps, before the dear little chap came — perhaps a little — um — ah! —

The thin lips, so generally compressed, puffed slightly in their breathing above that square chin resting on her cameo. The delicious surge of slumber swayed over the brain under the corkscrewed curls; the lips opened once and a word came forth: "Bub — Buckles."

❦

SANDS OF TIME, 1821-1863

In the Spring of 1860, on the afternoon of the last day before his son went to Eton, old Jolyon hung up his top hat on a wooden antler in the hall at Stanhope Gate and went into the dining-room. Young Jolyon, who had hung up his top hat on a lower wooden antler, followed, and so soon as his father was seated in his large leather chair, perched himself on the arm thereof. Whether from the Egyptian mummies they had just been seeing in the British Museum, or merely because the boy's venture to a new school, and a Public school at that, loomed heavy before them, they were both feeling old, for between the ages of fifty-four and thirteen there is not, on occasions like this, a great gulf set. And that physical juxtaposition, which, until he first went to school at the age of ten, had been constant between young Jolyon and his sire, was resumed almost unconsciously under the boy's foreboding that tomorrow he would be a man. He leaned back until his head was tucked down on his father's shoulder. To old Jolyon moments like this, getting rarer with the years, were precious as any that life afforded him — an immense comfort that the boy was such an affectionate chap.

"Well, Jo," he said, "what did you think of the mummies?"

"Horrible things, Dad."

"Um — yes. Still, if we hadn't got 'em, somebody else would. They say they're worth a lot of money. Queer thing, Jo, to think there are descendants of those mummies still living, perhaps. Well, you'll be able to say you've seen them; I don't suppose many other boys have. You'll like Eton, I expect." This he said because he was afraid his boy would not. He didn't know much about it, but it was a great big place to send a little chap to. The pressure of the boy's cheek against the hollow between chest and arm was increased; and he heard the treble voice, somewhat muffled, murmur:

"Tell me about YOUR school, Dad."

"My school, Jo? It was no great shakes. I went to school at Epsom — used to go by coach up to London all the way from Bosport, and then down by post-shay — no railways then, you know. Put in charge of the guard, great big red-faced chap with a horn. Travel all night — ten miles an hour — and change horses every hour — like clockwork."

"Did you go outside, Dad?"

"Yes — there I was, a little shaver wedged up between the coachman and a passenger; cold work — shawls there were in those days, over your eyes. My mother used to give me a mutton pie and a flask of cherry brandy. Good sort, the old coachman, hoarse as a crow and round as a barrel; and see him drive — take a fly off the leader's ear with his whip."

"Were there many boys?"

"No; a small school, about thirty. But I left school at fifteen."

"Why?"

"My mother died when your Aunt Susan was born, so we left Bosport and came up to London, and I was put to business."

"What was your mother like, Dad?"

"My mother?" Old Jolyon was silent, tracing back in thought through crowded memories.

"I was fond of her, Jo. Eldest boy, you know; they say I took after her. Don't know about that; she was a pretty woman, refined face. Nick Treffry would tell you she was the prettiest woman in the town — good woman, too — very good to me. I felt her death very much."

A little more pressure of the head in the hollow of his arm. All that he felt for the boy and that, he hoped and believed, the boy felt for him, he had felt for his own mother all that time ago. Only forty-one when she had died bearing her tenth child. Tenth! In those days they made nothing of that sort of thing till the pitcher went once too often to the well. Ah! Losing her had been a bitter business.

Young Jolyon got off the arm of the chair, as if he were sensing his father's abstraction.

"I think I'd better go and pack, Dad."

"All right, my boy! I shall have a cigar."

When the boy had gone — graceful little chap! — old Jolyon went to the Chinese tea chest where his cigars reposed, and took one out. He listened to it, clipped its end, lighted and placed it in his mouth. Drawing at the cigar, he took it out of his mouth again, held it away from him between two rather tapering-nailed fingers, and savoured with his nostrils the bluish smoke. Not a bad weed, but all the better for being smoked! Returning to his chair, he leaned back and crossed his legs. A long time since he'd thought of his mother. He could see her face still; yes, could just see it, the clear look up of her eyes from far back under the brows, the rather pointed chin; and he could hear her voice — pleasant, soft, refined. Which of them took after her? Ann, a bit; Hester, yes; Susan, a little; Nicholas, perhaps, except that the fellow was so sharp; he himself, they said — he didn't know, but he'd like to think it; she had been a gentle creature. And, suddenly, it was as if her hand were passed over his forehead again, brushing his hair up as she had liked to see it. Ah! How well he could remember still, coming into his father's house at Bosport after the long cold coach drive back from school — coming in and seeing his father standing stocky in the hallway, with his legs a little apart and his head bowed, as if somebody had just hit him over it — standing there and not even noticing him, till he said: "I've come, Father."

"What! You, Jo?" His face was very red, his eyelids puffed so that his eyes were hardly visible. He had made a queer motion with both hands and jerked his head towards the stairs.

"Go up," he had said. "Your mother's very bad. Go up, my boy; and whatever you do, don't cry."

He had gone up with a sort of sinking fear in his heart. His sister Ann had met him at the door — a good-looking upstanding young woman, then; yes, and a mother to them all, afterwards — had sacrificed herself to bringing up the young ones. Ah! a good woman, Ann!

"Come in, Jo," she had said; "Mother would like to see you. But, Jo — oh! Jo!" And he had seen two tears roll down her cheeks. The sight had impressed him terribly; Ann never cried. In the big four-poster his mother lay, white as the sheets, all but the brown ringlets of her hair — the light dim, and a strange woman — a nurse — sitting over by the window with a white bundle on her lap! He had gone up to the bed. He could see her face now — without a line in it, all smoothed out, like wax! He hadn't made a sound, had just stood looking; but her eyes had opened, and had turned a little, without movement of the face, to gaze full at him. And then her lips had moved, and whispered: "There's Jo, there's my darling boy!" And never in his life before or since had he had so great a struggle to keep himself from crying out, from flinging himself down. But all he had said was: "Mother!" Her lips had moved again. "Kiss me, my boy." And he had bent and kissed her forehead, so smooth, so cold. And then he had sunk on his knees; and stayed there gazing at her closed eyes till Ann had come and led him away. And up in the attic that he shared with James and Swithin, he had lain on his bed, face down, and sobbed and sobbed. She had died that morning, not speaking any more, so Ann had told him. After forty years he could feel again the cold and empty aching of those days, the awful silent choking when in the old churchyard they put her away from him for ever. The stone had been raised over her only the day before they left for London. He had gone and stood there reading:

> IN MEMORY OF
>
> ANN,
>
> The Beloved Wife of
>
> Jolyon Forsyte.
>
> Born Feb. 1, 1780; Died April 16, 1821

A bright May day and no one in that crowded graveyard but himself.

Old Jolyon shifted in his chair; his cigar was out, his cheeks above those grizzling whiskers — indispensable to the sixties — had coloured suddenly, his eyes looked angrily from deep beneath his frowning brows, for he was suddenly in the grip of another memory — bitter, wrathful and ashamed — of only ten years back.

That was on a Spring day too, in 1851, the year after they had buried their father up at Highgate, thirty years after their mother's death. That had put it into his mind, and he had gone down to Bosport for the first time since, travelling by train, in a Scotch cap. He had hardly known the place, so changed and spread. Having found the old parish church, he had made his way to the corner of the graveyard where she had been buried, and had stood aghast, rubbing his eyes. That corner was no longer there! The trees, the graves, all were gone. In place, a wall cut diagonally across, and beyond it ran the railway line. What in the name of God had they done with his mother's grave? Frowning, he had searched, quartering the graveyard like a dog. At least, they had placed it somewhere else. But no — not a sign! And there had risen in him a revengeful anger shot through with a shame which heightened the passion in his blood. The Goths, the Vandals, the ruffians! His mother — her bones scattered — her name defaced — her rest annulled! A stinking railway track across her grave. What right —! Clasping the railing of a tomb his hands had trembled, and sweat had broken out on his flushed forehead. If there were any law that he could put in motion, he would put it! If there were anyone he could punish, by Heaven he would punish him! And then, that shame, so foreign to his nature, came sweeping in on him again. What had his father been about — what had they all been about that not one of them had come down in all those years to see that all was well with her! Too busy making money — like the age itself, laying that sacrilegious railway track, scattering with its progress the decency of death! And he had bowed his head down on his trembling hands. His mother! And he had not defended her, who had lain defenceless! But what had the parson been about not to give notice of what they were going to do? He raised his head again, and stared around him. Over on the far side was someone weeding paths. He moved forward and accosted him.

"How long is it since they put that railway here?"

The old chap had paused, leaning on his spud.

"Ten year and more."

"What did they do with the graves in that corner?"

"Ah! I never did 'old with that."

"What did they do with them? I asked you."

"Why — just dug 'em up."

"And the coffins?"

"I dunno. Ax parson. They was old graves — an 'undred years or more, mostly."

"They were not — one was my mother's. 1821."

"Ah! I mind — there was a newish stone."

"What did they do with it?"

The old chap had gazed up at him, then, as if suddenly aware of the abnormal on the path before him:

"I b'lieve they couldn't trace the owner — ax parson, 'e may know."

"How long has he been here?"

"Four year come Michaelmas. Old parson's dead, but present parson 'e may 'ave some informashun."

Like some beast deprived of his kill old Jolyon stood. Dead! That ruffian dead!

"Don't you know what they did with the coffins — with the bones?"

"Couldn' say — buried somewhere again, I suppose — maybe the doctors got some — couldn' say. As I tell you. Vicar 'e may know."

And spitting on his hands he turned again to weeding.

The Vicar? He had been no good, had known nothing, or so he had said — no one had known! Liars — yes, liars — he didn't believe a word of what they said. They hadn't wanted to trace the owner, for fear of having a stopper put on them! Gone, dispersed — all but the entry of the burial! Over the ground where she had lain that railway sprawled, trains roared. And he, by one of those trains, had been forced to go back to that London which had enmeshed his heart and soul so that, as it were, he had betrayed her who had borne him! But who would have thought of such a thing? Sacred ground! Was nothing proof against the tide of Progress — not even the dead committed to the earth?

He reached for a match, but his cigar tasted bitter and he pitched it away. He hadn't told Jo, he shouldn't tell Jo — not a thing for a boy to hear. A boy would never understand how life got hold of you when you once began to make your way. How one thing brought another till the past went out of your head, and interests multiplied in an ever-swelling tide lapping over sentiment and memory, and the green things of youth. A boy would never comprehend how Progress marched inexorably on, transforming the quiet places of the earth. And yet, perhaps the boy ought to know — might be a lesson to him. No! He shouldn't tell him — it would hurt to let him know that one had let one's own mother —! He took up The Times. Ah! What a difference! He could remember The Times when he first came up to London — tiny print, such as they couldn't read nowadays. The Times — one double sheet with the Parliamentary debates, and a few advertisements of places wanted, and people wanting them. And look at it now, a great crackling flourishing affair with print twice the size!

The door creaked. What was that? Oh, yes — tea coming in! His wife was upstairs, unwell; and they had brought it to him here.

“Send some up to your mistress,” he said, “and tell Master Jo.”

Stirring his tea — his own firm’s best Soochong — he read about the health of Lord Palmerston and of how that precious mountebank of a chap — the French Emperor — was expected to visit the Queen. And then the boy came in. “Ah! Here you are, Jo! Tea’s getting strong.”

And, as the little chap drank, old Jolyon looked at him. To-morrow he was going to that great place where they turned out Prime Ministers and bishops and that, where they taught manners — at least he hoped so — and how to despise trade. H’m! Would the boy learn to despise his own father? And suddenly there welled up in old Jolyon all his primeval honesty, and that peculiar independence which made him respected among men, and a little feared.

“You asked just now about your grandmother, Jo. I didn’t tell you how, when I went down thirty years after her death, I found that her grave had been dug up to make room for a railway. There wasn’t a trace of it to be found, and nobody could or would tell me anything about it.”

The boy held his teaspoon above his cup, and gazed; how innocent and untouched he looked; then suddenly his face went pinker and he said:

“What a shame, Dad!”

“Yes; some ruffian of a parson allowed it, and never let us know. But it was my fault, Jo; I ought to have been seeing to her grave all along.”

And again the boy said nothing, eating his cake, and looking at his father. And old Jolyon thought: ‘Well, I’ve told him.’

Suddenly the boy piped up:

“That’s what they did with the mummies, Dad.”

The mummies! What mummies? Oh! Those things they had been seeing at the British Museum. And old Jolyon was silent, staring back over the sands of time. Odd! how it hadn’t occurred to him. Odd! Yet the boy had noticed it! Um! Now, what did that signify? And in old Jolyon there stirred some dim perception of mental movement between his generation and his son’s. Two and two made four. And he hadn’t seen it! Queer! But in Egypt they said it was all sand: Perhaps things came up of their own accord. And then — though there might be, as he had said, descendants living, they were not sons or grandsons. Still! The boy had seen the bearing of it and he hadn’t. He said abruptly:

“Finished your packing, Jo?”

“Yes, Dad, only do you think I could take my white mice?”

“Well, my boy, I don’t know — perhaps they’re a bit young for Eton. The place thinks a lot of itself, you know.”

“Yes, Dad.”

Old Jolyon’s heart turned over within him. Bless the little chap! What he was in for!

“Did you have white mice, Dad?”

Old Jolyon shook his head.

“No, Jo; we weren’t as civilised as all that in my young day.”

“I wonder if those mummies had them,” said young Jolyon.

❦

HESTER'S LITTLE TOUR, 1845

Those who frequented Forsyte 'Change at Timothy's on the Bayswater Road, and were accustomed to the sight of Aunt Hester sitting in her chair to the left of the fireplace with a book on her lap which she seemed almost too quiescent to be reading, must often have wondered: What, if any, adventures or emotional disturbances had ever come the way of that still figure? Had she ever loved, and if so — whom? Was she ever ill, and if so — where? To whom had she ever confided — what? Not that she imparted to the observer the impression of a sphinx. That would hardly have been nice. And yet, curiously enough, of the three sisters who dwelled at Timothy's, it was Aunt Hester who exhaled, in spite of all her quietism, an atmosphere of — one would almost say free thought, but for fear of going too far. Better, perhaps, say that she conveyed a feeling of having abandoned, out of love of a quiet life, more desires, thoughts, hopes and dislikes, than either of her sisters had ever been capable of entertaining. People felt, in fact, not that Aunt Hester owned a past, but that all her life she had been renouncing a past which she might very well have had. And they felt, too, that she knew it, and found it somehow not tragic, but comic, as if she were always saying to herself: 'To be like this when you're so unlike this — droll, isn't it?' When the Freudian doctrine of complexes and inhibitions came in, younger members of the family, such as Violet, given to pastels, Christopher, inclining to the stage, and Maud Dartie, nothing if not daring, would speculate on what had happened to Aunt Hester before she was as she was. And theory was divided between the assumption that she had been dropped on her head when she was three, or chased by a black man when she was thirteen. In a word, it was widely felt that there were strange potentialities in Aunt Hester, which she had deliberately not developed. The doctrine of 'balance redressed' which had contrived out of a family containing so many 'characters' a sort of reserve or sinking fund in Hester and Timothy, seemed to offer a sound biological explanation, and it was only when she died in 1907 and left to Francie Forsyte her china, that there came to at least one member of the family knowledge that Aunt Hester had once 'tried herself out' before for good and all she resigned a past. For in a Lowestoft teapot Francie found a little sheaf of yellowed leaves of paper, which seemingly Aunt Hester had been too passive to destroy, before she entered a passivity even more profound; leaves deeply buried beneath a pot-pourri of very old cloves, and the dust of rose petals, together with three boot buttons which appeared to have been dropped in at moments when Aunt Hester couldn't be bothered to put them in any other place. The leaves had been detached as if pulled out of a diary, and this alone gave food for thought, in its implication that Aunt Hester must at one time have manifested energy, or there would have been no diary to pull them out of. That they came into the hands of Francie was perhaps fortunate, for no other Forsyte could have relished them adequately. Indeed she so relished them that she even fancied Aunt Hester had wished them to survive as a sort of protest against her unspent life; and presently she dressed them up anonymously in the form of a story which she sent to the 'Argonaut,' who did not accept it. In her version the names were altered, but are here restored to their pristine purity. It was entitled: 'Hester's Little Tour, being Leaves from a Very Early Victorian Diary found in a Lowestoft teapot,' and it began abruptly:

"Wednesday morning, early. How entrancing it was last night to stand in the moonlight with that beautiful Rhine flowing by my feet, and to fancy that it wandered past castles and cities, only to lose itself at last in the great blue sea! How the moonbeams glistened on the water! To think that under this moon the Loreley lured men to destruction, and the robber barons issued from their fastnesses on their forays, with the soft moonlight gleaming on their armour! But was I, indeed, thinking of all this? No, I had but one thought: Would he come? Would he really come? And what would they say at home if they could see me standing there with the hood drawn over my face, waiting for my lover? Lover! Oh, the dear word! If only, I thought, I do not forget all my German, so that I can understand what he says to me in his dear voice, and not weary him by having to talk English! You must not think, my diary, that I did not know how immodest it was of me to have come out. Yes, I knew that, but I did not care. I did not care. Why should I? My heart tells me that I am in love with him. My heart tells me that he loves me. And then he came, he came almost before I knew he was there, wrapped in that flowing cloak which Swithin would laugh at, but which looks so martial on him, he is so upright. How terribly my heart beat when without a word he took me in his arms, wrapping his cloak right round me so that we seemed one person. Ah! it was divine; and strange how I had no fears or misgivings. I never once thought of home while I was standing there in his embrace. A nightingale was singing; so romantic, so beautiful, I shall never forget. Rolandseck, dear Rolandseck! . . . When I was back in my room, fortunately quite unobserved, I felt cold and sick at the thought that we were leaving on the morrow for Bonn. Would that not be too far for him to come, for he has his military duties. But if I can believe his words, or rather his lips, he will not fail. At six o'clock, he said, under the linden trees in the Platz at Bonn. Oh, my diary, where is your Hester going? When I was in his embrace last night I felt I could give up the world for him; and of course he is of very good family. But, lying in my bed, everything seemed so difficult and to need such an effort, for indeed I think it would give our dear father a fit to think of me in Germany married, or perhaps not married — for I do not even know if he has a wife already — to an Army officer. And soldiers are proverbially fickle; they love and ride away. And then what would become of me? But the delight I felt when he put his arms round me — can there be anything in the world more beautiful than love? And I have so often laughed at it; but indeed I do not know myself any more, nor where my sense of humour has gone. To think that only three weeks ago we were in the packet crossing to Calais — it seems a century; and all the towns and people I have seen are faded as if I had dreamed them; and just these last few days seem real. Or perhaps this is the dream and I shall wake up and find that I have never met him. Fancy! If we had not gone into the Pump rooms that night at Ems, I never should have met him. Those divine valses we danced together — how elegantly he dances! It was love at first sight, and I have behaved most immodestly, but that does not seem to me to matter at all. Yet sometimes I wonder what he thinks of me when I am not with him. After all, I am thirty years old, not just a young girl as perhaps he believes, for he says I look so young. His Englisches Mädchen — he calls me! Oh me! How difficult is life! I am surprised to find that all the deportment and good conduct I have been taught seem to count for nothing when I am with him. I am really naughty, for it makes me smile to think what John and Eleanor would feel and say if they only knew where their 'dear demure Hester' had been last night, and how all she is thinking about now is how to get away from them again to-night and meet him under the lime trees in the Platz at Bonn. It is nearly seven by my watch; I must close you now, my diary, and get ready for the chaise . . . .

"Wednesday evening. Oh! dear, how many stories I have told! First I said I had a headache after the jolting in the chaise, and was going to lie down and sleep, so as to be fresh for dinner. And then I listened till I heard John and Eleanor in their room, unpacking; and out I stole. He was there already — all impatience, and his boots all dusty; for he had ridden all the way and was going to ride back for his inspection in the morning. Ah! what a beautiful hour; but not so beautiful as last night because there were people about, and, though the linden trees were thick and lovely, they didn't hide us as I would have liked. Yes, I would — I am quite abandoned! To-night — dare I write it even in you, my diary? — he says he will come to my window. When I chose to be on the ground floor, did I think of that? Yes, I will be honest, I did; so that's that! I shall never smile again at people in love. It is too sweet, and too upsetting. It makes you do what you would never dream of doing, and feel quite proud of it, so long as nobody knows. And then, when I was coming in, I met John and told him I had been pining for air to cure my headache, and so I had gone for a walk. And I quite enjoyed seeing dear John so deceived! Yes, and I said I should be all right tomorrow if I went to bed EARLY AFTER DINNER. Poor John, he is very trustful, and has such nice eyes. Eleanor is very fortunate, I think. It is all so smooth for them! Ah me! It is so different and difficult for us. It is too cruel that he is not English. Bernhard — the name is beautiful and very strong — just what a name should be; only, I like it better without the 'h.' He is six feet tall and twenty-eight years old, and he thinks I am twenty-four; and I have not told him that I am not. When he touches me nothing matters, not even the truth. I feel it is fortunate that we can only speak to each other in a broken way; it seems to excuse me for deceiving him about my age. Yet, after all — thirty and twenty-eight — there is not much difference; and he is so big and strong and manly, I feel humble enough with him to be the younger. There is something so romantic about this beautiful Rhineland that I do not feel as I should feel in England; in England I could never act as I am acting now, indeed no — I should be ashamed of having such violent, such delicious feelings. I am writing in bed, for fear dear Eleanor should come and find me up, after I had said that I was going to bed at once. But I think I can venture soon now to get up and lock my door, and then I shall don my mauve négligé; it goes with my hair, and I shall keep my hair down. I know how daring that is, but sometimes I feel as daring as a tigress defending her young; and then, all suddenly, it is as if my heart would creep out at the soles of my feet, to think that I have a sweetheart coming to my window. 'Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?' Oh! Why is he not English? It would all be so much easier. For then he could woo me openly. If anybody knew he was coming to-night, could I ever hold up my head again? And yet, if I were sure no one would ever know, I should feel like a bird, free and happy, rejoicing that its mate was coming to it in the moonlight. Only birds do not come to their mates in the moonlight. How silly I am! But oh! if he should be seen! I will not think of that; I will not. Be brave, my heart! He says I am 'so schone'— such a pretty word. But I know I am not really. I have not the pink cheeks, the corn-coloured hair, the coral lips of these German maidens. I am dark, and thinner. Perhaps that is why he admires me. Oh! how my heart is beating! I must put you away now, my diary. What — ah! what will have come to me when I write in you again! . . .

"Friday afternoon. I am distraught. I cannot tell what to do, I cannot tell. All today my mind has been going this way and that, ever since I had his dear letter. I have made it all out with the help of the dictionary. His regiment is marching tomorrow to Frankfort, and he begs me to come to him there. He says we will be married, and he will make me 'ever happy.' But until he goes he is so busy that he cannot come again. I know it is my besetting weakness not to be able to act for myself; Ann is always at me about it. I wonder what she would say if she knew that if I could act now I should go to him and disregard the consequences. It is not that I am afraid of the consequences, but it is so difficult to act all by myself; there are so many things I must do if I am to go. Ah! if only someone could do them for me. It is not my soul, but my body that lags and lags. I wish I were like Ann, who always does at once what she feels to be right. Is it that I am ashamed of what has happened? No, not to myself. How can I be ashamed of obeying the dictates of my heart and his? But I cannot face having to explain to John and Eleanor. They would be so horrified, and how could I make them understand? And then there is the arranging for my journey and selling my necklace, for I have not enough money. He would send me money if he knew, but I could not ask him. Oh dear! it is all so difficult. Yesterday I was intoxicated on the memory of our night, it still makes me burn; but today my courage and my energy is all run out of me. Our night! Never, never could I write of it, even in you, my diary. It was too wonderful, and terrifying, and sweet. Did I care then what I was doing, do I care now what I did? A thousand times no! If he were here at this moment it should be again as it was. I think I must be wanton by nature, for I am proud of it to myself. But to the world — and then John and Eleanor! After all their kindness in taking me this tour, how can I leave them without a word? And if I do not, how can I ever tell them what I have done — what we have done! I should die of shame! But if I cannot make up my mind to leave them without a word, and do all those other things that are necessary, I must go on with them to Cologne, and back to London, and never see him again. Soon he will not remember me. I shall be just a night of love. Perhaps one of many nights, for what do I know of him but that I love him, and that he seems to me brave and beautiful? If I look up I can see him there leaning above me in the moonlight. O God! I was wicked, but I was happy. There is the bell for supper. Yes! I am distracted. Perhaps in the night I shall gain courage to act, because I shall want him so! . . .

"Sunday, Cologne. All has moved on as it seemed without me, and my body has come here with John and Eleanor. I have just written to him. I have told him that if he really loves me, he will come to England to claim me; but I know he will not come. I feel it is the end. I am not a fool. John and Eleanor think I have a touch of the sun; it was very hot in the chaise. It is a touch of the moon I have. The moon! I, Hester, who always laughed —! Ah me! I have a lump of lead in my chest. Eleanor came to my room early yesterday morning and insisted on helping me to pack; she is so kind; we started at eight o'clock and drove all day. Now we shall go to the Cathedral and tomorrow travel by train, and in four days we shall be home. John said to-night: 'Well, I think it has been a very enjoyable little tour.' He is a dear nice fellow, but quite blind! When I go home I shall kiss them all and say: 'Oh! such a lovely tour!' As I sit here in my bedroom writing, I seem to see myself with malice: Dear prim proper little Hester! Ugh! I have not cried at all, but an' I would —! To-morrow morning we shall travel on and on and on away from him. All my mind and will feel paralysed, my heart only is alive and sore; I know that if it came over again I should act just the same. And my nature will always be like this; always want love and freedom, always be free in thought but not in deed . . .

"Saturday. I have not written in you for days, my diary. What was the use? Yesterday we crossed in the packet and came up to London. I laughed when I saw our house, but I was not amused. It looked so pokey, and like other houses. Oh! Rolandseck! and the moonlight on the river! There was no letter from him. I have been a fool; I know it now. My pride is hurt, and I am sore — sore. Ann looked at me so hard, I could not help smiling bitterly. Poor Ann! And Juley gushed about my looking pale. She is a fool. I feel much older than them both. And now I shall go on day after day doing exactly what we have always done; but I shall never feel the same again, for I have been where they have not. I have had my little tour . . ."

In her capacity of editress Francie had added: "This is surely a curious little sidelight on the nature of our Victorian foremothers."

"F. F."

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TIMOTHY'S NARROW SQUEAK, 1851

In 1920 Soames Forsyte on the death of his uncle Timothy, proved that will which but for the law against accumulations would in course of time have produced such astounding results. He had been at pains to explain to Timothy how, owing to that law, what Timothy intended would not come about; but Timothy had merely stared at him very hard and said: "Rubbage! Make it so!" And Soames had made it. In any case the legal limit of accumulation would be reached, and that was as near to what the old chap wanted as could be. When, as executor, he came to the examination of the papers left behind by Timothy, he had fresh confirmation of his uncle's lifelong passion for safety. Practically nothing had been destroyed. Seventy years and more of receipted bills, and cheque books with the paid-out cheque forms carefully returned to them in order of date, were found, and — since Timothy had been spoon-fed and incapable of paying a bill since before the War — burned out of hand. There was a mass of papers referring to the publishing business, which he had abandoned for Consols in 1879, and which had died, very fortunately for Soames, a natural death not long after. All these were committed to the fire. But then — a far more serious matter — there were whole drawers full of private letters and odds and ends not only Timothy's, but of the three sisters who had made house with him since their father's death in 1850. And with that conscientiousness, which ever distinguished him in an unconscientious world, Soames had decided to go through them first and destroy them afterwards. It was no mean task. He sneezed his way through it doggedly, reading the spidery calligraphy of the Victorian era, in bundle after dirty bundle of yellowed letters; cheered slightly now and then, among the mass of sententious gossip, by little streaks of side light on this member of his family or on that. The fifteenth evening of his perusal, for he had had the lot conveyed by motor lorry down to Mapledurham, he came on the letter which forms the starting point of this narration. It was enclosed in a yellowed envelope bearing the address, "Miss Hatty Beecher;" was in Timothy's handwriting; bore the date, "May the twenty-seventh 1851," and had obviously never been posted. Hatty Beecher! Why that had been the maiden name of Hatty Chessman, the lively, elderly, somewhat raddled widow and friend of the family in his youth. He remembered her death in the Spring of 1899. She had left his Aunts Juley and Hester five hundred pounds apiece. Soames began to read the letter with an ashamed curiosity, though it was nearly seventy years old and everybody dead; he continued to read it with a sort of emotion, as of one coming on blood in the tissue of a mummy.

"MY DEAR HATTY," (it began),

"I hope it will not surprise you to receive from me," ('obviously she never did,' thought Soames), "this missive which has caused me much anxiety, for I am not one of those lighthearted gentry who take the gravest steps in life without due consideration. Only the conviction that my best interests, indeed my happiness, and, I trust, your happiness, are involved, have caused me to write this letter. I have not, I hope, obtruded my attentions upon you, but you will not I equally hope have failed to notice that the charms of your person and your character have made a great impression upon me and that I seek your company with an ever growing ardour. I cannot, then, think that it will be in the nature of a shock to you when, with all the gravity born of long consideration and many heart searchings, I ask for the honour of your hand. If I am so fortunate as to meet with your approval as a suitor, it will be my earnest endeavour to provide for you a happy and prosperous home, to surround you with every attention, and to make you a good husband. As you know, I think, I am thirty-one years old, and my business is increasing, I am indeed slowly, I am happy to say, becoming a warm man; so that in material matters you will have all the comfort and indeed luxury with which I feel you should be surrounded. In the words of, I think, the Marquis of Montrose:

> 'He either fears his fate too much
> Or his deserts are small
> Who dares not put it to the touch
> To win or lose it all.'

"As I say, I have not taken this step lightly, and if, my dear Hatty, it pleases you to crown my aspirations with success, I think you may rely on me to make you happy. I shall be on tenterhooks until I have your reply which I hope will not be delayed beyond the morrow. I express to you my devoted admiration and am, my dear Hatty,

"Your faithful and attached Suitor,

"TIMOTHY FORSYTE."

With a faint grin Soames dropped the yellowed letter — six years older than himself — on his knee, and sat brooding. Poor old Timothy! And he had never sent it. Why not? Never 'put it to the touch' after all. If he remembered Hatty Chessman the old boy had been well out of it. Bit of a dasher Hatty Chessman in her time, from all that he had heard!

Still! There was the letter! Irrefutable evidence that Timothy had been human once upon a time. 1851? — the year of the Great Exhibition! Yes, they had been in the Bayswater Road by then, Timothy and the girls, Ann, Juley, Hester! Fancy a thing like that letter coming out of the blue at this time of day! What had Hatty done that he didn't send the letter? Or what had Timothy done? Eaten something that disagreed with him — he shouldn't wonder, had a scare of some sort. The envelope had just Hatty's name but no address; was she then staying with them at the time or what — she had been a great friend, he knew, of Juley and of Hester! He put the letter back into its yellowed envelope with Timothy's cypher in an oval medallion on the flap, dropped it into a tray, and went on with his task of conning over his Uncle's remains.

Hallo! What were these?

Three thin red notebooks held together by a bit of dingy rainbow-coloured ribbon tied in a bow. Whose writing? Aunt Ann's undoubtedly, more upright, more distinct than any other in the family. A diary, by George, and pretty old! Yes, begun when they went to 'the Nook,' "November 1850," and going on to "1855," the year that old Aunt Juley married Septimus Small. It would be old-fashioned twaddle! But suddenly Soames' eye lighted again on the yellowed letter in the tray and taking up the second volume of the diary he turned its pages till he came to April 1851.

"April 3. We are all agog about the Great Exhibition that is to be opened in Hyde Park. James says he doesn't know, but he thinks it will be a failure. They are making a great to-do and the Park does not look itself at all. It has quite upset dear Timothy. He is afraid that it will attract many rogues and foreigners and that our house will be burgled. He has become very distrait and never talks to us about his business, but we think from what James said on Sunday that he must be in doubt whether or not to publish a new edition of the rhymes of Dr. Watts. They are very improving, but James says that Timothy does not know whether anyone will want to read them at this time of day." 'H'm!' thought Soames: '"How doth the little busy bee!"' If Timothy had really baulked at republishing that dreadful stuff, he must have regretted it all his life!' His eyes scanned on over the thin precise pages till he came to this:

"May 3. Hatty Beecher ('Ah! here it was!') came on April 30th to spend a month with us. She is a fine figure of a girl and has become quite buxom. We all went to the opening of the Exhibition. It was such a crowd, and the dear little Queen was so becomingly dressed. It was an occasion I shall never forget. How the people cheered! Timothy attended us, he seems quite taken with Hatty, he can hardly look at her. I hope she is really nice. Hester and Juley are already full of her praises. They all went to walk in the Park today, and look at the crowd going into the Exhibition, though there was a windy drizzle; but as our dear father used to say it was only 'pride of the morning,' for it soon cleared, and the sun shone . . .

"May 7. We all went to the opera. Dear Jolyon sent us his box — he put it so drolly. 'Take care Timothy doesn't lose his heart to Taglioni, she wouldn't make him a good wife.' I must say it is really wonderful how she supports herself on one toe, but Timothy seemed quite preoccupied. He was staring at Hatty's back all through the ballet. Mario was ravishing. I have never heard singing so like an angel's. We had great difficulty coming away. It rained and our crinolines got wet, the stupid coachman took someone else for Timothy and we missed our turn and had to walk outside the portico. But Hatty was in such spirits that it did not seem to matter. She is such a rattle. I wonder whether it is quite wise for dear Timothy to see so much of her. I am sure she is very well intentioned, but I feel her evening dresses are lower than is quite nice. I have given her my Brussels fichu.

"May 13. To-day we went to the Zoo. Hatty had never seen it. In some ways she is quite provincial, but she picks things up very fast. Dear Timothy came all the way from his office to meet us. I fear it was Hatty's beaux yeux rather than the animals which brought him. I confess that the Zoo does not give me much pleasure, it is very common; and the monkeys are so human, and not at all nice in their habits. Hatty insisted on mounting the elephant, and of course Timothy was obliged to be her squire of dames, but I am sure he did not really enjoy it, and, indeed, he looked so grave bobbing behind her in the howdah that I could not help smiling, and Hester laughed so that I thought she would burst her bonnet strings. I was obliged to check her, for fear dear Timothy should see. I am glad we arrived too late to see the lions fed. The seal was very droll . . .

"May 17. James came to tea. He told us that Swithin has bought a new pair of greys, very spirited, and that he doesn't know what will happen. He advised Hatty not to venture if Swithin asks her to go driving. But Hatty said: 'I should adore it.' She certainly has a great deal of courage, indeed she is inclined to be rash. I was not sorry that Timothy should have the opportunity of seeing that she is so venturesome, for I feel more and more that he is attracted by her. I do not remember when he has behaved quite as he has this last fortnight. And though in some ways she is attractive, I do not really think she would make him a good wife. I cannot disguise from myself, too, that it would cause a great disturbance in all our lives; but I tell myself constantly that I ought not to be selfish, and if it were for dear Timothy's good, I hope I should not 'care a brass farden' as Nicholas would put it in his droll way. The girls are very fond of her and they do not see the little things that I see, and which make me uneasy. I must hope for the best. I spoke to my dear Jolyon about it yesterday, he is the head of the family now that our dear father is gone, and he has good judgment. He said I was not to worry, Timothy would never 'come up to the scratch.' I thought it such a peculiar expression.

"May 20. A Mr. Chessman has been to call. He came with Swithin. Juley thought he was elegantly dressed, but for my part, I do not care for these large shepherd's plaid checks which seem to be all the rage now for gentlemen. Hester and Hatty came in while we were still at tea, and Mr. Chessman was very attentive to Hatty. I hope I am not being unjust to her when I say that she made eyes at him in a way that I thought very forward. I was quite glad dear Timothy was not there. At least, to be honest, I am not sure that it would not have been for the best if he could have seen her. Swithin says that Mr. Chessman has to do with stocks and shares and is very clever in his profession. I must say that he seems to me much better suited to Hatty than Timothy could ever be. So perhaps it is providential that he came. Swithin has asked her and Hester to make four at the Royal Toxophilite Society's Meeting on Saturday. He pooh-poohed James about the new horses and said that he was an old woman. I shall not tell James, it would only put him about. In the evening after dinner I read Cowper aloud to the girls and Timothy. I chose his celebrated poem, 'The Task,' which begins with that daring line 'I sing the sofa.' I did not read very long because Timothy seemed so sleepy: he works too hard all day in his stuffy office. I must say Hatty did not behave at all nicely. She made faces behind my back, which I could see perfectly well in the mirror; but of course, I took no notice, because she is our guest. For myself I find Cowper very sonorous and improving, though to be quite honest I prefer 'John Gilpin' to any of his more serious poems . . .

"May 23. We have had quite a to-do, and I am not at all sure where my duty lies. This morning after Timothy had gone to the office I went to his study to dust the books which he bought with dear James when we came to live here. They each bought a complete little library, containing Humboldt's Cosmos, Hudibras and all the best works of the past; and who should I find there but Hatty, sitting in Timothy's own arm chair, reading a book which I at once recognised as one of the little calf-bound volumes of Lord Byron. She was so absorbed that she did not see me till I was close to her. I received quite a shock when I apprehended that the book was that dreadful 'Don Juan' that one has heard so much about. She did not even try to hide it but said in a flippant way: 'Who'd have thought Timothy would have this book!' I am afraid I forgot myself, and spoke sharply.

"'I think, my dear Hatty,' I said, 'it is hardly genteel to come into a gentleman's room and sit in his own armchair and read a book like that. I am surprised at you.' She took me up quite rudely.

"'Why? Have you read it?'

"'Of course I have not read it,' I replied.

"'Then,' she said, pertly, 'what do you know about it?'

"'It is common knowledge,' I answered, 'that it is not a book for ladies.'

"She tossed her head with a very high colour; but I continued to stand there looking at her, and she got up and put the book back whence she had taken it. It was in my mind to improve the occasion, but I remembered in time that she has no mother, and is our guest, so I only said: 'You know, dear Hatty, Timothy does not like his books touched.' She laughed and said flippantly: 'No, they don't look as if they were meant to be read.' I could have shaken her, but I controlled myself. After all she is young and high-spirited, and I daresay it is rather quiet for her in our little house. She flung out of the room, and I have not seen her since. I cannot make up my mind whether to tell Timothy or not. I feel sure that he is seriously épris. He looks at her so much when he thinks nobody sees him, and he has been biting his fingers, and has not answered any question for some days; indeed, he does not seem to hear us when we speak to him. I should tell him at once if I only knew how he would take it; but men are so funny and I am not quite sure that it might not inflame his feelings rather than allay them. I feel more and more, however, that Hatty would not prove the ideal mate for him. He needs a more womanly woman, and especially one who would not laugh at him. I think I must just wait and see, as our dear father used to say so often . . .

“May 25. Swithin sent his brougham this evening for Hester and Hatty and they dined with him to meet Mr. Chessman and Mr. and Mrs. Traquair. Timothy looked very blue; all the evening he sat as glum as glum; and I noticed that when the girls came back in the highest spirits he was in such a fluster that he gave Hatty his own negus by mistake. When she was going to bed she left her shawl on the back of her chair, and when Timothy took it up to restore it to her, I saw him put it to his nose. I very much fear that it is not the highest side of him that she appeals to. This makes it very difficult for me to say anything. I have a feeling that Mr. Chessman is providential. I questioned Hester closely about him and from what she says he and Hatty get on together like a house on fire. I do not suppose from what Swithin told us that he is so warm a man as dear Timothy, who has always been of a saving disposition and is doing so very well now with his primers, and I am sure he cannot be so safe a man, but to do Hatty justice I do not think she is of a mercenary turn of mind. It is very agitating, and I can only pray that all will turn out for the best . . .

“May 28. Timothy sent a message to me this morning that he was going to Brighton for some sea air and would not be back for a fortnight. YOU CANNOT IMAGINE WHAT A RELIEF IT WAS TO ME for, after what happened last night, I was dreading having to do my duty. I cannot but think he knows what I had to tell him and that it is all over for the best. He took a cab and caught the early train without saying good-bye or indeed seeing any of us. I must put it all down as clearly as I can.

“Yesterday evening Mr. and Mrs. Traquair called for Hatty to take her to dine and to their box at the opera afterwards. We four had a cosy little dinner at home just to ourselves, the first time since Hatty came. Cook had made some mincepies specially, and the pulled-bread was more delicious than I ever remember it. Timothy got up a bottle of the special brown sherry, and he filled our glasses himself; then he held his up and screwed up his eyes and said: ‘Well, here’s to home and beauty!’ He looked quite waggish. But he was very distrait afterwards and went off to his study. I confess that I felt quite nervous, for I have never known him propose a toast or screw up his eyes like that; and knowing what I did I could not help fearing that he was making up his mind to a proposal. Juley and I played bézique for some time, and I got more and more anxious, and when the negus came I took Timothy’s glass down to the study. He was sitting at his desk with a pen in his mouth and his eyes fixed on the ceiling; and I noticed that he had been tearing up paper. It was all strewn about, and when I ventured to pick up some pieces and put them into the wastepaper basket I saw the word ‘Hatty’ on one of them. He was quite cross at being interrupted. ‘What’s the matter with you, Ann?’ he said: ‘I’m busy.’ And then he went off again into a brown study. I did not know what to do for the best. So I went away and sat in the drawing-room waiting for him to come up. The girls had gone to bed, and I took my tatting into the window, it was such a warm night. I confess that I prayed to God while I was sitting there. Timothy has always been my baby since our dear mother died when Susan was born, and it was dreadful to me to think that he might be taking a step that would lead to his unhappiness. I could not see what he could be writing and tearing up to Hatty except a proposal of marriage. His forehead had been flushed, and his eyes looked quite glassy. It seemed a very long time that I sat there. The Bayswater Road was quite quiet, and the lights of the Exhibition in the Park were so pretty, and there were stars in the sky, I always think they are wonderful, so bright and so far off. I could not tatt properly for thinking of dear Timothy. And still he did not come up, though it grew very late. I knew that he must be sitting up to let Hetty in; and that probably he would then give her the letter he had been writing. I was in despair till I thought: When she comes I will go down myself and open the door to her, and perhaps Timothy will let me talk to him before he puts the ‘fat in the fire’ as James would say. My nerves became all fiddlestrings, so at last I took up the works of Mr. Cowper, and tried to calm myself. The carriages and cabs were coming now bringing back people from the theatres and the Exhibition, and I knew I had not long to wait. I was just reading those clever little verses on ‘The high price of fish’ when I saw a hansom cab stopping at our door. I must say it gave me quite a shock, and I rubbed my eyes, because I had made sure that the Traquairs would bring Hatty back in their carriage. A man got out first in an opera cloak and hat, and then I saw him quite plainly assisting Hatty to alight. He placed her on the ground and lifted her hand to his lips, and I could see her look at him so archly. He got back into the cab and drove away. It was Mr. Chessman. At first I was so paralysed at the thought that she had driven all the way with him from the opera, ALONE IN THE CAB, that I could not move. Then I wondered whether Timothy also had seen what I had seen. In my disturbance I ran down stairs into the hall. The door of his room was shut and there was the bell ringing. He did not come out, so then I knew that he must have seen. I am afraid I did a very unladylike thing, for I stood outside his door and listened. From my own feelings I could tell what a shock it must have been to him to know that the lady to whom he was about to offer his hand had driven alone at night with a comparative stranger in one of those new cabs which are so private. I could hear a noise, indeed, as if someone were breathing very hard — it was a dreadful moment; then, afraid that he might do something violent, I ran to the front door and opened it. There was Hatty, as cool as a cucumber. I am thankful now that I said nothing to her, but she must have seen from my face that I knew everything. 'Well,' she said, pertly, 'here we are again! Such a treat, dear Papa! Good-night, Miss Forsyte!' and ran upstairs. My heart bled for Timothy. I listened again at his door, and could hear him walking up and down just like an animal in the Zoo. He went on for quite a long time, for though he does not show them, he has always had very deep feelings. You cannot imagine what a relief it was when suddenly I heard him begin to whistle 'Pop goes the weasel!' I knew, then, that the worst was over; and, though he was still walking up and down, I stole upstairs as quietly as a mouse. I am sure I was right in thinking that discretion was the better part of valour. Timothy cannot bear anyone to see him affected in any way, it puts him into a perfect fantod. When I got to my room I fell on my knees, and thanked God for this providential escape: though, when I think of Hatty in that cab, I feel that the ways of Providence are indeed inscrutable. It is a great relief to me to think that by now Timothy must be on the Pier at Brighton with the good sea air, and all the distractions . . .

"June 1. Hatty left us today. I should be sorry to say that I think her 'fast,' I am sure she really has a good heart, but I confess that I feel her influence on Juley and Hester has been unsettling — she is of course much younger than they, and the young people of today seem to have no deportment, and very little sense of duty or indeed of manners. I really find it difficult to forgive her for the flippant thing she said at the last minute: 'Tell Timothy that I'm sorry if I astonished his weak nerves.' And she whisked off before I could even answer . . .

"June 6. Timothy is still at Brighton. Hester had a letter from him yesterday in which he said that he had walked up to the Devil's Punchbowl and that it had done his liver good. He has seen the performing fleas too, and the aquarium. Swithin has been down, he says, driving his new greys — he — Timothy — does not think much of them; but, of course, he is not the judge of a horse that Swithin is. He made no allusion to Hatty in his letter, so I hope the wound is beginning to heal. Jolyon came in this afternoon when the girls were out, and told me of a picture he had bought 'Dutch fishing boats at Sunset'— he has such good judgment. He was so genial that I opened my heart to him about Timothy and Hatty. He twinkled and said:

"'H'm! Timothy had a narrow squeak.' It was so well put, I think . . .

"June 11. Everybody says the Exhibition is a great success, in spite of all the foreigners that it has attracted. Prince Albert has become quite popular. Hester had a letter from Hatty this morning. Fancy! She has received an offer of marriage from Mr. Chessman. It is such a relief, because quite apart from dear Timothy, it has always been on my conscience that it was from our house that she behaved as she did. And now that Timothy comes home tomorrow everything is for the best, if only this news does not reopen his wound . . ."

Soames let the little red volume drop and took up the yellowed letter. He balanced it in his hand, feeling its thin and slightly greasy texture. So that was that! He cackled faintly. The quaint old things! But suddenly his veins tingled with a flush of loyalty. Nobody should laugh at them except himself! No, by Jove! And, taking the little volumes and the letter, he pitched them one by one into the wood fire.

❦

AUNT JULEY'S COURTSHIP, 1855

The Crimean war and the marriage of Septimus Small with Miss Julia Forsyte, which both occupied part of the year 1855, were linked by a water picnic arranged for the entertainment of that 'hero,' Major Small, a younger brother of Septimus, who had been wounded in the leg. What bound Septimus himself to the Forsyte family was indubitably architecture, for he was a member of the firm of Dewbridge, Small and Keyman, who specialised in the domestic Gothic, which at that period was subjugating the taste of the British Islands. Roger Forsyte, in the course of his profession — the collection of house property — had many dealings with this firm which had designed for him a row of houses on a site he had picked up in Kensington, then somewhat out of the world; and to Septimus Small's riverside villa at Twickenham Roger sometimes repaired on Sundays to consummate his plans over cigars and claret cup. After his marriage in 1853 he would be accompanied by Mrs. Roger, and they would take her on the river, paddling with a rather deep-sea stroke, in long whiskers, ducks, and shallow wide-brimmed straw hats, while pretty little Mrs. Roger held the tiller and covered the boat's stern and other matters with her crinoline. In the severe winter 1854 Septimus, a man of weak constitution, inadvertently contracted bronchitis. He emerged with the long full beard and the cough which subsequently secured for him the cognomen 'Cough Lozenge' from the young Rogers, who all made their appearance between the years of '53 and '62 — George, inventor of the nickname, having '56 to his vintage. There can be no doubt that it was this cough and long beard which won the heart of Julia, then barely 'Aunt Juley,' since only young Jolyon, young Roger, young Nicholas, Ernest, and St. John Hayman had been born, and were still mostly in the cradle. When, years later, she heard that dear Septimus went about being called 'Cough Lozenge' in the family, she nearly had a fit.

In 1855, at the age of forty, she had a certain pink and pouting charm; but would have denied with vigour Roger's frequent remark to Mrs. Roger: "Juley's setting her cap at Sep." The idea! HER cap, indeed, when it was entirely for HIS good, and his least cough set her trembling with a sort of delighted pity! He did so want someone to look after him and see that he took care at night, and to trim his beard, that was so manly and so sensible, covering his chest. To her the notion that anyone so interesting-looking, almost handsome, should be a 'confirmed bachelor,' as Roger put it, was painful. Her sister Susan, too, seven years younger than herself, and already for three years wedded to John Hayman, was always telling her how John admired her in this dress or in that, and had once gone so far as to imply that he admired her in nothing — so daring of Susan — not quite nice!

When, then, in July of 1855 she was invited to come with Roger and his wife to this water picnic, she was all of a flutter and gave much thought to her costume. She came out finally in pink with green ribbons in her bonnet, and a perfectly new crinoline. Roger, living then in Bayswater, warming a house that he intended to sell shortly at a reasonable profit — not till 'sixty-nine did he anchor himself permanently in Prince's Gate — called for her with his carriage of a new-fangled shape named 'Victoria' (always so unusual, Roger — eccentric, some people called it). On the way down to Twickenham he had to sit back to the horses on a narrow little seat that came out from below the high box, and was propped up with an iron stand; and he was so cross that it was quite a relief to them all three when they arrived, and dear Mr. Small met them at the gate, looking most manly in a puggaree and white trousers — 'ducks,' Roger called them, he was so droll. In his hand, too, he had a bunch of picotees, and held them to her nose with quite an air. "These are for you, Miss Julia," he said. Tucked into her fichu they went beautifully with her dress, and were so fragrant; it would have been perfect if Roger had not closed his left eye quickly two or three times. As if —! Then they all went into the house to meet Major Small and have light refreshment before going on the river.

'Parsons' Villa' (Aunt Juley subsequently changed the name to Sunninglea) had not been built by Dewbridge, Small and Keyman; it was in fact Georgian, on two floors, with French windows from the drawing-room on to the lawn, the river close below, and a little island opposite. In the drawing-room were four persons, making eight in all for the picnic: Major Small, a fine, full-bearded figure of a man, with a stiff leg, in a tussore suit; Hatty Chessman, always the life and soul of any party, and —"Who do you think, my dear?"— Augustus Perry; almost famous for those delightful books with music and rhymes in them, and his recitals at parties. It was he who made up that 'Round' which became so popular:

> "A boat, a boat unto the ferry,
> And we'll go over and be merry,
> And laugh and quaff and sing Down-derry."

And he had witty variations for the last line, such as: “And laugh and quaff and drink brown sherry,” or: “And laugh and quaff — Augustus Perry.”

Seated on a chintz-covered chair with a glass of sherry cobbler in her hand, and a bowl of lavender close to her nose, Julia could not help looking at Mrs. Augustus Perry and wondering a little if she liked being the wife of anyone so popular, so sought after as Gus Perry, who played the guitar, too. She was hoping so much that she herself would not be in a boat with Roger — he was such a tease, especially if their dear host were in the same boat. And she hoped he was noticing how brightly she was talking with Major Small; and indeed it was an honour to be talking to him, for after all it was he who had the stiff leg, and was the hero; but all the time she contrived to watch their dear host and to note that he looked a little anxious. Then they all went down across the lawn to the two boats, so graceful, with striped cushions and brown varnish. It WAS a moment, not knowing in which boat she was to be, with Augustus Perry cracking so many jokes. But her arm was taken gently, firmly, above the elbow by Mr. Septimus, and she was stepping into a boat, and sitting down quite quickly beside her sister-inlaw on the stern seat.

“My dear,” she said, “I hope I am not required to steer. It’s such a responsibility.”

“Oh! I will steer, dear Juley,” replied her sister-inlaw.

Crinoline by crinoline they sat, and — so gratifying — who should step into the boat but dear Mr. Septimus himself, and Augustus Perry. She could not help smiling when that droll Gus said:

“I shall take my coat off, Sep.”

And Mr. Septimus, always courtly, asked:

“Do you mind, ladies?” Indeed, they didn’t!

So both took their coats off, and placed the oars in the rowlocks. And then the boat glided out. It WAS delightful! Julia felt, somehow, that not only herself, but dear little Mary beside her, who was looking so pretty, was glad that dear Roger (even though he was her husband) was not in their boat. How beautifully they rowed, almost together; Augustus Perry — his face was so round, without whiskers or anything — kept popping it out from behind Mr. Septimus’s back, to make such amusing remarks. And then he ‘caught a crab’ on purpose! How they did laugh; he looked so droll! So first they went up the stream, and then they came down the stream, with the water all green and the swans all white — and landed on the little island opposite Parson’s Villa, where they found the picnic baskets — fancy! It WAS all beautifully planned, and so romantic under the willow trees, with rugs for them to sit on, and Augustus Perry’s guitar, quite like a picture by Watteau.

The lunch was exquisite: lobster salad, pigeon pie, tipsy cake, raspberries, and champagne: with plates and spoons, forks and napkins, and a dear little water rat looking on. She had never enjoyed anything so much, and she was really quite relieved when Major Small flirted outrageously with Hatty Chessman, and gave them no more anxiety. To be waited on by their dear host was such a privilege, and Roger and Gus Perry were so droll; altogether it was enchanting. When they had all finished lunch and the gentlemen were smoking their cigars, they sang some delightful ‘rounds’: ‘A boat, a boat,’ ‘Three blind mice,’ ‘White sand and grey sand.’ Mr. Septimus’s voice was so manly — deep and hollow, almost like an organ. Then they played hide-and-seek. Each in turn was allowed five minutes to hide from the others — such a clever idea, so thoughtful. She herself hid among some willow bushes, and who do you think found her? Mr. Septimus: he was so surprised! When they had all hidden it was time for tea, and such a to-do boiling the kettle. Roger, indeed — it was just like him — suggested that they should leave the kettle and go over and have tea in the house; but that would have destroyed all the romance. And when at last the kettle did boil, it would have been a delicious cup, only the water was smoky. But nobody minded, because, of course, it was a picnic. Then came the moment when the other six got into one boat and rowed away. It seemed quite providential. So she and their dear host helped the servants to pack everything in the other boat to take over to the house. While they were doing that, she noticed that he coughed three times.

“I am sure,” she said, “dear Mr. Septimus, it’s too damp for you on the river so late. It is past six.” How good he was about it!

“Let us sit on the lawn, then, Miss Julia,” he said, “and wait for the others to come back.”

So they sat under the cedar tree where it was beautifully cool, and quite private, for the branches came down very low. She had quite a fluttery feeling, sitting there all alone with him for the first time. But he was so considerate, talking about Southey. Did she like his poetry? He himself preferred Milton.

“I must confess, Mr. Septimus,” she said, “that I have not read ‘Paradise Regained,’ but Milton is certainly a very beautiful poet — so sonorous.”

“And what do you think of Wordsworth, Miss Julia?”

“Oh! I love Mr. Wordsworth! I always feel he must have had such a beautiful character.”

As she said this she could not help wondering if he would ask her whether she read Byron. If he did, she should be daring and say: ‘Yes, indeed!’ She did not want to have secrets from him, and she had been so impressed by ‘Childe Harold,’ and ‘The Giaour.’ Of course Lord Byron had NOT had good principles, but she was sure dear Mr. Septimus would never suspect her of reading anything that was not nice. There was ‘Don Juan’ in Timothy’s study — several volumes. Hester had read them and been horrified. And when he did not ask her she felt quite disappointed; it would have drawn them closer together, she was sure. But she could feel that he was shy about it; because he asked her instead whether she liked the novels of Charles Dickens.

“Of course,” she said, “he is very clever, but I do think he writes about such very peculiar, such very common characters; and there is so much about drinking in ‘The Pickwick Papers,’ though most people, I know, like them very much. Do you admire ‘The Pickwick Papers,’ Mr. Septimus?”

“No, Miss Julia; it seems to me a very extravagant book.”

Time went so quickly under the cedar, and it would have been quite perfect if the midges had not bitten her dreadfully through her stockings; for, of course, she could not scratch, or even say “La!” She did so wonder whether they were biting him, too. The longer they sat there the more she felt that he did not take enough care of himself, with no scarf on, in the evening air; he did so need someone to look after him. And so the midges bit, and she smiled, and the boat came back, with Augustus Perry singing to his guitar. What an agreeable rattle he was, was he not? And how romantic always — music on the water!

Then it all came to an end, and she drove home alone with dear little Mary in the Victoria, Roger refusing to sit back to the horses on ‘that knife-board’ any more, and going off with Hatty Chessman in her brougham. Such a relief! It had been such a — such a holy afternoon, and she did so want not to be teased about it . . . .

On the Bayswater Road that night she sat a long time at her window thinking of Septimus’s beard, and whether she would dare to come to calling him ‘Sep,’ and whether he would ever ask her to let him go and see her eldest brother, dear Jolyon — now that their father was dead . . . .

And then came their correspondence; that WAS a delightful experience. His letters sometimes contained a sprig of lavender — his favourite scent; they were beautifully written, because of course he was an architect, and full of high principle, so refined. Now and then, indeed, she would feel as if he might be too refined, because she had often read the Marriage Service and — thought about what it meant, as who indeed would not? In her own letters she tried hard not to be just gossipy, but like Maria Edgeworth. All that time she was knitting him a scarf. It had to be quite a secret, and done in her bedroom, because if Timothy saw it he would be sure to say: “Is that for me?” And perhaps would add: “I don’t want a great thing like that.” And if she said: “No, it’s not for you,” he would be quite upset and want to know whom it was for; which would never do.

In August they went (Ann and Hester, herself and Timothy) to Brighton for the sea air, and in a letter she happened to mention it to Septimus — always Septimus in her thoughts. Imagine her surprise, then, when on the third day she saw him sitting on the pier. It gave her such a colour. Timothy stopped short at once.

“Why! That’s Sep Small! I’m off!” It showed how little he understood, or he would never have left her like that alone with him. But what an adorable hour that was, hanging over the pier by his side. He knew such a lot about marine things — he pressed seaweed, and could not bear nigger-minstrels. He told her, too, that the sea air was good for his cough, and she was sure he had noticed her hat, for he said in such a far-away voice: “I dote on these pork-pie hats you see about, Miss Julia, and the veils are so sensible!” And there was hers floating almost against his cheek. It was all so friendly and delightful; and she did long to ask him to come back with her to lunch at their hotel so that she could get out his scarf and say: “I have a little surprise for you, dear Mr. Septimus,” and clasp it round his neck; but she felt it would make a ‘how-de-do’! It would be too dreadful if Timothy showed anything by his manner; and sometimes he showed such a lot, especially if he were kept waiting for meals. For, of course, neither he nor dear Ann, nor even Hester, knew anything about her feelings for dear ‘Sep’; so on the whole it would be better not. And then — so providential! — HE asked if he might escort her back to her hotel, and what COULD she say except that she would be flattered! He looked so tall and aristocratic walking beside her, with his full beard, and a puggaree round his hat, and his white, green-lined umbrella. She hoped, indeed, that people might be thinking: ‘What a distinguished couple!’ Many hopes flitted in her mind while they strolled along the front, and watched the common people eating winkles, and smelled the tarry boats. And something tender welled up in her so that she could not help stopping to call his attention to the sea, so blue with little white waves.

“I DO love Nature,” she said.

“Ah! Miss Julia,” he answered — she always remembered his words — “the beauties of Nature are indeed only exceeded by those of — Tut! — I have a fly in my eye!”

“Dear Mr. Septimus, let me take it out with the corner of my handkerchief.”

And he let her. It took quite a long time; he was so brave, keeping his eye open; and when at last she got it out, very black and tiny, they both looked at it together; it seemed to her to draw them quite close, as if they were looking into each other’s souls. Such a wonderful moment! And then — her heart beat fast — he had taken her hand. Her knees felt weak; she looked up into his face, so thin and high-minded and anxious, with a little streak where the eye had watered; and something of adoration crept up among her pinkness and her pouts, into her light grey eyes. He lifted her hand slowly till it reached his beard, and stooped his lips to it. Fancy! On the esplanade! All went soft and sweet within her; her lips trembled, and two large tears rolled out of her eyes.

“Miss Julia,” he said, “Julia — may I hope?”

“Dear Septimus,” she answered, “indeed, you MAY.”

And through a mist she saw his puggaree float out in the delicious breeze, and under one end of it a common man stop eating winkles, to stare up at her, as if he had seen a rainbow.

❦

NICHOLAS-REX, 1864

In the late seventies someone made the remark: “Nicholas Forsyte — cleverest man in London.” And with this dictum those who observed him in his business and public capacity were frequently in agreement. It is in the hinterland of his existence that one must look for qualifications of the statement. Wherever he functioned Nicholas was certainly cock of the walk — indeed he looked a little like a cock, very natty, with a high forehead and his hair brushed off it in a comb, erect, and with quick movements of his head and neck. His colouring too was fresh and sanguine and his hair almost chestnut before it went grey. When he rose at a meeting and opened with one of his dry witticisms people sat forward, and seldom took their ears off him till he resumed his seat. He was almost notorious for his power of making an opponent look foolish, and than that no greater asset is in the balance sheet of a public man. For Nicholas was a public man in the minor sense suitable to a Forsyte. He never aspired to extravagances of power or position — never for instance went into Parliament. He confined himself to obtaining the practical, if not the nominal, control of any concern in which he held interests; and he had a certain tempered public spirit which led him almost insensibly to grasp the helm of two utility corporations, the one concerned with tramways, and the other with canals, although his holdings in them were not considerable. As a judge of an investment he was perhaps unique, so much so that his five brothers felt it almost a relief when one of his investments went wrong. He could be sharp and he could be genial, and no one ever knew beforehand which he was going to be; and this in itself was a source of sovereignty. One might say with a reasonable amount of certainty that he had never had a friend. Many men had tried it on with him, but he had always nipped them off sooner or later and generally sooner. He was perhaps constitutionally unable to associate with people on terms of equality. On the other hand his integrity was admirable, for he owed integrity to himself, and one could always follow him with a feeling that one would not be let down. Without knowing anything at all about him one would have taken him, perhaps, for one of those extremely high-class doctors who do not move out of their own houses, and that only at a good many guineas. With all this he had not much health, or rather just the health of a Forsyte, which kept him alive until he was ninety-one, and might better be termed vitality.

Without being exactly close in money matters he was the most guarded of the clan, partly no doubt because he had more children and partly because of a certain austerity which had little patience with fashion and fallals, and believed almost pitilessly in work being good for the human being. And this brings one to his hinterland which began, one may suggest, with his marriage in 1848. Whether in marrying at all he did justice to the truest instincts of supremacy will ever remain a question; but the fact is he was a man who had to be married and married somewhat young, given Queen Victoria and his own constitution. That he undoubtedly married money — and long before the Married Woman’s Property Act, so that he was able to make the most judicious use of it, and Mrs. Nicholas to make none at all — must not be regarded as proof of a cold-blooded selection. On the contrary he was an ardent wooer, in peg — top trousers, of a very pretty girl, the daughter of a county-town banker with whom finance had thrown him into contact. Limited by her mother and possibly by her crinoline, the young lady had kept Nicholas at a respectable distance until after a ceremony observed with every circumstance including a really witty speech from her bridegroom. She had been the more surprised afterwards.

To this surprise must be attributed the inception of that “fronde” which smouldered for so many decades behind the façade of his sovereignty.

We will not pause here to enquire whether the manners of the twentieth century would have saved Nicholas, or rather Mrs. Nicholas, from receiving the feeling that she was married. The fact remains that she received it. As, one by one, she produced little Nicholases the feeling if anything increased. When she had produced six in fourteen years, she flatly refused to produce any more. From a woman not quite thirty-five this seemed to Nicholas, who had by then a considerable fortune, wholly unreasonable — the more so as it was the first definite limit set to his prerogative. And to this fettering of his complete freedom must be attributed much of that nervous irritability which he undoubtedly developed. But who, seeing Mrs. Nicholas, would have dreamed that she was in any way responsible for the moods of her lord and master. The fact is that no one except Nicholas ever did see Mrs. Nicholas —‘Fanny’ as she was called, because her real name was Elizabeth. Her manner in public was almost the opposite of her manner in private. She is described somewhere as entering a room behind Nicholas “with an air of frightened jollity.” How true! She did. And why? Because he would aim at her wittily caustic shafts which she had never learned to parry. And she would smile and smile with that frightened look in her eyes, and generally be so glad to get home before he had aimed one. But when she was home, and there was no one but herself to hear him, that frightened look would disappear. And in a hundred womanly ways (without perhaps deliberately meaning to) she avenged it. Not before the children, no — mainly in the privacy of the common bedroom, supremely in the privacy of the common bed. There she would reduce Nicholas from sovereignty to supplication. She did it not because he was repellent to her — he was never that — but almost as it were on principle, because she had, after all, a soul of her own, and there were no other means of asserting it. In all the manifest ways of life he was the perfect autocrat, paying the piper — incidentally not altogether without what had been her money — and calling the tune. Who can blame her, then, for reminding him that he was mortal, and that she was mortal too. We have here in miniature, indeed, a somewhat perfect illustration of monarchy and the attempt of subjects at its limitation.

This continual strife to limit Nicholas was of course but vaguely suspected on "Forsyte 'Change" and cannot therefore be recorded with any precision; but, in spite of all the instinctive camouflage lavished on the matter, there did come into the family consciousness news of a phase of it worth commemorating for the light it throws on the change in British institutions and the imperfection of human judgments. It began with a letter from Mrs. Nicholas dated: "June the twenty-fourth 1864: The Chine Hotel, Bournemouth" which ran thus:

"MY DEAR HUSBAND —

"I have long wished to take a step which I fear will cause you some anxiety and cannot fail to have roused your disapproval. I came to this nice hotel yesterday in this very charming spot with the intention of remaining here for some weeks. The sea air is delicious, and there are several quite nice people in the hotel. Please send me some of my money. Indeed, I think it would be nice if in future you paid me a regular allowance, out of the money that my dear father left me. Give my love to the dear children.

"Your affectionate wife,

"FANNY."

When Nicholas received this letter he was already in a state of considerable confusion — not to say anxiety — and he read it with a stupor unbecoming to the cleverest man in London. That a wife should have gone off by herself without giving notice had taken him — as he would not have expressed to anybody else —"flat aback." That, on the top of it, she should ask him to send her money and make her a regular allowance seemed to him outrageous. He went to bed and passed a wretched night. What was the woman about? The more he did not sleep the more he was inclined to think that he had never heard of such a thing. Next day he wrote in reply:

"MY DEAR FANNY —

"I have received your letter. Your going off like that gave me a pretty surprise. If you choose to take things into your own hands, you must incur the consequences. I shall certainly not send you any money; and the best thing you can do is to come back home at once. As to a regular allowance what on earth do you want it for? I give you everything you can reasonably require. I suppose you have been listening to some clap-trap about married women's property. The sooner you rid your mind of any of these new-fangled notions the better it will be for both of us, and for the children.

"Now for goodness sake come to your senses, and come home.

"Your affectionate husband,

"NICHOLAS FORSYTE."

He went to a Board meeting irritably convinced that he had clinched the matter and that she would be home tomorrow. She was not, and the day after he received a second letter.

"MY DEAR HUSBAND —

"I am sorry that you do not see the reasonableness of my conduct and of my requests. I shall therefore continue to stay on here. There is a very nice solicitor in the hotel, and he advises me that you will be liable for any debts I may have to incur, which I think, is quite reasonable. Of course, I did not tell him that I was speaking of myself. I hope your indigestion is better. Give my love to the dear children.

"Your affectionate wife,

"FANNY."

Nicholas put the letter down with the remark: "Well, for obstinacy give me a woman!" What on earth had come to her!

Debts, indeed! Fiddlesticks! He was none the less "in a regular stew." To have his attention on important matters disturbed in this way was scandalous. Why! if it went on he would have to go down and bring her back! And it did go on. He answered the letter after waiting another day to see if she would come to her senses.

"MY DEAR WIFE —

"Will you please understand that I expect you to come back, otherwise I shall be compelled to come down and fetch you. I am surprised and grieved at your conduct, especially at this moment when I have important business on hand. Now don't be silly, but come home like a good girl.

"Your affectionate husband,

"NICHOLAS FORSYTE."

To this letter he received no answer. Three days passed during which he experienced every kind of mental and some physical discomfort. He even began to have dark thoughts about the nice solicitor. Fanny was only thirty-seven, and with a woman you never knew. At last, thoroughly alarmed, he cried off from a meeting of the Central Canal Corporation, and went down to Bournemouth. At the hotel they told him that Mrs. Forsyte had left two days before. No! They had no address. The callous indifference to his feelings disclosed by this conduct upset Nicholas completely. That he should have to confront an almost grinning hotel manager and betray the fact that his own wife was acting independently was — was monstrous! He did not even ask if she had paid her bill; but his knowledge of hotels — he was on the Board of one — told him that she had, or they would have presented him with it. Where was she getting money from — throwing away her jewellery he shouldn't be surprised. He returned to London — there was nothing else to do. The next day he received a letter from her to say that she had moved on to Weymouth, but it was not as nice as she expected and she should not stay. She did not say where she was going. 'H'm!' thought Nicholas: 'Playing cat and mouse with me, is she?' And he went sullenly into the City.

Now a man may make the best resolutions about his wife, such as: "I'll have nothing more to do with her," or: "If she thinks she can tire me out she's very much mistaken." But when, like Nicholas, he has given her six children — three of them at home; when, like Nicholas, he has a reputation for always having had his own way, and for being an irreproachable householder, it was exceptionally galling not even to be able to say with truth that he knew where his wife was, to have to avoid Forsyte 'Change as if it were the devil — as perhaps it was — and to sneak about his own house feeling that his children and his servants knew all about everything. He began to suffer severely from that kind of dyspepsia which arises from the thwarting of one's will, one's instincts, and one's self-esteem. He often thought: 'If she could see me, she wouldn't go on behaving like this.'

At the end of a fortnight he received from her a letter dated from an hotel at Cheltenham which, though it seemed to show a certain softening, mentioned a nice doctor who had given her some very kind advice — Doctors, indeed, as if he didn't know them! — and ended with the words: "I trust that you are now prepared, my dear husband, to make me a fixed and regular allowance, of course out of my own money. I think — do you not agree? — that £500 a year is the least amount that would be proper. I feel that if I had that I could come home again. In the meantime I have parted with my emerald pendant. Give my love to the dear children. Your affectionate wife, Fanny."

Parted with her emerald pendant! The thing had cost him ninety pounds, and he supposed she had got thirty or forty for it. The sheer folly of women had never seemed to him so patent. Five hundred a year, indeed, to throw away in fallals! But a cloud had undoubtedly been lifted from his brain by this letter. Here was at least a definite situation. If he promised her a fixed five hundred a year she would come home. It all came of agitators putting ideas into women's heads, a mischievous lot! But the boys would be back from school in another week or two; and it would look extremely odd if their mother were not there to go to the seaside with them.

An organ-grinder playing his confounded organ, had said to him only yesterday: "No, Guv'nor, I knows the valley of peace an' quietness — I don't move on under 'arf-a-crown." The impudence of the ruffian had tickled Nicholas and he had given him the half-crown. Fanny was behaving just like that. And who knew when she wouldn't be off again to get out of him the rest of the thousand a year he'd received with her. No, on the whole, he didn't think she'd be as unreasonable as that; but he continued to combat his desire for peace and quietness at so considerable a price. All the time he had a dim feeling that it wasn't really the money she was after. She had never seemed to know or care much about money, in fact he had often had occasion to reproach her with indifference to its value. What exactly she had in her head he hesitated to characterize by a word which kept creeping nastily into his mind — independence. Fanny independent! Why she'd be in the workhouse tomorrow! Nicholas, indeed, was not unlike most people: he could not understand the need in others for that without which he himself would have been wholly miserable. What would be his own position if he made her independent — he would be subject to her whims and fancies and women's nonsense of all sorts! And then — this was a bright moment — the solution occurred to him: Make her a fixed and regular allowance, and stop it when he wanted to! Everything seemed suddenly clear, he wondered he hadn't thought of that before; and by the evening post he wrote off to say that he had reconsidered the matter and was prepared to pay her a regular allowance of a hundred and twenty-five pounds a quarter, and he would send the carriage to meet the five o'clock train the day after tomorrow.

To say that he was surprised on receiving not Fanny, but another letter — saying that she had meant of course that the five hundred a year should be settled on her, with the word settled underlined — would be a gross under-statement. He would never have believed that Fanny of all women could be so sordid. He continued in this mood of surprised disgust for fully an hour seated in his study which specially faced north so that his head should never be heated by the intrusion of the sun. He was determined to do no such thing, and yet extremely conscious that he could not go on much longer in this wifeless condition. She had been away now for seventeen days, and every day his head was getting heavier and less clear. He would have to put an end to it somehow. While he sat thus, turning and turning the wheels of indecision, he was conscious of a whirring noise gradually becoming articulate — that confounded barrel organ, again, grinding out the popular song of the moment: "Up in a balloon boys, up in a balloon."

A flood of angry colour invaded Nicholas's clean-shaven face, running almost up into the grizzled cock's-comb rising from his forehead. He went to the window and threw it wide open. There was the ruffian grinding away and grinning at him. For a moment words failed Nicholas and then a flash of caustic humour redeemed him from his sober self. The fellow's impudence was really laughable! He grinned back and closed the window. If he'd been the organ grinder it was just what he would have done himself. The beggar seemed to recognise that Greek had met Greek, for, after playing 'Champagne Charlie,' he wheeled his organ away.

But in Nicholas the little incident had changed the current of thought, or rather had swung the blood a little more to his head, so that now it seemed to him worth while to get Fanny back even on her own terms. His speech for the General Meeting of the "United Tramways Association" was due on Friday, and in the present heavy state of his head, due to this persistent wifelessness, he would be making a mess of it.

Five hundred a year — what was it after all — settled or not! He would go to James this very minute and get it over; then, with the settlement in his pocket, he would pop down himself tomorrow and bring her back. Calling a hansom, he uttered the word "Poultry" and got in. It was a long drive from Ladbroke Grove, and while he sat, behind the scuttling horse, erect, dapper, and shaken by the cobblestones of the London of those days, he thought of how he should put it to his brother James, in answer to the question the fellow would be sure to ask: "What d'you want to do that for?" And he decided merely to say: "What business is that of yours?" James was always a bit of an old woman, and it was best to be sharp with him.

With a certain dismay therefore he heard James say instead:

"I thought you'd be having to do that — they say Fanny's on the high horse."

"WHO says?" barked Nicholas.

James ploughed through one of his ultra-Crimean whiskers: "Oh! They — Timothy and the girls."

"What business have they to gabble about what they know nothing of?"

James cleared his throat.

"Well," he said, "I don't know, they never tell me anything."

"What!" snapped Nicholas. "Why, you sit there and talk scandal by the hour together. Well, I've no time to waste. Draw this settlement and make yourself and old Bustard the trustees. I want it all ship-shape by eleven o'clock tomorrow. You can put in enough of my Great Western Stock to provide five hundred a year."

Cheltenham — there was something appropriate about the Stock; and to himself he thought: 'Railways — I don't trust them; they'll be inventing something else before long.'

He left James somewhat agitated over the hurry his brother was in. The fellow however came up to the scratch, and with the settlement all signed and sealed, Nicholas caught the afternoon train to Cheltenham. He spent the hours of travel in coining caustic remonstrances against being treated in the way he had been, but when he arrived and found her having tea in the hotel drawing-room looking quite fresh and young, he decided to postpone them, and all he said was: “Well, Fanny, you look quite bobbish.”

And she answered: “What a long time, dear Nicholas! How are the dear children?”

“I’ve been bad with my head,” said Nicholas, “the children are all right. I’ve brought you this,” and he placed the settlement on the tea-table, “it’s all right — you won’t understand a word of it.”

“I’m sure, dear Nicholas, that you’ve done it beautifully.”

And while she read it, wrinkling her brows, Nicholas watched her, and thought:

‘She’s a better-looking woman than I remembered.’

Throughout the evening he was quite cheerful, not to say witty. It all seemed, indeed, a little like the days of their honeymoon at Brighton.

Not until nearly midnight, did he turn on his elbow and say rather suddenly:

“What on earth made you do it?”

“Oh, dear Nicholas,” replied her voice, close to his own, “I did so want a nice quiet rest.”

“Rest? What d’you want a rest from — you’ve got no work?”

She smiled.

“And now,” she said, “I shall be able to go and have one whenever I feel I want it.”

“The deuce you will!”

“How nice it will be, too, never having to ask you for money. It does so annoy you sometimes.”

And Nicholas thought: ‘Well, I HAVE been and gone and done it. Women!’ Turning still more on his elbow, he regarded her lying on her back with that queer little smile on her lips as if she were saying to herself: ‘Dear Nicholas, the cleverest man in London!’

So was Nicholas, in common with other Kings, limited by his Constitution.

❦

A SAD AFFAIR, 1867

In 1866, at the age of nineteen, young Jolyon Forsyte left Eton and went up to Cambridge, in the semi-whiskered condition of those days. An amiable youth of fair scholastic and athletic attainments, and more susceptible to emotions, aesthetic and otherwise, than most young barbarians, he went up a little intoxicated on the novels of Whyte Melville. From continually reading about whiskered dandies, garbed to perfection and imperturbably stoical in the trying circumstances of debt and discomfiture, he had come to the conviction that to be whiskered and unmoved by Fortune was quite the ultimate hope of existence. There was something not altogether ignoble at the back of his creed. He passed imperceptibly into a fashionable set, and applied himself to the study of whist. All the heroes of Whyte Melville played whist admirably; all rode horses to distraction. Young Jolyon joined the Drag, and began to canter over to Newmarket, conveniently situated for Cambridge undergraduates. Like many youths before and after him, he had gone into residence with little or no idea of the value of money; and in the main this 'sad affair' must be traced to the fact that while he had no idea of the value of money, and, in proportion to his standards, not much money, his sire, Old Jolyon, had much idea of the value of money, and still more money. The hundred pounds placed to his credit for his first term seemed to young Jolyon an important sum, and he had very soon none of it left. This surprised him, but was of no great significance, because all Whyte Melville's dandies were in debt; indeed, half their merit consisted in an imperturbable indifference to mere financial liability. Young Jolyon proceeded, therefore, to get into debt. It was easy, and 'the thing.' At the end of his first term he had spent just double his allowance. He was not vicious nor particularly extravagant — but what, after all, was money? Besides, to live on the edge of Fortune was the only way to show that one could rise above it. Not that he deliberately hired horses, bought clothes, boots, wine and tobacco, for that purpose; still, there was in a sense a principle involved. This is made plain, because it was exactly what was not plain to Old Jolyon later on. He, as a young man, with not half his son's allowance, had never been in debt, had paid his way, and made it. But then he had not had the advantages of Eton, Cambridge, and the novels of Whyte Melville. He had simply gone into Tea.

Young Jolyon going up for his second term, with another hundred pounds from an unconscious sire, at once perceived that if he paid his debts, or any appreciable portion of them, he would have no money for the term's expenses. He therefore applied his means to the more immediate ends of existence — College fees, 'wines,' whist, riding, and so forth — and left his debts to grow.

At the end of his first year he was fully three hundred pounds to the bad, and beginning to be reflective. Unhappily, however, he went up for his second year with longer whiskers and a more perfect capacity for enjoyment than ever. He had the best fellows in the world for friends, life was sweet, Schools still far off. He was liked and he liked being liked; he had, in fact, a habit of existence eminently unsuited to the drawing-in of horns.

Now his set were very pleasant young men from Eton and Harrow and Winchester, some of whom had more worldly knowledge than young Jolyon, and some of whom had more money, but none of whom had more sense of responsibility. It was in the rooms of 'Cuffs' Charwell (the name was pronounced Cherrell, who was taking Divinity Schools, and was afterwards the Bishop) that whist was first abandoned for baccarat, under the auspices of 'Donny' Covercourt. That young scion of the Shropshire Covercourts had discovered this exhilarating pastime, indissolubly connected with the figure Nine, at a French watering-place during the Long Vacation, and when he returned to Cambridge was brimming over with it, in his admirably impassive manner. Now, young Jolyon was not by rights a gambler; that is to say, he was self-conscious about the thing, never properly carried away. Moreover, in spite of Whyte Melville, he was by this time indubitably nervous about his monetary position — on all accounts, therefore, inclined to lose rather than to win. But when such cronies as 'Cuffs' Cherrell, 'Feathers' Totteridge, Guy Winlow, and 'Donny' himself — best fellows in the world — were bent on baccarat, who could be a 'worm' and wriggle away?

On the fourth evening his turn came to take the 'bank.' What with paying off his most pestiferous creditors and his College fees, so unfeelingly exacted in advance, he had just fifteen pounds left — the term being a fortnight spent. He was called on to take a 'bank' of one hundred. With a sinking heart and a marbled countenance, therefore, he sat down at the head of the green board. This was his best chance, so far, of living up to his whiskers — come what would, he must not fail the shades of 'Digby Grand,' 'Daisy Waters,' and the 'Honble. Crasher '!

He lost from the first moment; with one or two momentary flickers of fortune in his favour, his descent to Avernus was one of the steadiest ever made. He sat through it with his heart kept in by very straight lips. He rose languidly at the end of half an hour with the 'bank' broken, and, wanly smiling, signed his I.O.U's, including one to 'Donny' Covercourt for a cool eighty. Restoring himself with mulled claret, he resumed his seat at the board, but, for the rest of the evening, neither won nor lost. He went across the Quad to his own rooms with a queasy feeling — he was seeing his father's face. For this was his first unpayable debt of honour, so different from mere debts to tradesmen. And, sitting on his narrow bed in his six-foot by fifteen bedroom, he wrestled for the means of payment. Paid somehow it must be! Would his Bank let him overdraw to the amount? He could see the stolid faces behind that confounded counter. Not they! And if they didn't! That brute Davids? Or — the Dad? Which was worse? Oh! the Dad was worse! For, suddenly, young Jolyon was perceiving that from the beginning he had lived up here a life that his father would not understand. With a sort of horror he visualised his effort to explain it to that high-domed forehead, and the straight glance that came from so deep behind. No! Davids was the ticket! After all, 'Daisy Waters,' 'Digby Grand,' the 'Honble. Crasher,' and the rest of the elect — had they jibbed at money-lenders? Not so! Did 'Feathers,' did 'Donny'? What else were money-lenders for but lending money? Trying to cheer himself with that thought, he fell asleep from sheer unhappiness.

Next morning, at his Bank, very tight lips assured him that an overdraft without security was not in the day's work. Young Jolyon arched his eyebrows, ran fingers through a best whisker, drawled the words: "It's of no consequence!" and went away, stiffening his fallen crest. In front of him he saw again his father's face, and he couldn't stand it. He sought the rooms of 'Feathers' Totteridge. The engaging youth had just had his 'tosh' and was seated over devilled kidneys, in his dressing-gown.

Young Jolyon said:

"Feathers, old cock, give me a note to that brute Davids!"

Feathers stared. "What ho, friend!" he said. "Plucked? He'll skin you, Jo."

"Can't be helped," said young Jolyon, glumly.

He went away armed with the note, and in the afternoon sought the abode of Mr. Rufus Davids. The Hebraic benefactor read the note, and bent on young Jolyon the glance of criticism.

"How mutth do you want, Mithter Forthyte?" he said.

"One hundred and fifty."

"That will cotht you two hundred thicth month from now. I give good termth."

Good terms! Young Jolyon checked the opening of his lips. One didn't chaffer.

"I like to know my cuthtomerth, you know, Mithter Forthyte. I athk a little bird or two. Come in tomorrow."

"You can take me or leave me," said young Jolyon.

"Thatth all right, Mithter Forthyte. To-morrow afternoon."

Young Jolyon nodded, and went out.

It hadn't been so bad, after all; and, cantering over to Newmarket, he almost forgot how 'Post equitem sedet atra cura.'

In the afternoon of the following day he received one hundred and fifty pounds for his autograph, and seeking out 'Donny' and the others who held his I.O.U's, discharged the lot. Not without a sense of virtue did he sit down to an evening collation in his rooms. He was eating cold wild duck, when his door was knocked on.

"Come in!" he shouted. And, there — in overcoat, top hat in hand — his father stood . . . .

Sitting in the City offices of those great tea-men, 'Forsyte and Treffry,' old Jolyon had been handed, with the country post, a communication marked: 'Confidential.'

"Great Cury, "Cambridge.

"DEAR SIR —

"In accordance with your desire that we should advise you of anything unusual, expressed to us when you opened your son's account a year ago, we beg to notify you that Mr. Jolyon Forsyte, Junr., made application to us today for an overdraft of one hundred pounds. We did not feel justified in granting this without your permission, but shall be happy to act in accordance with your decision in this matter.

"We are, dear Sir, with the compliments of the season,

"Your faithful servants,

"BROTHERTON AND DARNETT."

Old Jolyon had sat some time regarding this missive with grave and troubled eyes. He had then placed it in the breast pocket of his frock coat, and taking out a little comb, had passed it through his grey Dundrearys and moustachios.

"I am going down to Cambridge, Timming. Get me a cab."

In the cab and in the train, and again in the cab from the station at Cambridge, he had brooded, restless and unhappy. Why had the boy not come to HIM? What had he been doing to require an overdraft like that? He had a good allowance. He had never said anything about being pressed for money. This way and that way he turned it in his mind, and whichever way he turned it, the conclusion was that it showed weakness — weakness to want the money; above all, weakness not to have come to his father first. Of all things, Old Jolyon disliked weakness. And so there he stood, tall and grey-headed, in the doorway.

"I've come down, Jo. I've had a letter I don't like."

Through young Jolyon raced the thought: 'Davids!' and his heart sank into his velvet slippers. He said, however, drawling:

"Charmed to see you, Sir. You haven't had dinner? Can you eat wild duck? This claret's pretty good."

Taking his father's hat and coat, he placed him with his back to the fire, plied the bellows, and bawled down the stairway for forks and another wild duck. And while he bawled he felt as if he could be sick, for he had a great love for his father, and this was why he was afraid of him. And old Jolyon, who had a great love for his son, was not sorry to stand and warm his legs and wait.

They ate the wild duck, drank the claret, talking of the weather, and small matters. They finished, and Young Jolyon said:

"Take that 'froust,' Dad;" and his heart tried to creep from him into the floor.

Old Jolyon clipped a cigar, handed another to his son, and sat down in the old leather chair on one side of the fire; young Jolyon sat in another old leather chair on the other side, and they smoked in silence, till old Jolyon took the letter from his pocket and handed it across.

"What's the meaning of it, Jo? Why didn't you come to me?"

Young Jolyon read the letter with feelings of relief, dismay, and anger with his Bank. Why on earth had they written? He felt his whiskers, and said:

"Oh! That!"

Old Jolyon sat looking at him with a sharp deep gravity.

"I suppose it means that you're in debt?" he said, at last.

Young Jolyon shrugged: "Oh! well, naturally. I mean, one must —"

"Must what?"

"Live like other fellows, Dad."

"Other fellows? Haven't you at least the average allowance?"

Young Jolyon had. "But that's just it," he said eagerly. "I'm not in an average set."

"Then why did you get into such a set, Jo?"

"I don't know, Sir. School and one thing and another. It's an awfully good set."

"H'm!" said old Jolyon, deeply. "Would this hundred pounds have cleared you?"

"Cleared me! Oh! well — yes, of what matters."

"What matters?" repeated old Jolyon. "Doesn't every debt matter?"

"Of course, Dad; but everybody up here owes money to tradesmen. I mean, they expect it."

Old Jolyon's eyes narrowed and sharpened.

"Tradesmen? What matters are not tradesmen? What then? A woman?" The word came out hushed and sharp.

Young Jolyon shook his head. "Oh! No."

Old Jolyon's attitude relaxed a little, as if with some intimate relief. He flipped the ash off his cigar.

"Have you been gambling, then, Jo?"

Struggling to keep his face calm and his eyes on his father's, young Jolyon answered:

"A little."

"Gambling!" Something of distress and consternation in the sound young Jolyon couldn't bear, and hastened on:

"Well, Dad, I don't mean to go on with it. But Newmarket, you know, and — and — one doesn't like to be a prig."

"Prig? For not gambling? I don't understand. A gambler!"

And, again, at that note in his voice, young Jolyon cried:

"I really don't care for it, Dad; I mean I'm just as happy without."

"Then why do you do it? It's weak. I don't like weakness, Jo."

Young Jolyon's face hardened. The Dad would never understand. To be a swell — superior to Fate! Hopeless to explain! He said lamely:

"All the best chaps —"

Old Jolyon averted his eyes. For at least two minutes he sat staring at the fire.

"I've never gambled, or owed money," he said at last, with no pride in the tone of his voice, but with deep conviction. "I must know your position, Jo. What is it? Speak the truth. How much do you owe, and to whom?"

Young Jolyon had once been discovered cribbing. This was worse. It was as little possible as it had been then to explain that everybody did it. He said sullenly:

"I suppose — somewhere about three hundred, to tradesmen."

Old Jolyon's glance went through and through him.

"And that doesn't matter? What else?"

"I did owe about a hundred to fellows, but I've paid them."

"That's what you wanted the overdraft for, then?"

"Debts of honour — yes."

"Debts of honour," repeated old Jolyon. "And where did you get the hundred from?"

"I borrowed it."

"When?"

"To-day."

"Who from?"

"A man called Davids."

"Money-lender?"

Young Jolyon bowed his head.

"And you preferred to go to a money-lender than to come to me?"

Young Jolyon's lips quivered; he pitched his cigar into the fire, not strong enough to bear it.

"I— I— knew you'd — you'd hate it so, Dad."

"I hate this more, Jo."

To both of them it seemed the worst moment they had ever been through, and it lasted a long time. Then old Jolyon said:

"What did you sign?"

"I borrowed a hundred and fifty, and promised to pay two hundred in six months."

"And how were you going to get that?"

"I don't know."

Old Jolyon, too, pitched his cigar into the fire, and passed his hand over his forehead.

Impulsively young Jolyon rose, and, oblivious of his whiskers, sat down on the arm of his father's chair, precisely as if he were not a swell. There were tears in his eyes.

"I'm truly sorry, Dad; only, you don't understand." Old Jolyon shook his head.

"No, I don't understand, Jo. That's the way to ruin."

"They were debts of honour, Dad."

"All debts are debts of honour. But that's not the point. It seems to me you can't face things. I know you're an affectionate chap, but that won't help you."

Young Jolyon got up.

"I CAN face things," he said: "I—! Oh! You can't realise."

Scattering the logs with his slippered foot, he stared into the glow. His eyes felt burned, his inside all churned up; and while the 'swell' within him drawled: 'A fuss about money'; all his love for his father was raw and quivering. He heard old Jolyon say:

"I'll go now, Jo. Have a list of your debts for me tomorrow. I shall pay them myself. We'll go to that money-lender chap together."

Young Jolyon heard him getting up, heard him with his coat and hat, heard him open the door; and, twisting round, cried:

"Oh! Dad!"

"Good-night, Jo!" He was gone.

Young Jolyon stood a long time by the dying fire. His father did not, could not know what a fellow had to do, how behave to — to be superior to fortune. He was old-fashioned! But, besides loving him, young Jolyon admired his father, admired him physically and mentally — as much — yes, more than the Honble. Crasher or Digby Grand. And he was miserable.

He sat up late, making a list of his debts as well as anyone could who had the habit of tearing up his bills. Repressed emotion tossed his slumbers, and when he woke the thought of the joint visit to Mr. Davids made him feel unwell.

Old Jolyon came at ten o'clock, looking almost haggard. He took the list from his son.

"Are these all, Jo?"

"So far as I can remember."

"Send any others in to me. Which of your friends are the gamblers?"

Young Jolyon coloured.

"You must excuse me, Dad."

Old Jolyon looked at him.

"Very well!" he said. "We'll go to this money-lender now."

They walked forth. By God's mercy no one had bounced in on his way to Newmarket. Young Jolyon caught sight of 'Donny' Covercourt on the far side of the quadrangle and returned him no greeting. Quite silent, side by side, father and son passed out into the street. Except for old Jolyon's remark:

"There's no end to these Colleges, it seems," they did not speak until they reached the office of Mr. Davids, above a billiard room.

Old Jolyon ascended, stumping the stairs with his umbrella; young Jolyon followed with his head down. He was bitterly ashamed; it is probable that old Jolyon was even more so.

The money-lender was in his inner office, just visible through the half-open doorway. Old Jolyon pushed the door with his umbrella.

Mr. Davids rose, apparently surprised, and stood looking round his nose in an ingratiating manner.

"This is my father," said young Jolyon, gazing deeply at his boots.

"Mr. Davids, I think?" began old Jolyon.

"Yeth, Thir. What may I have the pleasure —"

"You were good enough yesterday to advance my son the sum of a hundred and fifty pounds, for which he signed a promissory note for an extortionate amount. Kindly give me that note, and take this cheque in satisfaction."

Mr. Davids washed his hands.

"For what amount ith your cheque, Thir?"

Old Jolyon took a cheque from his pocket and unfolded it.

"For your money, and one day's interest at ten per cent."

Mr. Davids threw up his well-washed hands.

"Oh! No, Mithter Forthyte; no! Thath not bithneth. Give me a cheque for the amount of the promithory note, and you can have it. I'm not ancthious to be paid — not at all."

Old Jolyon clapped his hat on his head.

"You will accept my cheque!" he said, and thrust it under the money-lender's eyes.

Mr. Davids examined it, and said:

"You take me for a fool, it theemth."

"I take you for a knave," said old Jolyon. "Sixty-six per cent, forsooth!"

Mr. Davids recoiled in sheer surprise.

"I took a great rithk to lend your thon that money."

"You took no risk whatever. One day's interest at ten per cent is ninepence three-farthings; I've made it tenpence. Be so good as to give me that note."

Mr. Davids shook his head.

"Very well," said old Jolyon. "I've made some inquiries about you. I go straight from here to the Vice-Chancellor."

Mr. Davids again began to wash his hands.

"And thuppothe," he said, "I go to your thon's College and tell them that I lend him thith money?"

"Do!" said old Jolyon; "do! Come, Jo!" He turned and walked to the door, followed by his agonised but unmoved son.

"Thtop!" said Mr. Davids. "I don't want to make no trouble."

Old Jolyon's eyes twinkled under his drawn brows.

"Oh!" he said, without turning, "you don't! Make haste, then. I give you two minutes," and he took out his watch.

Young Jolyon stood looking dazedly at the familiar golden object. Behind him he could hear Mr. Davids making haste.

"Here it ith, Mithter Forthyte, here it ith!"

Old Jolyon turned.

"Is that your signature, Jo?"

"Yes," said young Jolyon, dully.

"Take it, then, and tear it up."

Young Jolyon took, and tore it savagely.

"Here's your cheque," said old Jolyon.

Mr. Davids grasped the cheque, changing his feet rapidly.

"Ith not bithneth, really ith not bithneth," he repeated.

"The deuce it isn't," said old Jolyon; "you may thank your stars I don't go to the Vice-Chancellor, into the bargain. Good-bye to you!" He stumped his umbrella and walked out.

Young Jolyon followed, sheepishly.

"Where's the station, Jo?"

Young Jolyon led the way, and they walked on, more silent than ever.

At last old Jolyon said:

"This has been a sad affair. It's your not coming to me, Jo, that hurt."

Young Jolyon's answer was strangled in his throat.

"And don't gamble, my boy. It's weak-minded. Well, here we are!"

They turned into the station. Old Jolyon bought The Times. They stood together, silent on the platform, till the London train came in; then young Jolyon put his hand through his father's arm, and squeezed it. Old Jolyon nodded:

“I shan’t allude to this again, Jo. But there’s just one thing: If you must be a swell, remember that you’re a gentleman too. Good-bye, my boy!” He laid his hand on his son’s shoulder, turned quickly and got in.

Young Jolyon stood with bared head, watching the train go out. He then walked, as well as he knew how, back to College.

Indeed, yes! A sad affair!

❦

REVOLT AT ROGER'S, 1870

When the house of Roger Forsyte in Prince's Gate was burgled in the autumn of 1870, Smith was undoubtedly drunk and made no serious attempt to rebut the accusation. A broad man of extremely genial disposition, he had in the few months of his butlerdom in Roger's new house endeared himself to the young Rogers, and even Roger was wont to speak of him as 'an amiable chap.' To be drunk without anyone's knowing, is a tort; to be discovered drunk, a misdemeanour; to be drunk when burglary is committed under one's nose, a crime, if not a felony. This, at least, was Roger's view, and he acted on it by immediate dismissal. His spoons had gone and Smith must go, too.

"If you hadn't been drunk," he said, "you'd have heard the ruffians. Call yourself a butler — you're a disgrace."

"Yes, Sir," said Smith, humbly, "a glass has always been my weakness, but I never thought it'd come to this."

"Well, it has," said Roger, "and so have you. Off you go this very day, and don't come to me for a character."

In mitigation of Roger's harshness it will be remembered that in those days there was no such practice as insurance against burglary. Indeed, it was Roger (always original) who started the habit, and he had to go to Lloyd's to get it done.

"It's the most barefaced thing I ever knew," he added. The plate-basket, indeed, with all the spoons, forks, salt-cellars and pepper-pots of Roger's ménage, had been rived practically from under the nose of the intoxicated Smith snoring on the turn-up bedstead in his own pantry. He had still been asleep, indeed, with a glass and empty whisky bottle by his bedside, when the page-boy entered in the morning.

Smith having withdrawn to his pantry, with his tail between his legs, Roger repaired to his bedroom, where in the four-poster his wife still lay thinking about less than usual, and put the matter in a few forcible words.

"Oh! Roger, what a pity! Such an amiable man. The children will be very upset."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Roger. "I must go out and see the police. But they're no good. Precious little chance of getting anything back."

Mrs. Roger remained lying, flat as ever. She had been married to him seventeen years, and if she now had a life of her own, no one knew where she kept it.

Smith, on the other hand, upright in his shirt-sleeves, had an expression on his broad and amiable face as though he had mislaid his trousers. To him thus standing the pantry door was flung open, and in the doorway stood Miss Francie. Francie Forsyte was then aged twelve, a dark-haired child with thin legs always outgrowing their integuments. Her Celtic-grey eyes shone ominously.

"You're not to go, Smith. I won't have it. You couldn't help being drunk when the burglars came."

"'Ush! Miss Francie," said Smith, "the Master says I've got to."

Francie put a hand into his.

"Dear Smith!"

Smith's round face grew almost long.

"It's my fault, Miss; I WAS tipsy, there's no denyin'."

"But how could you tell the burglars were coming?"

"I couldn't, Miss Francie, and that's a fact."

"Well, then!"

"If I 'adn't been tipsy," said Smith with sudden violence, "I'D 'ave given 'em what for!" And he worked his arm up to the angle which best displayed his formidable biceps.

"Oh! Smith," said Francie, "you ARE strong! Feel; *I* haven't got ANY!" And she angled her arm, thin, like a stick. Then the thought coming to her that soon there would be no Smith to show her lack of muscle to, the water started into her eyes.

"You're NOT to go," she cried again. "Here's Eustace, he'll say so too."

The youngest but one of the five young Rogers was now eleven, dark-haired and thin-faced like his sister, and, like her, grey-eyed, but of a calm which contrasted forcibly with Francie's fervour. He was recovering from the mumps, which had conveniently delayed his return to school.

"Have you really got to go, Smiff?" he said. "I wouldn't, if I were you. I should just stay."

Smith smiled. His smile was that of the sun at noonday.

"Faver'll forget," added Eustace.

Smith closed an eye, a practice which beyond all things endeared him to children.

"Will'e, Master Eustace? I don't fink."

"I do fink," said Eustace. "The best way wiv Faver is to take no notice. He can't birch YOU; look at your muscle."

Again Smith crooked his arm to the proper position. He never spent ten minutes with the children without having to do this at least once.

"Smith," said Francie, "we'll come with you and speak to Father."

Smith shook his head.

"I expect he hasn't seen your muscle," said Eustace.

Smith smiled. Like all powerful, good-tempered, easy-going men, he was unable to say "No."

"That's settled then," said Francie; "when Father comes in, Eustace and I will come for you. Come along, Eustace."

She turned at the door: "You shan't go — DEAR Smith!"

Smith in the centre of his pantry, slowly shook his rounded head.

He was still in undetermined mood when visited by the constable whom Roger had set in motion. Now the temperament of Smith was pre-eminently suited to the police. Sunk in humility, without edge, and highly human, it appealed to authority as cream to a cat. The constable, who had come to carp and question, remained to chat and quaff. He quaffed Roger's beer, and said:

"S'far as I can see, 'twas accidental like; a man may sleep so sound, no burglar'd wake 'im. That was your trouble, mate. You'd 'ad a nightcap no doubt. I'll do me best with your governor."

Upstairs in the dining-room Mrs. Roger was staring at the bronze clock and rehearsing a sentence which began:

"Roger, I wish you would reconsider your decision about Smith; there are many reasons why —" and then nothing would come but: "it will be out of the frying-pan into the fire," which she could not feel to be quite dignified. Unaware of these forces being marshalled against him, Roger, alert, and with an eye on a new board announcing the sale of a house by auction, returned from the police station where he had been rendering a just and faithful account of his silver, and entered his hall with the latchkey which he had been one of the first householders to have made. As he divested himself of his overcoat a light, thin, ghostly shape flitted from the darkness under the stairs into the smell of mutton rising from the basement; another shape at the top of the stairs bestrode the banisters, waited till Roger had entered the dining-room, slid down with a run, and vanished also.

Startled by her husband's entry, Mrs. Roger took the stopper out of the cut glass bottle of pickled walnuts on the sideboard, and said:

"Oh! Roger, I wish — I wish —"

"What do you wish?" said Roger. "Some nonsense. Don't let that smell out; I can't bear a vinegary smell."

"It's Smith," murmured Mrs. Roger. "I wish you —"

"That'll do," said Roger; "he's got to go."

Mrs. Roger stoppered the bottle.

"Oh! very well, dear; only where we shall get —"

"Plenty of good fish in the sea," said Roger. "Where's that policeman they sent round?"

"He's still in the basement, I fancy."

"He would be. They're no good! What's this?"

Through the doorway was coming a procession led by Francie. It took up a position on the far side of the mahogany — from left to right, Francie, Smith, Eustace, and the policeman.

"How's this, Smith?" said Roger, caressing his left whisker. "I told you to be off. Have you got something to say?"

"Yes," said Francie, her voice shrill: "Smith's not going."

“What!” cried Roger.

“All wight, Faver!” said Eustace quietly.

“All right? What d’you mean by that, you impudent young shaver?”

“Seems as ‘ow your butler was asleep, Sir,” said the constable impressively.

“Of course he was asleep. He was drunk.”

“Well, Sir, I’d ‘ardly call it that,” said the constable. “Not up to snuff at the moment, as you might say.”

“If you’ve any excuse to make, Smith,” said Roger, “make it before you pack off.”

Smith shook his head. “None, Sir, I’m sure.”

On one side and the other Francie and Eustace tugged at his sleeves, as if inciting him to show his muscle.

“Very well then,” said Roger, “you can go. I’ll talk to you in a moment, constable. You children run off, and don’t let me catch you —”

“If Smith goes,” said Francie, loudly, “we’re going too.”

Roger stared. It was his first experience of revolt.

“Go to my study, you two,” he said, “and wait till I come. Mary, take them out.”

But over Mrs. Roger a spell seemed to have been cast; she did not move. Crimson shame had covered Smith’s face; the constable stood stolid. Roger’s spare figure stiffened. He made but half of either Smith or the constable, but the expression on his face, sharp, firm and sour, redressed the balance.

“Go along,” he said to Smith.

Smith moved towards the door, but the two children had placed their backs against it. Roger’s very whiskers seemed to go red.

“This is too much of a good thing,” burst from his tightened lips.

At this moment of exquisite deadlock the sense of duty which dominated a sober Smith came to the rescue. With a deep sigh he took a child by the belt with each hand, lifted them bodily from the door, set them down, and went out.

“Go to my study, you two,” said Roger again.

The two children went out into the hall.

“Are you going to the study, Fwancie?”

“He’ll birch us.”

“He shan’t,” said Eustace. “Let’s arm ourselves with knives.”

“No,” said Francie; “let’s go away with Smith.”

“Smiff will only bwing us back,” said Eustace; “let’s go by ourselves.”

“All right,” said Francie.

“We’ll take Faver’s umbwella and our money-box.”

“We shan’t be able to open it.”

“No, but we can sell it to someone; it wattles.”

“All right, quick!”

With their father’s umbrella and the locked money-box, the two children opened the front door and, running across Kensington Road, were soon in Hyde Park, the money-box rattling all the way.

“How much is there in it?” said Eustace.

“Four shillings and elevenpence.”

“Let’s sell it for five shillings, then. The box cost a shilling.”

“Who to?”

“We’ll find an old gentleman.”

They walked along the Row under the umbrella, for it was raining. Francie had neither hat nor coat, Eustace his school cap, black with a red stripe.

“Look!” said Francie. “There’s one!”

They approached a bench whereon sat a tall, bulky figure, who had placed his hands on the handle of his stick with a view to rising. He had a grey goatee beard, a grey beaver hat, and a long watch-chain looped on his brown velvet waistcoat.

Francie, who carried the money-box, held it out.

"Hullo!" said the old gentleman: "what have you got there?"

"It's our money-box," said Francie; "we want to sell it. It's got four and elevenpence in coppers."

"But it's worf more," said Eustace.

"The deuce it is!" said the old gentleman. His voice rumbled, and his eyes, grey and rather bloodshot, twinkled. "Why do you want to sell it?"

"Because we haven't got the key," said Francie.

"So we can't get the money out," added Eustace. "It belongs to us and we shall want it out, you see."

"What d'you want it out for?" said the old gentleman.

"To buy our dinner."

"You're a rum couple," said the old gentleman. "What's your name?"

"Will you buy the box?" said Eustace: "then we'll tell you."

"What should I do with the box, heh?"

"You could carry it in one of your big pockets?"

"Well," said the old gentleman, "here's five bob. Hand it over. Now, what's your name?"

"Forsyte," said Francie. "I'm Francie, and this is Eustace."

"Forsyte?" grunted the old gentleman. "The deuce it is! Where d'you live?"

"Are you to be twusted?" asked Eustace, tilting the umbrella backwards.

The old gentleman uttered a guffaw.

"What do you want to trust me for?"

"Well, you see," said Eustace cautiously, "we're wunning away for the pwesent."

"Oh!" said the old gentleman, and rumbled.

"We had to," said Francie, "because of Smith. It's a long story."

"Well," said the old gentleman, rising, "come and have your dinner with me, and tell me all about it. What's your father's Christian name?"

"Roger."

"Oh! Ah!" said the old gentleman. "Well, I know your uncles Jolyon and Swithin, and your cousin Jo. My name's Nicholas Treffry. Ever heard it?"

"No," said Eustace.

"I have," cried Francie. "Father says you're notorious. What does that mean?"

The 'notorious' Mr. Treffry chuckled.

"My carriage is out there at the Gate. Come along and I'll show you why he calls me notorious."

The two children looked at each other, then Eustace whispered:

"All wight, he's wespectable."

"The deuce, he is!" said Mr. Treffry unexpectedly. "Come along, young shavers."

The two children accompanied him silently to the Gate. Outside stood a pair of fine horses harnessed to a phaeton with the hood up. A tiger stood at their heads.

"Up you get!" said Mr. Treffry.

Francie mounted with alacrity. Eustace hung back.

"Where are you going to take us?"

"The Albany — know it?"

"Yes," said Eustace, "George went there once."

"Respectable enough for you, heh?"

"Yes," said Eustace, and furling the umbrella, mounted beside his sister.

Mr. Treffry clambered heavily to his driver's seat alongside.

"Let go, Tim."

The horses sprang forward, the tiger let go, and, running, caught on behind.

The carriage swung from side to side; Francie's eyes danced.

"I— I like it," she said.

"Your father'd have a fit, if he saw us," chuckled Mr. Treffry. "He lives in Prince's Gate, doesn't he?"

Eustace looked round at him, and in imitation of Smith, closed his left eye.

"You're a cool young man," said Mr. Treffry.

The pavements of those days not being precisely smooth, they made but a rough passage to the Albany, where, after they had been made clean and comfortable under the auspices of the valet, the children repaired to a low panelled room with pictures of dogs and horses on the walls, a case of guns in one corner, and some black Chinese tea chests, embossed with figures and flowers in coloured lacquer.

"Now," said Mr. Treffry, "let's have some prog."

The prog consisted of grouse and pancakes and spiky artichokes, and each child was given a glass of wine.

"Well," said Mr. Treffry, "what was it all about, heh?"

Francie related the story of Smith.

"H'm!" Mr. Treffry rumbled. "So your father lost his spoons?"

"And we've got his umbwella," said Eustace.

"Well, I'll see you're not birched, though I daresay you deserve it. Your mother must be in a pretty stew. Green, have the phaeton round again."

They made an even rougher passage back to Prince's Gate.

"Here's your money-box," said Mr. Treffry.

"But you bought it!"

"Tut! Here! My dear! Take my card to your master."

Francie caught the maid by the sleeve.

"Has Smith gone, Annie?"

"Not yet, Miss. We've all been in a state about you."

"Hooray! D'you hear, Eustace? Smith hasn't gone."

"All wight, don't make a wow!"

Roger, Mrs. Roger, three maids and Smith all seemed to have gathered from nowhere in particular.

"How are you?" said Mr. Treffry, advancing in front of the children. "I thought you'd be in a stew. I'm your brother Jolyon's partner — Nicholas Treffry. These young shavers ran out to cool their heads. I've given 'em their dinner and brought 'em back none the worse."

"H'm!" said Roger profoundly.

"They ought to be birched, no doubt," continued Mr. Treffry, looking bigger and bigger; "but I promised they shouldn't be. You," he added, pointing to Smith, "the chap who got drunk?"

"Yes, sir."

"H'm! Let him off this time. Here's your umbrella."

Roger took the umbrella.

"Well," he said," I don't know what's coming to things." He held out his hand to Mr. Treffry. "My brother's always talking about you. He says you'll break your neck one of these days."

"H'm! He's a careful chap, Jo. Glad you've got 'em back. Good-bye to you, Ma'am. Good-bye, young shavers."

And, rumbling, Mr. Treffry passed out.

There was a silence.

“Well,” said Roger at last, while a little smile twitched between his whiskers and vanished into them, “don’t let me hear a word more about anything from any of you.” And he withdrew into the dining-room.

Francie rushed at Smith, and mechanically felt his muscle.

“Dear Smith!”

“Muvver,” said Eustace, “we had gwouse, pancakes, and spiky artichokes, and we dwove like Jehu.”

So ended the revolt at Roger’s, which, together perhaps with the Franco-German war, in that same year laid the foundations of a looser philosophy.

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JUNE'S FIRST LAME DUCK, 1876

The life of little June Forsyte until the age of nearly eight had been spent in superintending the existence of her dolls. Not until the autumn of 1876 did she find a human being whose destiny she could control.

It happened thus: The stables of her grandfather old Jolyon Forsyte's house in Stanhope Gate where June and, incidentally, her mother resided with her grandparents, were round the corner. They consisted of two stalls and a loose box occupied by the carriage horses Brownie and Betty and by her pony Bruce. Above were the three rooms of the coachman Betters, his wife, and little daughter, the groom living God knew more precisely where.

One October noon, in her long blue habit, with her spirit and her eyes looking up out of her flaming hair, June was lifted from her pony at the stable door.

"That pony's artful, Miss June; don't you give him more than two carrots, or 'e'll think he can do what 'e likes with you."

"Darling!" said June in a voice strangely deep for a small child. Having given the pony four carrots she remained standing beside it in the stall, fervently stroking its nose. In the next stall the groom was hissing while he wisped down Betty, preferred by Betters as a mount to Brownie —"an 'oss that did that not throw you up."

"George, which do you think is the most beautiful, Brownie or Betty?"

The groom jerked his head at the loose box.

"That 'oss is the best-lookin', Miss June."

"Then I shall give Brownie one carrot and Betty two — it isn't her fault, is it, poor darling?"

Having given the carrots and had her capped head nuzzled, she went out and stood in the yard. Betters had disappeared up the stairway to his rooms, whence a smell of onions indicated that Mrs. Betters, a small pale puckered woman, was cooking steak.

The yard was deserted but for a pigeon, towards which June ran so that the pigeon at once left for the roof. Hurt in her feelings June had gathered up her tail, and was moving towards the house when round the corner came a little girl blubbering into her sleeve.

"Susie Betters, what are you crying for?"

The little girl, who was plain and thin, blubbered the louder.

"They pinched me; they said I was a thief 'cos I only took the top what belonged to me." She displayed some pinch marks on her arms and some mud stains on her frock.

"Who pinched you?"

"The boys and girls I go to school with."

"Did you pinch them back?"

"Nao."

"Then I will. Horrid little children. Don't cry, Susie. I'll protect you."

Susie looked down half a head and her mouth opened.

"We'll go and look for them. I've got my whip. They won't dare touch you again. You aren't brave, are you?"

"Nao," said Susie.

June swished the whip, which had the thickness of the top joint of a fishing rod. "Come on!"

They went round the corner, followed by June's tail.

There was no sign of any children.

"We'll go and tell the teacher."

"Nao."

"Why not?"

"They'll larrup me proper, if we do."

"Why don't they like you, Susie? Is it because you're ugly?" Susie wailed again. "Don't cry! It's not your fault that you're ugly."

Susie wailed the louder.

Two small boys and a girl had suddenly appeared and stood pointing in a somewhat vulgar manner. June raised her whip.

The children nudged each other.

"Ill-bred little children!" said June, quoting from her governess.

One of the boys emitted a piercing whistle.

"Did you pinch little Susie Betters?"

The children laughed in a still more vulgar manner.

"You're dirty little morkins," cried June; "and I'm going to larrup you."

The children gave before the onslaught, skipping sideways with uncouth noises; one of the boys shoved June so that she tripped over her tail, and sprawled, a small blue figure, on the ground. The children, then, pinching Susie warmly, yelled in unison, and vanished.

June rose, her habit dirty, her whip gone, her cheeks crimson. Susie was wailing as she had not yet wailed.

"Don't! It's babyish to cry."

"They pinched me again."

"Where?"

"On my ba-ase."

"Come with me, and show my Gran," said June. "He'll soon astonish their weak nerves. You shall have my pudding, too. Come on!" And she dragged the reluctant Susie to the mansion of old Jolyon.

"François," said June to the Swiss servant, "this is Susie Betters; she's been pinched, and she's to have my pudding. She isn't brave, so she's not to be frightened. I want my Gran to see her pinches. Come on, Susie!"

Still tugging Susie, she passed into the dining-room.

Old Jolyon, who never went to the City on Saturdays, was in his armchair by the fire, reading The Times and waiting for lunch to be announced. Across the dining table laid for five he looked at the two small figures, and his eyes twinkled.

"Well, my ducky, what have you got there?"

"Susie Betters, Gran; she's been pinched behind. I wanted you to see."

She pulled Susie round to the chair, whence old Jolyon looked shrewdly at his coachman's daughter.

"H'm!" he said: "you're a thin little toad."

"Yes; she's going to have my pudding. She's too thin altogether, and she's too pale. Her face is dirty, too, but it isn't her fault."

"What's come to your habit?" said old Jolyon. "Did you fall off?"

"Oh! no; I just sat down in the street while I was larruping those morkins and they took my whip and ran away."

"H'm! Pretty pair of shoes altogether!"

He stretched out and rang the bell.

"Take this little girl downstairs, François, and have her face washed, and give her a good dinner; and tell that page chap to run over and let Betters know she's here. You go and get brushed," he added to June, "before your mother sees you, and don't say anything about it."

The two children went out. In the hall June said:

"I want to see her face washed, François."

"Veree well, Mees June."

During lunch June fidgeted, with difficulty prevented by old Jolyon's eyes from telling her story.

When her mother and governess had withdrawn, she approached her grandfather, who had lighted his after-lunch cigar, and stood between his knees.

"I'm going to be Susie Betters' friend, Gran."

“Oh!” said old Jolyon. “Mite like you — picking up lame ducks.”

“Is Susie a lame duck?”

Old Jolyon nodded. “Shouldn’t be surprised if they pinched her more than ever now. She looks to me a poor thing.”

“Well, I’m going to protect her.”

“How?” said old Jolyon, twinkling.

“I shall dare them to pinch her.”

“First catch your hare —”

“I know,” said June, suddenly. “She can do lessons with ME, Gran, instead of going to school.”

Old Jolyon shook his head.

“That cock won’t fight. Coming to the Zoo?”

June clapped her hands, then said at once:

“No. I must look after Susie.”

Old Jolyon stared. It was his first introduction to the real nature of his little grand-daughter.

“She’s a poor timid little stick,” he said; “and you’ll never make anything of her.”

When June had gone, he sat contemplating the ash of his cigar. Children! What things they thought of! She would learn some day that you couldn’t go ‘protecting’ everything you came across. Sooner the better, perhaps! Generous little thing — though; giving up the Zoo. Lessons! “What would her mother say to that? She was such a good woman — that you never knew.” And old Jolyon sighed. If his son hadn’t married such a good woman, it might all have turned out very different; and Jo — Well, well! A nap! Just forty winks. And, crushing out his cigar, he leaned back with eyes fixed on ‘Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset’; and his thin hand with pointed nails depending over the arm of his old chair. A warmhearted little thing! Lame ducks! . . .

In spite of the misgivings of the good woman afraid of the effect on her accent, and the opposition of her governess, too deep for words, June had her way. Susie Betters, almost unnecessarily clean, sat every morning at the schoolroom table shedding tears over her vowels and aitches. Delivered from pinches, and advanced in all material things, soap, pudding, and frocks, she seemed at first to exude as much water per day as ever, for June frequently protected her from the governess.

“You oughtn’t to make Susie cry, Miss Pearson, just because she speaks commonly. She doesn’t know any better. You can’t help being common, can you, Susie?”

This protection, indeed, produced as much water as any educational exhortations. Out of school hours she taught Susie every game she knew and some she didn’t; instructed her in dressing and undressing dolls; delivered her from the Italian greyhound; helped her to burn her cheeks cooking cocoanut ice and toffee; and prick her fingers sewing at dolls’ nightgowns. When Susie was put in the corner, June had invariably to be put in the opposite corner — so loyal was she to her ‘lame duck.’ The ‘good woman’ watched the experiment with equanimity — it would help June not to be selfish. Old Jolyon, with innate sagacity, waited for its inevitable end; he had no belief in ‘lame ducks.’

The end came stealthily with every ounce of weight that Susie Betters put on from the dinners and teas she ate, and every deepening of the contempt which familiarity slowly bred in her. She had ceased to exude water, her cheeks were becoming pink, and she wore a sky blue ribbon in hair no longer unwashed. In fact she had come to be ‘twice the child’; and she no longer excited June’s compassion. The habit of protection, however, lasted till the middle of November. It vanished in one day.

Susie had a doll, given her by June, which, following the law of compensation — advocated by the then fashionable philosopher Mr. Emerson — she treated in the manner in which she herself was treated, possessing its soul, placing its body in corners, and harassing it over her knee for its own good. With the increase of adipose, her treatment of the doll became more and more protective, if not arbitrary. It was not long before this treatment excited June’s concern, and the doll began to seem to her a ‘lame duck.’

One Saturday morning when the doll had been whipped and put first in one corner and then in another, her feelings became too much for her.

“You oughtn’t to treat poor Amy like that, Susie, it’s a shame!”

Susie answered:

“Why not? She’s my doll!”

“Well, you shan’t!” said June. “So there!”

“I will,” said Susie, and promptly turned up the doll’s petticoats.

June’s eyes grew very blue, her hair seemed to shine.

“If you whip her,” she said, “I’ll whip you.”

“Will you?” said Susie. “I’m bigger than you.”

She laid the doll over her knee.

“Stop!” said June.

“I won’t!” said Susie.

June rushed at her. The doll fell to the floor, and the two children struggled. Susie had so far profited by six weeks of good feeding that she was the stronger; but she had not June’s spirit. The combat, short and sharp, ended with June sitting on her chest. Susie sobbed, wriggled and scratched. June sat tighter.

“Promise not to whip her any more.”

“Shan’t!”

“Then I shall sit here till you do.”

Susie began to scream. June covered her mouth with a hand. Susie bit it.

The screams had attracted old Jolyon, who was in his dressing-room. The sight when he entered the room was precisely that which he had been expecting for some time.

“That’ll do,” he said. “Get up, June! Now, what’s it all about?”

June, who had picked up the doll, stood crimson and defiant, Susie stood whimpering and overawed.

“What’s that mark on your hand?” said old Jolyon to his grand-daughter.

“She shan’t whip Amy,” said June; “I won’t have it!”

“Did you bite her?” said old Jolyon to Susie.

Susie sobbed.

The instinct to protect Susie caused June to say automatically:

“I began it, because she’s not to whip Amy.”

Susie blurted:

“I wasn’t going to until she told me not.”

“That’ll do,” said old Jolyon. “Give me the doll. Go and get your hand bathed, June. And you,” he added to Susie, “go home for dinner.”

The children went; Susie, sniffing, June, very red.

Old Jolyon was left with the doll, a furbelowed affair in wax — which is indeed more inviting to chastisement than china — whose round blue eyes expressed nothing but indifference. Rum little toads, children! Fancy getting into a fantod over a bit of wax! Well, well —! Another lame duck, he supposed. He rearranged the doll’s petticoats, and his eyes twinkled. There was the end of Susie Betters! And just as well!

Placing the doll on the table he descended slowly to the dining-room, pondering on the rumness of little toads.

June came to lunch with her hand bound up. She would not eat her pudding, and could be heard whispering to François that it was to be saved for Susie.

When told later that Susie was not to come any more, but to go to school again, she was silent; and nobody could tell what she was feeling. It was the impression of old Jolyon, however, that she was not unhappy. He had always known how it would be.

The last state of Susie Betters was worse than the first. Wild animals that are captured and regain their liberty receive but a poor welcome from their fellows. So with June’s past lame duck. She was soon as thin, pinched and tearful as ever; but, as June never saw her, she remained in memory pink and plump, with a sky blue ribbon, no longer worthy of compassion. Besides, June had found a new lame duck, on organ-grinder’s wife with a baby in her arms.

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Dog at Timothy's, 1878

Mrs. Septimus Small, known in the Forsyte family as Aunt Juley, returning from service at St. Barnabas', Bayswater, on a Sunday morning in the Spring of 1878, took by force of habit the path which led her into the then somewhat undeveloped gardens of Kensington. The Reverend Thomas Scoles had been wittier than usual, and she had the longing to stretch her legs, which was the almost invariable effect of his 'nice' sermons. While she walked, in violet silk under a black mantle, with very short steps — skirts being extremely narrow in that year of grace — she was thinking of dear Hester and what a pity it was that she always had such a headache on Sunday mornings — the sermon would have done her so much good! For now that dear Ann was unable to stand the fatigue of service, she did feel that Hester ought to make a point of being well enough to go to church. What dear Mr. Scoles had said had been so helpful — about the lilies of the fields never attempting to improve their figures, and yet, about ladies of fashion in all their glory never being attired like one of them. He had undoubtedly meant 'bustles'— so witty — and Hester would have enjoyed hearing it, because only yesterday, when they had been talking about the Grecian bend, Emily had come in with dear James and said that the revival of crinolines was only a question of time and that she personally intended to be in the fashion the moment there was any sign of it. Dear Ann had been rather severe with her; and James had said he didn't know what was the use of them. Of course, crinolines did take up a great deal of room, and a 'bustle,' though it was warmer, did not. But Hester had said they were both such a bore, she didn't see why they were wanted; and now Mr. Scoles had said it too. She must really think about it, if Mr. Scoles thought they were bad for the soul; he always said something that one had to think about afterwards. He would be SO good for Hester! And she stood a minute looking out over the grass.

Dear, dear! That little white dog was running about a great deal. Was it lost? Backwards and forwards, round and round! What they called — she believed — a Pomeranian, quite a new kind of dog. And, seeing a bench, Mrs. Septimus Small bent, with a little backward heave to save her 'bustle,' and sat down to watch what was the matter with the white dog. The sun, flaring out between two Spring clouds, fell on her face, transfiguring the pouting puffs of flesh, which seemed trying to burst their way through the network of her veil. Her eyes, of a Forsyte grey, lingered on the dog with the greater pertinacity in that of late — owing to poor Tommy's (their cat's) disappearance, very mysterious — she suspected the sweep — there had been nothing but 'Polly' at Timothy's to lavish her affection on. This dog was draggled and dirty, as if it had been out all night, but it had a dear little pointed nose. She thought, too, that it seemed to be noticing her, and at once had a swelling-up sensation underneath her corsets. Almost as if aware of this, the dog came sidling, and sat down on its haunches in the grass, as though trying to make up its mind about her. Aunt Juley pursed her lips in the endeavour to emit a whistle. The veil prevented this, but she held out her gloved hand. "Come, little dog — nice little dog!" It seemed to her dear heart that the little dog sighed as it sat there, as if relieved that at last someone had taken notice of it. But it did not approach. The tip of its bushy tail quivered, however, and Aunt Juley redoubled the suavity of her voice: "Nice little fellow — come then!"

The little dog slithered forward, humbly wagging its entire body, just out of reach. Aunt Juley saw that it had no collar. Really, its nose and eyes were sweet!

"Pom!" she said. "Dear little Pom!"

The dog looked as if it would let her love it, and sensation increased beneath her corsets.

"Come, pretty!"

Not, of course, that he was pretty, all dirty like that; but his ears were pricked, and his eyes looked at her, bright, and rather round their corners — most intelligent! Lost — and in London! It was like that sad little book of Mrs. — What WAS her name — not the authoress of Jessica's First Prayer? — dear, dear! Now, fancy forgetting that! The dog made a sudden advance, and curved like a C, all fluttering, was now almost within reach of her gloved fingers, at which it sniffed. Aunt Juley emitted a purring noise. Pride was filling her heart that out of all the people it MIGHT have taken notice of, she should be the only one. It had put out its tongue now, and was panting in the agony of indecision. Poor little thing! It clearly didn't know whether it dared try another master — not, of course, that she could possibly take it home, with all the carpets, and dear Ann so particular about everything being nice, and — Timothy! Timothy would be horrified! And yet —! Well, they couldn't prevent her stroking its little nose. And she too panted slightly behind her veil. It WAS agitating! And then, without either of them knowing how, her fingers and the nose were in contact. The dog's tail was now perfectly still;

its body trembled. Aunt Juley had a sudden feeling of shame at being so formidable; and with instinct inherited rather than acquired, for she had no knowledge of dogs, she slid one finger round an ear and scratched. It WAS to be hoped he hadn't fleas! And then! The little dog leaped on her lap. It crouched there just as it had sprung, with its bright eyes upturned to her face. A strange dog — her dress — her Sunday best! It WAS an event! The little dog stretched up, and licked her chin. Almost mechanically Aunt Juley rose. And the little dog slipped off. Really she didn't know — it took such liberties! Oh! dear — it WAS thin, fluttering round her feet! What would Mr. Scoles say? Perhaps if she walked on! She turned towards home, and the dog followed her skirt at a distance of six inches. The thought that she was going to eat roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and mincepies, was almost unbearable to Aunt Juley, seeing it gaze up as if saying: "Some for me! Some for me!" Thoughts warred within her: must she 'shoo' and threaten it with her parasol? Or should she —? Oh! This would never do! Dogs could be SO— she had heard? And then — the responsibility! And fleas! Timothy couldn't endure fleas! And it might not know how to behave in a house! Oh, no! She really couldn't! The little dog suddenly raised one paw. Tt, tt! Look at its little face! And a fearful boldness attacked Aunt Juley. Turning resolutely towards the Gate of the Gardens, she said in a weak voice: "Come along, then!" And the little dog came. It was dreadful!

While she was trying to cross the Bayswater Road, two or three of those dangerous hansom cabs came dashing past — so reckless! — and in the very middle of the street a 'growler' turned round, so that she had to stand quite still. And, of course, there was 'no policeman.' The traffic was really getting beyond bounds. If only she didn't meet Timothy coming in from his constitutional, and could get a word with Smither — a capable girl — and have the little dog fed and washed before anybody saw it. And then? Perhaps it could be kept in the basement till somebody came to claim it. But how could people come to claim it if they didn't know it was there? If only there were someone to consult! Perhaps Smither would know a policeman — only she hoped not — policemen were rather dangerous for a nice-looking girl like Smither, with her colour, and such a figure, for her age. Then, suddenly, realising that she had reached home, she was seized by panic from head to heel. There was the bell — it was not the epoch of latchkeys; and there the smell of dinner — yes, and the little dog had smelt it! It was now or never. Aunt Juley pointed her parasol at the dog and said very feebly: "Shoo!" But it only crouched. She couldn't drive it away! And with an immense daring she rang the bell. While she stood waiting for the door to be opened, she almost enjoyed a sensation of defiance. She was doing a dreadful thing, but she didn't care! Then, the doorway yawned, and her heart sank slowly towards her high and buttoned boots.

"Oh, Smither! This poor little dog has followed me. Nothing has ever followed me before. It must be lost. And it looks so thin and dirty. What SHALL we do?"

The tail of the dog, edging into the home of that rich smell, fluttered.

"Aoh!" said Smither — she was young! "Paw little thing! Shall I get cook to give it some scraps, Ma'am!" At the word "scraps" the dog's eyes seemed to glow.

"Well," said Aunt Juley, "you do it on your own responsibility, Smither. Take it downstairs quickly."

She stood breathless while the dog, following Smither and its nose, glided through the little hall and down the kitchen stairs. The pit-pat of its feet roused in Aunt Juley the most mingled sensations she had experienced since the death of Septimus Small.

She went up to her room, and took off her veil and bonnet. What WAS she going to say? She went downstairs without knowing.

In the drawing-room, which had just had new pampas grass, Ann, sitting on the sofa, was putting down her prayer-book; she always read the Service to herself. Her mouth and chin looked very square, and there was an expression in her old grey eyes as if she were in pain. She wanted her lunch, of course — they were trying hard to call it lunch, because, according to Emily, no one with any pretension to be fashionable called it dinner now, even on Sundays. Hester, in her corner by the hearth, was passing the tip of her tongue over her lips; she had always been so fond of mincepies, and these would be the first of the season. Aunt Juley said:

"Mr. Scoles was delightful this morning — a beautiful sermon. I walked in the Gardens."

Something warned her to say no more, and they waited in silence for the gong; they had just got a gong — Emily had said it was 'the thing.'

It sounded. Dear, dear! What a noise — bom — bom! Timothy would never — Smither must take lessons. At dear James' in Park Lane the butler made it sound almost cosy.

In the doorway of the dining-room, Smither said:

"It's ate it all, Ma'am — it was THAT hungry."

"Shhh!"

A heavy footstep sounded in the hall; Timothy was coming from his study, square in his frock-coat, his face all brown and red — he had such delicate health. He took his seat with his back to the window, where the light was not too strong.

Timothy, of course, did not go to church — it was too tiring for him — but he always asked the amount of the offertory, and would sometimes add that he didn't know what they wanted all that for, as if Mr. Scoles ever wasted it. Just now he was getting new hassocks, and when they came she had thought perhaps dear Timothy and Hester would come too. Timothy, however, had said:

"Hassocks! They only get in the way and spoil your trousers."

Aunt Ann, who could not kneel now, had smiled indulgently:

"One should kneel in church, dear."

They were all seated now with beef before them, and Timothy was saying:

"Mustard! And tell cook the potatoes aren't browned enough; do you hear, Smither?"

Smither, blushing above him, answered: "Yes, sir."

Within Aunt Juley, what with the dog and her mind and the difficulty of assimilating Yorkshire pudding, indigestion had begun.

"I had such a pleasant walk in the Gardens," she said painfully, "after church."

"You oughtn't to walk there alone in these days; you don't know what you may be picking up with."

Aunt Juley took a sip of brown sherry — her heart was beating so! Aunt Hester — she was such a reader — murmured that she had read how Mr. Gladstone walked there sometimes.

"That shows you!" said Timothy.

Aunt Ann believed that Mr. Gladstone had high principles, and they must not judge him.

"Judge him!" said Timothy: "I'd hang him!"

"That's not quite a nice thing to say on Sunday, dear."

"Better the day, better the deed," muttered Timothy; and Aunt Juley trembled. He was in one of his moods. And, suddenly, she held her breath. A yapping had impinged on her ears, as if the white dog were taking liberties with Cook. Her eyes sought Smither's face.

"What's that?" said Timothy. "A dog?"

"There's a dog just round the corner, at No. 9," murmured Aunt Juley; and, at the roundness of Smither's eyes, knew she had prevaricated. What dreadful things happened if one was not quite frank from the beginning! The yapping broke into a sharp yelp, as if Cook had taken a liberty in turn.

"That's not round the corner," said Timothy; "it's downstairs. What's all this?"

All eyes were turned on Smither, in a dead silence. A sound broke it — the girl had creaked.

"Please, Miss, it's the little dog that followed Madam in."

"Oh!" said Aunt Juley, in haste; "THAT little dog!"

"What's that?" said Timothy. "Followed her in?"

"It was so thin!" said Aunt Juley's faint voice.

"Smither," said Aunt Ann, "hand me the pulled bread; and tell Cook I want to see her when she's finished her dinner."

Into Aunt Juley's pouting face rose a flush.

"I take the entire responsibility," she said. "The little dog was lost. It was hungry and Cook has given it some scraps."

"A strange dog," muttered Timothy, "bringing in fleas like that!"

"Oh! I don't think," murmured Aunt Juley, "it's a well-bred little dog."

"How do YOU know? You don't know a dog from a door-mat."

The flush deepened over Aunt Juley's pouts.

"It was a Christian act," she said, looking Timothy in the eye. "If you had been to church, you wouldn't talk like that."

It was perhaps the first time she had openly bearded her delicate brother. The result was complete. Timothy ate his mincepie hurriedly.

"Well, don't let ME see it," he muttered.

"Put the wine and walnuts on the table and go down, Smither," said Aunt Ann, "and see what Cook is doing about it."

When she had gone there was silence. It was felt that Juley had forgotten herself.

Aunt Ann put her wineglass to her lips; it contained two thimblefuls of brown sherry — a present from dear Jolyon — he had such a palate! Aunt Hester, who during the excitement had thoughtfully finished a second mince-pie, was smiling. Aunt Juley had her eyes fixed on Timothy; she had tasted of defiance and it was sweet.

Smither returned.

"Well, Smither?"

"Cook's washing of it, Miss."

"What's she doing that for?" said Timothy.

"Because it's dirty," said Aunt Juley.

"There you are!"

And the voice of Aunt Ann was heard, saying grace. When she had finished, the three sisters rose.

"We'll leave you to your wine, dear. Smither, my shawl, please."

Upstairs in the drawing-room there was grave silence. Aunt Juley was trying to still her fluttering nerves; Aunt Hester trying to pretend that nothing had happened; Aunt Ann, upright and a little grim, trying to compress the Riot Act with her thin and bloodless lips. She was not thinking of herself, but of the immutable order of things, so seriously compromised.

Aunt Juley repeated, suddenly: "He followed me, Ann."

"Without an intro — Without your inviting him?"

"I spoke to him, because he was lost."

"You should think before you speak. Dogs take advantage."

Aunt Juley's face mutinied. "Well, I'm glad," she said, "and that's flat. Such a how-de-do!"

Aunt Ann looked pained. A considerable time passed. Aunt Juley began playing solitaire — she played without presence of mind, so that extraordinary things happened on the board. Aunt Ann sat upright, with her eyes closed; and Aunt Hester, after watching them for some minutes to see if they would open, took from under her cushion a library volume, and hiding it behind a firescreen, began to read — it was volume two and she did not yet know 'Lady Audley's' secret: of course it WAS a novel, but, as Timothy had said, 'Better the day, better the deed.'

The clock struck three. Aunt Ann opened her eyes, Aunt Hester shut her book. Aunt Juley crumpled the solitaire balls together with a clatter. There was a knock on the door, for not belonging to the upper regions, like Smither, Cook always knocked.

"Come in!"

Still in her pink print frock, Cook entered, and behind her entered the dog, snowy white, with its coat all brushed and bushy, its manner and its tail now cocky and now deprecating. It WAS a moment! Cook spoke:

"I've brought it up, miss; it's had its dinner, and it's been washed. It's a nice little dear, and taken quite a fancy to me."

The three Aunts sat silent with their eyes now on the dog, now on the legs of the furniture.

"'Twould 'ave done your 'eart good to see it eat, miss. And it answers to the name of Pommy."

"Fancy!" said Aunt Hester, with an effort. She did so hate things to be awkward.

Aunt Ann leaned forward; her voice rose firm, if rather quavery.

"It doesn't belong to us, Cook; and your master would never permit it. Smither shall go with it to the Police Station."

As if struck by the words, the dog emerged from Cook's skirt and approached the voice. It stood in a curve and began to oscillate its tail very slightly; its eyes, like bits of jet, gazed up. Aunt Ann looked down at it; her thin veined hands, as if detached from her firmness, moved nervously over her glacé skirt. From within Aunt Juley emotion was emerging in one large pout. Aunt Hester was smiling spasmodically.

"Them Police Stations!" said Cook. "I'm sure it's not been accustomed. It's not as if it had a collar, miss."

"Pommy!" said Aunt Juley.

The dog turned at the sound, sniffed her knees, and instantly returned to its contemplation of Aunt Ann, as though it recognised where power was seated. "It's really rather sweet!" murmured Aunt Hester, and not only the dog looked at Aunt Ann. But at this moment the door was again opened.

"Mr. Swithin Forsyte, miss," said the voice of Smither.

Aunts Juley and Hester rose to greet their brother; Aunt Ann, privileged by seventy-eight years, remained seated. The family always went to Aunt Ann, not Aunt Ann to the family. There was a general feeling that dear Swithin had come providentially, knowing as he did all about horses.

"You can leave the little dog for the moment, Cook. Mr. Swithin will tell us what to do."

Swithin, who had taken his time on the stairs which were narrow, made an entry. Tall, with his chest thrown forward, his square face puffy pale, his eyes light and round, the tiny grey imperial below his moustached lips gave to him the allure of a master of ceremonies, and the white dog, retreating to a corner, yapped loudly.

"What's this?" said Swithin. "A dog?"

So might one entering a more modern drawing-room, have said: "What's this — a camel?"

Repairing hastily to the corner, Aunt Juley admonished the dog with her finger. It shivered slightly and was silent. Aunt Ann said:

"Give dear Swithin his chair, Hester; we want your advice, Swithin. This little dog followed Juley home this morning — he was lost."

Swithin seated himself with his knees apart, thus preserving the deportment of his body and the uncreased beauty of his waistcoat. His Wellington boots showed stiff beneath his almost light blue trousers. He said:

"Has Timothy had a fit?"

Dear Swithin — he was so droll!

"Not yet," said Aunt Hester, who was sometimes almost naughty.

"Well, he will. Here, Juley, don't stand there stuck. Bring the dog out, and let's have a look at it. Dog! Why, it's a bitch!"

This curiously male word, though spoken with distinction, caused a sensation such as would have accompanied a heavy fall of soot. The dog had been assumed by all to be of the politer sex, because of course one didn't notice such things. Aunt Juley, indeed, whom past association with Septimus Small had rendered more susceptible, had conceived her doubts, but she had continued to be on the polite side.

"A bitch," repeated Swithin; "you'll have no end of trouble with it."

"That is what we fear," said Aunt Ann, "though I don't think you should call it that in a drawing-room, dear."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Swithin. "Come here, little tyke!"

And he stretched out a ringed hand smelling of dogskin — he had driven himself round in his phaeton.

Encouraged by Aunt Juley, the little dog approached, and sat cowering under the hand. Swithin lifted it by the ruff round its neck.

"Well-bred," he said, putting it down.

"We can't keep it," said Aunt Ann, firmly. "The carpets — we thought — the Police Station."

"If I were you," said Swithin, "I'd put a notice in The Times: 'Found, white Pomeranian bitch. Apply, The Nook, Bayswater Road.' You might get a reward. Let's look at its teeth."

The little dog, who seemed in a manner fascinated by the smell of Swithin's hand and the stare of his round china-blue eyes, put no obstacle in the way of fingers that raised its upper and depressed its lower lip.

"It's a puppy," said Swithin. "Loo, loo, little tyke!"

This terrible incentive caused the dog to behave in a singular manner; depressing its tail so far as was possible, it jumped sideways and scurried round Aunt Hester's chair, then crouched with its chin on the ground, its hindquarters and tail in the air, looking up at Swithin with eyes black as boot-buttons.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Swithin, "if it was worth money. Loo, loo!"

This time the little dog scurried round the entire room, avoiding the legs of chairs by a series of miracles, then, halting by a marqueterie stand, it stood on its hind legs and began to eat the pampas grass.

"Ring, Hester!" said Aunt Ann. "Ring for Smither. Juley, stop it!"

Swithin, whose imperial was jutting in a fixed smile, said:

"Where's Timothy? I should like to see it bite his legs."

Aunt Juley, moved by maternal spasms, bent down and picked the dog up in her arms. She stood, pouting over its sharp nose and soft warm body, like the very figure of daring with the smell of soft soap in its nostrils.

"I will take it downstairs myself," she said; "it shan't be teased. Come, Pommy!"

The dog, who had no say whatever in the matter, put out a pink strip of tongue and licked her nose. Aunt Juley had the exquisite sensation of being loved; and, hastily, to conceal her feelings, bore it lolling over her arm away. She bore it upstairs, instead of down, to her room which was at the back of dear Ann's, and stood, surrounded by mahogany, with the dog still in her arms. Every hand was against her and the poor dog, and she squeezed it tighter. It was panting, and every now and then with its slip of a tongue it licked her cheek, as if to assure itself of reality. Since the departure of Septimus Small ten years ago, she had never been properly loved, and now that something was ready to love her, they wanted to take it away. She sat down on her bed, still holding the dog, while below, they would be talking of how to send Pommy to the Police Station or put her into the papers! Then, noticing that white hairs were coming off on to her, she put the dog down. It sidled round the room, sniffing, till it came to the washstand, where it stood looking at her and panting. What DID it want? Wild thoughts passed through Aunt Juley's mind, till suddenly the dog stood on its hind legs and licked the air. Why, it was thirsty! Disregarding the niceties of existence, Aunt Juley lifted the jug, and set it on the floor. For some minutes there was no sound but lapping. Could it really hold all that? The little dog looked up at her, moved its tail twice, then trotted away to inspect the room more closely. Having inspected everything except Aunt Juley, concerning whom its mind was apparently made up, it lay down under the valance of the dressing table, with its head and forepaws visible, and uttered a series of short spasmodic barks. Aunt Juley understood them to mean: 'Come and play with me!' And taking her sponge-bag, she dangled it. Seizing it — So unexpected! — the little dog shook it violently. Aunt Juley was at once charmed and horrified. It was evidently feeling quite at home; but her poor bag! Oh! its little teeth WERE sharp and strong! Aunt Juley swelled. It was as if she didn't care what happened to the bag so long as the little dog were having a good time. The bag came to an end; and gathering up the pieces, she thought defiantly: 'Well, it's not as if I ever went to Brighton now!' But she said severely:

"You see what you've done!" And, together, they examined the pieces, while Aunt Juley's heart took a resolution. They might talk as they liked: Finding was keeping; and if Timothy didn't like it, he could lump it! The sensation was terrific. Someone, however, was knocking on the door.

"Oh! Smither," said Aunt Juley, "you see what the little dog has done?" And she held up the sponge-bag defiantly.

"Aoh!" said Smither; "its teeth ARE sharp. Would you go down, ma'am? Mr. and Mrs. James Forsyte are in the drawing-room. Shall I take the little dog now? I daresay it'd like a run."

"Not to the Police Station, Smither. I found it, and I'm going to keep it."

"I'm sure, Ma'am. It'll be company for me and Cook, now that Tommy's gone. It's took quite a fancy to us."

With a pang of jealousy Aunt Juley said: "I take all the responsibility. Go with Smither, Pommy!"

Caught up in her arms, the little dog lolled its head over the edge of Smither and gazed back sentimentally as it was borne away. And, again, all that was maternal in Aunt Juley swelled, beneath the dark violet of her bosom sprinkled with white hairs.

"Say I am coming down." And she began plucking off the white hairs.

Outside the drawing-room door she paused; then went in, weak at the knees. Between his Dundreary whiskers James was telling a story. His long legs projected so that she had to go round; his long lips stopped to say:

"How are you, Juley? They tell me you've found a dog," and resumed the story. It was all about a man who had been bitten and had insisted on being cauterised until he couldn't sit down, and the dog hadn't been mad after all, so that it was all wasted, and that was what came of dogs. He didn't know what use they were except to make a mess.

Emily said: “Pomeranians are all the rage. They look so amusing in a carriage.”

Aunt Hester murmured that Jolyon had an Italian greyhound at Stanhope Gate.

“That snippetty whippet!” said Swithin — perhaps the first use of the term: “There’s no body in THEM.”

“You’re not going to KEEP this dog?” said James. “You don’t know what it might have.”

Very red, Aunt Juley said sharply: “Fiddle-de-dee, James!”

“Well, you might have an action brought against you. They tell me there’s a Home for Lost Dogs. Your proper course is to turn it out.”

“Turn out your grandmother!” snapped Aunt Juley; she was not afraid of James.

“Well, it’s not your property. You’ll be getting up against the Law.”

“Fiddle the Law!”

This epoch-making remark was received in silence. Nobody knew what had come to Juley.

“Well,” said James, with finality, “don’t say I didn’t tell you. What does Timothy say — he’ud have a fit.”

“If he wants to have a fit, he must,” said Aunt Juley. “*I* shan’t stop him.”

“What are you going to do with the puppies?” said Swithin: “Ten to one she’ll have puppies.”

“You see, Juley,” said Aunt Ann.

Aunt Juley’s agitation was such that she took up a fan from the little curio table beside her, and began to wave it before her flushed face.

“You’re all against me,” she said: “Puppies, indeed! A little thing like that!”

Swithin rose. “Good-bye to you all. I’m going to see Nicholas. Good-bye, Juley. You come for a drive with me some day. I’ll take you to the Lost Dogs’ Home.” Throwing out his chest, he manoeuvred to the door, and could be heard descending the stairs to the accompaniment of the drawing-room bell.

James said mechanically: “He’s a funny fellow, Swithin!”

It was as much his permanent impression of his twin brother as was Swithin’s: “He’s a poor stick, James!”

Emily, who was bored, began talking to Aunt Hester about the new fashion of eating oysters before the soup. Of course it was very foreign, but they said the Prince was doing it; James wouldn’t have it; but personally she thought it rather elegant. She should see! James had begun to tell Aunt Ann how Soames would be out of his articles in January — he was a steady chap. He told her at some length. Aunt Juley sat pouting behind her moving fan. She had a longing for dear Jolyon. Partly because he had always been her favourite and her eldest brother, who had never allowed anyone else to bully her; partly because he was the only one who had a dog, and partly because even Ann was a little afraid of him. She sat longing to hear him say: “You’re a parcel of old women; of course Juley can keep what she found.” Because, that was it! The dog had followed her of its own free will. It was not as if it had been a precious stone or a purse — which, of course, would have been different. Sometimes Jolyon did come on Sundays — though generally he took little June to the Zoo; and the moment he came James would be sure to go away, for fear of having his knuckles rapped; and that, she felt sure, would be so nice, since James had been horrid about it all!

“I think,” she said, suddenly, “I shall go round to Stanhope Gate, and ask dear Jolyon.”

“What do you want to do that for?” said James, taking hold of a whisker. “He’ll send you away with a flea in your ear.”

Whether or no this possibility deterred her, Aunt Juley did not rise, but she ceased fanning herself and sat with the expression on her face which had given rise to the family saying: ‘Oh! So-and-so’s a regular Juley!’

But James had now exhausted his weekly budget. “Well, Emily,” he said, “you’ll be wanting to get home. We can’t keep the horses any longer.”

The accuracy of this formula had never been put to the proof, for Emily always rose at once with the words:

“Good-bye, dears. Give our love to Timothy.” She had pecked their cheeks and gone out of the room before James could remember what — as he would tell her in the carriage — he had specially gone there to ask them.

When they had departed, Aunt Hester, having looked from one to the other of her sisters, muffled ‘Lady Audley’s Secret’ in her shawl and tiptoed away. She knew what was coming. Aunt Juley took the solitaire board with hands that trembled. The moment had arrived! And she waited, making an occasional move with oozing fingers, and stealing glances at that upright figure in black silk with jet trappings and cameo brooch. On no account did she mean to be the first to speak; and she said, suddenly:

"There you sit, Ann!"

Aunt Ann, countering her glance with those grey eyes of hers that saw quite well at a distance, spoke:

"You heard what Swithin and James said, Juley."

"I will NOT turn the dog out," said Aunt Juley. "I will not, and that's flat." The blood beat in her temples and she tapped a foot on the floor.

"If it were a really nice little dog, it would not have run away and got lost. Little dogs of that sex are not to be trusted. You ought to know that, at your age, Juley; now that we're alone, I can talk to you plainly. It will have followers, of course."

Aunt Juley put a finger into her mouth, sucked it, took it out, and said:

"I'm tired of being treated like a little girl."

Aunt Ann answered calmly:

"I think you should take some calomel — getting into fantods like this! We have never had a dog."

"I don't want you to have one now," said Aunt Juley; "I want it for myself. I— I—" She could not bring herself to express what was in her heart about being loved — it would be — would be gushing!

"It's not right to keep what's not your own," said Aunt Ann. "You know that perfectly well."

"I will put an advertisement in the paper; if the owner comes, I'll give it up. But it followed me of its own accord. And it can live downstairs. Timothy need never see it."

"It will spoil the carpets," said Aunt Ann, "and bark at night; we shall have no peace."

"I'm sick of peace," said Aunt Juley, rattling the board. "I'm sick of peace, and I'm sick of taking care of things till they — till you — till one belongs to them."

Aunt Ann lifted her hands, spidery and pale.

"You don't know what you're talking about. If one can't take care of one's things, one is not fit to have them."

"Care — care — I'm sick of care! I want something human — I want this dog. And if I can't have it, I will go away and take it with me; and that's flat."

It was, perhaps, the wildest thing that had ever been said at Timothy's. Aunt Ann said very quietly:

"You know you can't go away, Juley, you haven't the money; so it's no good talking like that."

"Jolyon will give me the money; he will never let you bully me."

An expression of real pain centred itself between Aunt Ann's old eyes.

"I do not think I bully," she said; "you forget yourself."

For a full minute Aunt Juley said nothing, looking to and fro from her twisting fingers to the wrinkled ivory pale face of her eldest sister. Tears of compunction had welled up in her eyes. Dear Ann was very old, and the doctor was always saying —! And quickly she got out her handkerchief.

"I— I'm upset. — I— I didn't mean — dear Ann — I—" the words bubbled out: "b-b-but I d-do so w-want the little d-d-dog."

There was silence, broken by her sniffing. Then rose the voice of Aunt Ann, calm, a little tremulous:

"Very well, dear; it will be a sacrifice, but if it makes you happier —"

"Oh!" sobbed Aunt Juley: "Oh!"

A large tear splashed on the solitaire board, and with the small handkerchief she wiped it off.

❦

MIDSUMMER MADNESS, 1880

George, second son to Roger Forsyte of Prince's gate, was in the year 1880 twenty-four years of age, and supposed to be a farmer. That is to say he had failed for the Army, and had definitely refused to enter any indoor profession. This was why he spent the inside of his weeks in any country pursuit which was not farming, and the outside of his weeks in or about the Club in Piccadilly which he had nicknamed 'The Iseeum.' Nominally resident at Plumtree Park in Bedfordshire, where a gentleman farmer eked out his losses with the premiums paid by the fathers of his pupils, George Forsyte's wit, of which he had a good deal, enabled him to spend most of his time with neighbouring landowners, who let him ride their horses or shoot their pheasants and rabbits. In the summer, when horses were turned out, pheasants turned in, and even rabbits were breeding, George would sometimes look at other people shearing sheep, and cheer them with his jests; but as a general thing he would be found studying the conformation of the horse on Newmarket Heath, or the conformation of chorus girls on the stage of the Liberty Theatre. But in this particular summer of 1880, as will sometimes happen with men of the world, he had fallen in love. The object of his affection was a very pretty woman with dark dove-like eyes, who was somewhat naturally the wife of a man he knew called Basset, a neighbouring landowner and Major in the Militia. It may come as a shock to those who fifty years later have claimed for themselves the abolition of morals to learn that George already had none. It was with a mere glow that he discovered himself to be in love with a married woman. Flora Basset, like most people with dove-like eyes, was what was then known as a 'flirt'; and since she lived in the country to please her husband, when she would rather have lived in London, she considered herself entitled to such amusement as came her way. George was very amusing.

He began at Easter time by normal admiration of Flora's eyes and conformation, and a normal hankering to make her his own; but as summer came, he found these feelings gradually complicated by a sensation which he had never before known, but which other people had called jealousy. In other words it became distasteful to think of Flora as Mrs. Basset. George was not of those who examine and label their feelings, or he would perhaps have understood that desire was becoming passion.

June arriving, and the weather turning hot, Major Basset, "that poopstick" as George now called him in thought, went into camp with his Militia. George experienced a feeling, not merely of increased hope, but of relief, for, when not in the presence of his Flora, he had begun to ache. But he was soon to discover that his Flora had an excellent head, and knew how to keep it. She had no intention of being compromised. George, of course, was well aware that if he did compromise her, or rather himself, his position, dependent on his father, a man of maturer years and the morals of an old Forsyte, would become impossible; as likely as not, cut off with a shilling, he would be obliged to live on racing debts. But this was not enough to make him thankful that his Flora would not let him compromise her. On the contrary her discretion drove him nearly mad.

And the weather grew hotter; the trees, the flowers, the grasses exuded more scent; the cuckoo's note became a little querulous; the wood-pigeons emitted the ritornelles of love. With the increasing temperature more and more of his Flora became visible, and George played croquet with her, and sat listening to her singing the songs of opera bouffe, and now and again was permitted to stay to dinner, and dismissed at nine o'clock; and his wit shrivelled within him in the heat of his feelings; and half the month of June was gone.

Now in George was something dogged and tenacious; nor did he lack hardihood. He ceased not in his resolve; with heroism he fought against the shrivelling of his wit, and like the unhappy clowns of Kings in the old days, who must be merry whatever the conditions of their hearts, continued to jest in the presence of his beloved, and to subdue the smoulder in his bull-like eyes. 'Plain but pleasant'— as he called himself — to cease being pleasant must lose him the game. But dry were the lips with which he jested; and small was his knowledge of his Flora's heart. What her feelings were for the 'poopstick' who in a week's time would be returning he never dared to ask. And he suffered, he suffered as much as moralists could wish; but he continued to jest, because it was — jest or lose; and his Flora continued to smile on him with her dark and dove-like eyes, to laugh little half-shocked laughs, to press his hand faintly; to smell sweet and look enticing. And the last week passed.

Hotter and hotter, the sun flamed all day, and it was good to sit in the shade. Now, alongside the croquet lawn in front of the Bassets' house, was a shrubbery of rhododendrons, and beyond this a clump of lilacs and within it a summer-house and beyond this again an orchard of plum and pear trees.

And George took from his Flora's hand the croquet mallet, and, holding it out, said with a grin:

"Who's for a cooler? Let's go and sit in the shade with this between us."

His Flora laughed:

"George, how naughty you are!"

"Naughty but nice!" said George, and took her hand with the tips of his fingers, walking delicately, for all his heaviness, as if leading her to a minuet. And, while he walked, he thought: 'The last day — this is hell!'

They came to the summer-house.

"What?" said George; "no earwigs! Forward, the Buffs!"

They entered, sat down; George placed the mallet between them. And silence fell — for the life of him he could no longer jest.

From across the mallet, Flora was gazing, cool and sweet against the wooden wall, a little smile on her lips. It was too much! George took the mallet in both hands; his fleshy face had gone a dusky red, his full thick-lidded eyes gazed lowering in front of him, veins stood out on his forehead beneath his neatly parted hair; the muscles in his arms below the rolled-up sleeves swelled in ridges. He laid the mallet down on his other side noiselessly as if it had been a feather.

"Flora!" he said, and seized the sweet and unresisting creature.

So was accomplished his desire, with no words spoken.

He stood, presently, and watched her go, a finger to her lips and her eyes still smiling; then through the orchard himself went away, dumb and grateful for pleasure as the beasts that perish, and drunk with triumph like a god. The day had changed and darkened with the heat. The sky had an airless brooding aspect; flies buzzed viciously and clung about him. He sat down on the bank of a stream and lighted a cigar. He held it between lips that never ceased to smile, and watched the smoke annoying the flies and midges. He listened, without hearing, to their hum, and to the cooing of the wood-pigeons; he watched, without seeing, the extreme stillness of the heat-darkened day. Thus, he spent two hours lost in a few past minutes. He got up with a sigh, the scent of nettles, burdock and the carted hay deep in his nostrils. He would not go home, but walked to the Inn. He ate bread and cheese and drank porter. And then began again the longing to see and touch her that had for so short time been appeased; and smoking a village clay he ached, watching all light out of the sky; so heavy and hot the air, that he sweated, sitting there. And he thought: 'The last night! She might let me in-she might!'

He rose and went out into the breathless dark, retracing his steps to the stream, and through the blinded orchard to the summer-house. He groped and found the mallet and took it with him, stealing along past the lilacs, to the edge of the rhododendron clump bordering the lawn. Dark! It was more than dark, but he could just see the house. And, squatting on the grass, dry as tinder, he gazed up. Two first floor windows alone were lighted, open but curtained — hers — so well he knew the windows he had longed to enter! And he thought: 'By Gad! I'll have a shot!' and going on his knees he searched for tiny pebbles in the shrubbery. Then drawing deep breaths to still the pounding of his heart he moved towards the house along the rhododendrons. But then he stopped as if he had been shot, and dropped to his knees on the grass. A curtain had been pulled aside; in the lighted window-space stood the figure of a half-dressed man. He was leaning there, inhaling the heavy night; he turned and spoke into the room. George saw his profile — Basset! Their voices carried to him in the stillness — his voice and hers. He saw a shimmer of white — flesh, drapery — pass across behind; saw the man's arm go round it. And George pressed his face to the dry grass, stifling a groan. He heard a woman's low laugh, the window shut down, and furious pain jerked him to his knees. To take the mallet — to climb up — to brain him — her — to — to —! He fell forward again, with arms outstretched. The smell of parched grass mixed itself with his agony, for how long — how long — till the night was rent with a blinding flash and thunder rolled round and round him. He staggered to his feet, ran into the dark; and stumbled among the orchard trees. Lightning flashed all round, he wanted it to strike. He wanted it to strike him, but he knew it wouldn't. Then the rain fell — fell in a sheet, drenched him in a minute; fell and fell, and cooled him even to the heart. Like a drowned rat he came to where he lived, and let himself in. He went up to his bedroom, and tearing off his clothes, flung himself into bed. And behind and through the crashing of the thunder he heard that low soft laugh, and the window being shut down. He fell asleep at last.

When he woke the sun was shining in at his window; it shone across the room on to his boots — fourteen pairs of boots and shoes, treed, in triple rows, on the top of his chest-of-drawers. Boots and shoes of every kind — riding boots, shooting boots, town boots, tennis boots, pumps. George looked at them, with fish-like eyes. In those well-worn and polished boots, treed against decay, was life — his life — and in his heart, dragged from its drowned sleep, was death. That laugh! No! To hell with women! Boots! And, lying there, he ground his teeth and grinned.

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THE HONDEKOETER, 1880

Encountering his old friend Traquair opposite the Horse Guards, in the summer of 1880, James Forsyte, who had taken an afternoon off from the City, proceeded alongside with the words:

"I'm not well."

His friend answered: "You look bobbish enough. Going to the Club?"

"No," said James. "I'm going to Jobson's. They're selling Smelter's pictures. Don't suppose there's anything, but I thought I'd look in."

"Smelter? Selling his 'Cupid and Pish,' as he used to call it? He never could speak the Queen's English."

"I'm sure I don't know what made him die," said James; "he wasn't seventy. His '47 was good."

"Ah! And his brown sherry."

James shook his head.

"Liverish stuff. I've been walking from the Temple; got a touch of liver now."

"You ought to go to Carlsbad; that's the new place, they say."

"Homburg," said James, mechanically. "Emily likes it — too fashionable for me. I don't know — I'm sixty-nine." He pointed his umbrella at a lion.

"That chap Landseer must ha' made a pretty penny," he muttered: "They say Dizzy's very shaky. HE won't last long."

"M'm! That old fool Gladstone'll set us all by the ears yet. Going to bid at Jobson's?"

"Bid? Haven't got the money to throw away. My family's growing up."

"Ah! How's your married daughter — Winifred?"

The furrow between James' brows increased in depth.

"She never tells me. But I know that chap Dartie she married makes the money fly."

"What is he?"

"An outside broker," said James, gloomily: "But so far as I can see, he does nothing but gallivant about to races and that. He'll do no good with himself."

He halted at the pavement edge, where a crossing had been swept, for it had rained; and extracting a penny from his trouser pocket, gave it to the crossing-sweeper, who looked up at his long figure with a round and knowing eye.

"Well, good-bye, James. I'm going to the Club. Remember me to Emily."

James Forsyte nodded, and moved, stork-like, on to the narrow crossing. Andy Traquair! He still looked very spry! Gingery chap! But that wife of his — fancy marrying again at his age! Well, no fool like an old one. And, incommoded by a passing four-wheeler, he instinctively raised his umbrella — they never looked where they were going.

Traversing St. James' Square, he reflected gloomily that these new Clubs were thundering great places; and this asphalt pavement that was coming in-he didn't know! London wasn't what it used to be, with horses slipping about all over the place. He turned into Jobson's. Three o'clock! They'd be just starting. Smelter must have cut up quite well.

Ascending the steps, he passed through the lobbies into the sale-room. Auction was in progress, but they had not yet reached the 'property of William Smelter Esq.'

Putting on his tortoiseshell pince-nez, James studied the catalogue. Since his purchase of a Turner — some said 'not a Turner'— all cordage and drowning men, he had not bought a picture, and he had a blank space on the stairs. It was a large space in a poor light; he often thought it looked very bare. If there were anything going at a bargain, he might think of it. H'm! There was the Bronzino: 'Cupid and Pish' that Smelter had been so proud of — a nude; he didn't want nudes in Park Lane. His eye ran down the catalogue: "Claud Lorraine," "Bosboem," "Cornelis van Vos," "Snyders"—"Snyders"— m'm! still life — all ducks and geese, hares, artichokes, onions, platters, oysters, grapes, turkeys, pears, and starved-looking greyhounds asleep under them. No. 17, "M. Hondekoeter." Fowls, 11 foot by 6. What a whopping great thing! He took three mental steps into the middle of the picture and three steps out again. "Hondekoeter." His brother Jolyon had one in the billiard room at Stanhope Gate — lot of fowls; not so big as that. "Snyders!" "Ary Scheffer"— bloodless-looking affair, he'd be bound! “Rosa Bonheur.” “Snyders.”

He took a seat at the side of the room, and fell into a reverie — with James a serious matter, indissolubly connected with investments. Soames — in partnership now — was shaping well; bringing in a lot of business. That house in Bryanston Square — the tenancy would be up in September — he ought to get another hundred on a re-let, with the improvements the tenant had put in. He’d have a couple of thousand to invest next Quarter Day. There was Cape Copper, but he didn’t know; Nicholas was always telling him to buy ‘Midland.’ That fellow Dartie, too, kept worrying him about Argentines — he wouldn’t touch them with a pair of tongs. And, leaning forward with his hands crossed on the handle of his umbrella, he gazed fixedly up at the skylight, as if seeing some annunciation or other, while his shaven lips, between his grey Dundrearys, filled sensually as though savouring a dividend.

“The collection of William Smelter, Esquire, of Russell Square.”

Now for the usual poppycock! “This well-known collector,” “masterpieces of the Dutch and French Schools”; “rare opportunity”; “Connoisseur”; all me eye and Betty Martin! Smelter used to buy ’em by the yard.

“No. 1. Cupid and Psyche: Bronzino. Ladies and Gentlemen: what shall I start it at — this beautiful picture, an undoubted masterpiece of the Italian School?”

James sniggered. Connoisseur — with his ‘Cupid and Pish’!

To his astonishment there was some brisk bidding; and James’ upper lip began to lengthen, as ever at any dispute about values. The picture was knocked down and a ‘Snyders’ put up. James sat watching picture after picture disposed of. It was hot in the room and he felt sleepy — he didn’t know why he had come; he might have been having a nap at the Club, or driving with Emily.

“What — no bid for the Hondekoeter? This large masterpiece.”

James gazed at the enormous picture on the easel, supported at either end by an attendant. The huge affair was full of poultry and feathers floating in a bit of water and a large white rooster looking as if it were about to take a bath. It was a dark painting, save for the rooster, with a yellowish tone.

“Come, gentlemen? By a celebrated painter of domestic poultry. May I say fifty? Forty? Who’ll give me forty pounds? It’s giving it away. Well, thirty to start it? Look at the rooster! Masterly painting! Come now! I’ll take any bid.”

“Five pounds!” said James, covering the words so that no one but the auctioneer should see where they came from.

“Five pounds for this genuine work by a master of domestic poultry! Ten pounds did you say, Sir? Ten pounds bid.”

“Fifteen,” muttered James.

“Twenty.”

“Twenty-five,” said James; he was not going above thirty.

“Twenty-five — why, the frame’s worth it. Who says thirty?”

No one said thirty; and the picture was knocked down to James, whose mouth had opened slightly. He hadn’t meant to buy it; but the thing was a bargain — the size had frightened them; Jolyon had paid one hundred and forty for his Hondekoeter. Well, it would cover that blank on the stairs. He waited till two more pictures had been sold; then, leaving his card with directions for the despatch of the Hondekoeter, made his way up St. James’ Street and on towards home.

He found Emily just starting out with Rachel and Cicely in the barouche, but refused to accompany them — a little afraid of being asked what he had been doing. Entering his deserted house, he told Warmson that he felt liverish; he would have a cup of tea and a muffin, nothing more; then passing on to the stairs, he stood looking at the blank space. When the picture was hung, it wouldn’t be there. What would Soames say to it, though — the boy had begun to interest himself in pictures since his run abroad? Still, the price he had paid was not the market value; and, passing on up to the drawing-room, he drank his China tea, strong, with cream, and ate two muffins. If he didn’t feel better tomorrow, he should have Dash look at him.

The following morning, starting for the office, he said to Warmson:

“There’ll be a picture come today. You’d better get Hunt and Thomas to help you hang it. It’s to go in the middle of that space on the stairs. You’d better have it done when your mistress is out. Let ’em bring it in the back way — it’s eleven foot by six; and mind the paint.”

When he returned, rather late, the Hondekoeter was hung. It covered the space admirably, but the light being poor and the picture dark, it was not possible to see what it was about. It looked quite well. Emily was in the drawing-room when he went in.

“What on earth is that great picture on the stairs, James?”

“That?” said James. “A Hondekoeter; picked it up, a bargain, at Smelter’s sale. Jolyon’s got one at Stanhope Gate.”

“I never saw such a lumbering great thing.”

“What?” said James. “It covers up that space well. It’s not as if you could see anything on the stairs. There’s some good poultry in it.”

“It makes the stairs darker than they were before. I don’t know what Soames will say. Really, James, you oughtn’t to go about alone, buying things like that.”

“I can do what I like with my money, I suppose,” said James. “It’s a well-known name.”

“Well,” said Emily, “for a man of your age — Never mind! Don’t fuss! Sit down and drink your tea.”

James sat down, muttering. Women — always unjust, and no more sense of values than an old tom-cat!

Emily said no more, ever mistress of her suave and fashionable self.

Winifred, with Montague Dartie, came in later, so that all the family were assembled for dinner; Cicely having her hair down, Rachel her hair up — she had ‘come out’ this season; Soames, who had just parted with the little whiskers of the late ‘seventies, looking pale and flatter-cheeked than usual. Winifred, beginning to be ‘interesting,’ owing to the approach of a little Dartie, kept her eyes somewhat watchfully on ‘Monty,’ square and oiled, with a ‘handsome’ look on his sallow face, and a big diamond stud in his shining shirt-front.

It was she who broached the Hondekoeter.

“Pater dear, what made you buy that enormous picture?”

James looked up, and mumbled through his mutton:

“Enormous! It’s the right size for that space on the stairs.” It seemed to him at the moment that his family had very peculiar faces.

“It’s very fine and large!” Dartie was speaking! ‘Um!’ thought James: ‘What does HE want — money?’

“It’s so yellow,” said Rachel, plaintively.

“What do YOU know about a picture?”

“I know what I like, Pater.”

James stole a glance at his son, but Soames was looking down his nose.

“It’s very good value,” said James, suddenly. “There’s some first-rate feather painting in it.”

Nothing more was said at the moment, nobody wanting to hurt the Pater’s feelings, but, upstairs, in the drawing-room after Emily and her three daughters had again traversed the length of the Hondekoeter, a lively conversation broke out.

Really — the Pater! Rococo was not the word for pictures that size! And chickens — who wanted to look at chickens, even if you could see them? But, of course, Pater thought a bargain excused everything.

Emily said:

“Don’t be disrespectful, Cicely.”

“Well, Mater, he does, you know. All the old Forsytes do.”

Emily, who secretly agreed, said: “H’ssh!”

She was always loyal to James, in his absence. They all were, indeed, except among themselves.

“Soames thinks it dreadful,” said Rachel. “I hope he’ll tell the Pater so.”

“Soames will do nothing of the sort,” said Emily. “Really your father can do what he likes in his own house — you children are getting very uppish.”

“Well, Mater, you know jolly well it’s awfully out of date.”

“I wish you would not say ‘awfully’ and ‘jolly,’ Cicely.”

“Why not? Everybody does, at school.”

Winifred cut in:

"They really are the latest words, Mother."

Emily was silent; nothing took the wind out of her sails like the word 'latest,' for, though a woman of much character, she could not bear to be behindhand.

"Listen!" said Rachel, who had opened the door.

A certain noise could be heard; it was James, extolling the Hondekoeter, on the stairs.

"That rooster," he was saying, "is a fine bird; and look at those feathers floating. Think they could paint those nowadays? Your Uncle Jolyon gave a hundred an' forty for his Hondekoeter, and I picked this up for twenty-five."

"What did I say?" whispered Cicely. "A bargain. I hate bargains; they lumber up everything. That Turner was another!"

"Shh!" said Winifred, who was not so young, and wished that Monty had more sense of a bargain than he had as yet displayed. "I like a bargain myself; you know you've got something for your money."

"I'd rather have my money," said Cicely.

"Don't be silly, Cicely," said Emily; "go and play your piece. Your father likes it."

James and Dartie now entered, Soames having passed on up to his room where he worked at night.

Cicely began her piece. She was at home owing to an outbreak of mumps at her school on Ham Common; and her piece, which contained a number of runs up and down the piano, was one which she was perfecting for the school concert at the end of term. James, who made a point of asking for it, partly because it was good for Cicely, and partly because it was good for his digestion, took his seat by the hearth between his whiskers, averting his eyes from animated objects. Unfortunately, he never could sleep after dinner, and thoughts buzzed in his head. Soames had said there was no demand now for large pictures, and very little for the Dutch school — he had admitted, however, that the Hondekoeter was a bargain as values went; the name alone was worth the money. Cicely commenced her 'piece'; James brooded on. He really didn't know whether he was glad he had bought the thing or not. Everyone of them had disapproved, except Dartie; the only one whose disapproval he would have welcomed. To say that James was conscious of a change in the mental outlook of his day would be to credit him with a philosophic sensibility unsuited to his breeding and his age; but he WAS uncomfortably conscious that a bargain was not what it had been. And while Cicely's fingers ran up and down — he didn't know, he couldn't say.

"D'you mean to tell me," he said, when Cicely shut the piano, "that you don't like those Dresden vases?"

Nobody knew whom he was addressing or why, so no one replied.

"I bought 'em at Jobson's in '67, and they're worth three times what I gave for them."

It was Rachel who responded.

"Well, Pater, do you like them yourself?"

"Like them? What's that got to do with it? They're genuine, and worth a lot of money."

"I wish you'd sell them, then, James," said Emily. "They're not the fashion now."

"Fashion! They'll be worth a lot more before I die."

"A bargain," muttered Cicely, below her breath.

"What's that?" said James, whose hearing was sometimes unexpectedly sharp.

"I said: 'A bargain,' Pater; weren't they?"

"Of course they were"; and it could be heard from his tone that if they hadn't been, he wouldn't have bought them. "You young people know nothing about money, except how to spend it"; and he looked at his son-inlaw, who was sedulously concerned with his finger-nails.

Emily, partly to smooth James, whom she could see was ruffled, and partly because she had a passion for the game, told Cicely to get out the card table, and said with cheery composure:

"Come along, James, we'll play Nap."

They sat around the green board for a considerable time playing for farthings, with every now and then a little burst of laughter, when James said: "I'll go Nap!" At this particular game, indeed, James was always visited by a sort of recklessness. At farthing points he could be a devil of a fellow for very little money. He had soon lost thirteen shillings, and was as dashing as ever.

He rose at last, in excellent humour, pretending to be bankrupt.

“Well, I don’t know,” he said, “I always lose MY money.”

The Hondekoeter, and the misgivings it had given rise to, had faded from his mind.

Winifred and Dartie departing, without the latter having touched on finance, he went up to bed with Emily in an almost cheerful condition; and, having turned his back on her, was soon snoring lightly.

He was awakened by a crash and bumping rumble, as it might be thunder, on the right.

“What on earth’s that, James?” said Emily’s startled voice.

“What?” said James: “Where? Here, where are my slippers?”

“It must be a thunderbolt. Be careful, James.”

For James, in his nightgown, was already standing by the bedside — in the radiance of a night-light, long as a stork. He sniffed loudly.

“D’you smell burning?”

“No,” said Emily.

“Here, give me the candle.”

“Put on this shawl, James. It can’t be burglars; they wouldn’t make such a noise.”

“I don’t know,” muttered James, “I was asleep.” He took the candle from Emily, and shuffled to the door.

“What’s all this?” he said on the landing. By confused candle and night-light he could see a number of white-clothed figures — Rachel, Cicely, and the maid Fifine, in their nightgowns. Soames in his nightshirt, at the head of the stairs, and down below, that fellow Warmson.

The voice of Soames, flat and calm, said:

“It’s the Hondekoeter.”

There, in fact, enormous, at the bottom of the stairs, was the Hondekoeter, fallen on its face. James, holding up his candle, stalked down and stood gazing at it. No one spoke, except Fifine, who said: “La, la!”

Cicely, seized with a fit of giggles, vanished.

Then Soames spoke into the dark well below him, illumined faintly by James’ candle.

“It’s all right, Pater; it won’t be hurt; there was no glass.”

James did not answer, but holding his candle low, returned up the stairs, and without a word went back into his bedroom.

“What was it, James?” said Emily, who had not risen.

“That picture came down with a run — comes of not looking after things yourself. That fellow Warmson! Where’s the eau-de-Cologne?”

He anointed himself, got back into bed, and lay on his back, waiting for Emily to improve the occasion. But all she said was:

“I hope it hasn’t made your head ache, James.”

“No,” said James; and, for some time after she was asleep, he lay with his eyes on the night-light, as if waiting for the Hondekoeter to play him another trick — after he had bought the thing and given it a good home, too!

Next morning, going down to breakfast he passed the picture, which had been lifted, so that it stood slanting, with its back to the stair wall. The white rooster seemed just as much on the point of taking a bath as ever. The feathers floated on their backs, curved like shallops. He passed on into the dining-room.

They were all there, eating eggs and bacon, suspiciously silent.

James helped himself and sat down.

“What are you going to do with it now, James?” said Emily.

“Do with it? Hang it again, of course!”

“Not really, Pater!” said Rachel. “It gave me fits last night.”

“That wall won’t stand it,” said Soames.

“What! It’s a good wall!”

“It really is too big,” said Emily.

“And we none of us like it, Pater,” put in Cicely, “it’s such a monster, and so yellow!”

“Monster, indeed!” said James, and was silent, till suddenly he spluttered:

“What would you have me do with it, then?”

“Send it back; sell it again.”

“I shouldn’t get anything for it.”

“But you said it was a bargain, Pater,” said Cicely.

“So it was!”

There was another silence. James looked sidelong at his son; there was a certain pathos in that glance, as if it were seeking help, but Soames was concentrated above his plate.

“Have it put up in the lumber-room, James,” said Emily, quietly.

James reddened between his whiskers, and his mouth opened; he looked again at his son, but Soames ate on. James turned to his teacup. And there went on within him that which he could not express. It was as if they had asked him: “When is a bargain not a bargain?” and he didn’t know the answer, but they did. A change of epoch, something newfangled in the air. A man could no longer buy a thing because it was worth more! It was — it was the end of everything. And, suddenly, he mumbled: “Well, have it your own way, then. Throwing money away, I call it!”

After he had gone to the office, the Hondekoeter was conducted to the lumber-room by Warmson, Hunt, and Thomas. There, covered by a dust-sheet to preserve the varnish, it rested twenty-one years, till the death of James in 1901, when it went forth and again came under the hammer. It fetched five pounds, and was bought by a designer of posters, working for a poultry-breeding firm.

❦

CRY OF PEACOCK, 1883

The Ball was over. Soames decided to walk. In the cloak-room, whence he retrieved coat and opera hat, a mirror showed him a white-waistcoated figure still trim, but a half-melted collar, and a brown edging to the gardenia in his button-hole. Hot with a vengeance it had been! And taking a silk handkerchief from his cuff he passed it over his face before putting on his hat.

Down the broad red-carpeted steps where Chinese lanterns had burned out, he passed into the Inner Temple and the dawn. A faint air from the river freshened his face. Half-past three!

Perhaps he had never danced so often as that night — so often and so long. Six times with Irene! Six times with girls of whom he now remembered nothing. Had he danced well — dancing with HER he had been conscious only of her closeness and her scent; and, dancing with those others, only of her circling apart, out of his reach.

Only fourteen days and fourteen nights — until her closeness and her scent should be for ever his! She should be nearly home by now, with that stepmother of hers, in the hansom cab wherein he had placed them. How Irene detested that woman, and no wonder! For Soames knew well enough that to 'that woman's' wish to get her stepdaughter married, so that she might marry again herself, he had owed his own chances these past eighteen months.

From the hall, bright with colour and dark gleaming wood, he moved slowly into half-lit stillness haunted by the drawl of a waltz fading as he went. And, inhaling long breaths of air grass-scented by the Temple Gardens, Soames stripped off his gloves, thin, black-stitched, of lavender hue.

Irene loved dancing! It would not be good form to dance with one's wife! Would that prevent him? No, by Jove!

By a rambler rose-bush in a tub and a Chinese lantern still alight — last splash of colour in the grey of dawn — he turned, past one dim lamp at the corner of Middle Temple Lane, down to the Embankment, and Cleopatra's Needle. Cleopatra! A bad lot! If she'd been alive now, they'd have cut her in Rotten Row, and run her in for suicide; and there was her needle and herself a great figure of romance — like those other bad lots, Helen of Troy, Semiramis, Mary Queen of Scots — because — because she had felt in her veins what he felt now! Grand passion, no grander than his own! Well, they would never make HIM a figure of romance! And Soames grinned.

He walked half-conscious, a sensation about his ribs, as though his soul were bathing in a scent of sweet briar. All was empty of sound — no footsteps, and no wheels — empty, foliaged, broad, the grey river coming to colour as the sun trembled to the horizon. All waiting for the one idea of the whole world — heat. And Soames, with his one idea, walked fast. Her window! Surely the light in that window would not yet be out! If, for a moment of fresh air, she drew aside the blind, he might still see her, unseen himself, behind some lamp-post, in some doorway — see her as he had never seen her yet, as soon he would see her every night and every morning. And with that thought racing through him he almost ran past each paling lamp, past Big Ben and the Abbey, slowly creeping to colossal life from its roof down, into Victoria Street, past his own rooms to the corner of the street where she was staying. There he stopped, his heart beating. He must take care! She mustn't see him. She was strange, she was fitful — she mightn't like it — she wouldn't like it. He edged along the far side of the empty street. Dared he go further? Surely she could not mind if he walked swiftly past. Fourth house now — first window on the second floor! And by a lamp-post he halted peering up. Open — yes — and the curtains half drawn back to cool the room before she slept! Dared he? Suppose she saw him stealing by, stealing on her when she thought herself alone, unseen? Yet, if she saw him, would it not prove to her once more how that she was his one thought, one prize, and one desire? Could she mind that? In truth — he did not know, and he stood there, waiting. She must come to close the curtains against the brightening daylight. If only she had for him the feeling he had for her, then, indeed, she could not mind — she would be glad, and their gaze would cling together across this empty London street, eerie in its silence with not a cat to mark the meeting of their eyes. Blotted against the lamp-post he stayed unmoving, aching for a sight of her. With his coat he blotted the whiteness of his shirt-front, took off his hat and crushed it to him. Now he was any stray early idler with cheek against lamp-post and no face visible, any returning reveller. But his eye close to the lamp-post's iron moved not from that blank oblong where the curtain stirred feebly in the dawn breeze. And, then he trembled. A white arm from the elbow up had slid into his view, and on the hand of it he saw her face resting, looking straight up over the roof opposite at the brightening sky. With a sort of passion he screwed his eyes to slits that he might see the expression on her face. But he could not — too far, far as she always was, as she must not, should not always be. Of what was she thinking? Of him? Of those little fleecy clouds passing from the west? Of the cooling air? Of herself? Of what? Joined with the lamp-post he stood, still as the dead, for if she caught sight of its thickened base she would vanish. Her neck, her hair looped back were mixed into the folds of curtain — just the arm round and white he saw, just the oval of her lifted face, so still that he held his breath there, a hundred feet away. And then — the sparrows cheeped, all the sky brightened. He saw her rise; for a second saw her nightgowned figure, her hands reach up, the long white arms, and the screening curtains close. A sensation as of madness stirred in his limbs, he sprang away, and, muffling his footsteps, fled back to Victoria Street. There he turned not towards his rooms, but away from them: Paradise deferred! He could not sleep. He walked at a great rate. A policeman stared at him, an early dust-cart passed, the thick horse clop-clopping out the only sound in all the town. Soames turned up towards Hyde Park. This early world of silent streets was to him unaccustomed, as he himself, under this obsession, would be to all who knew and saw him daily, self-contained, diligent, a flat citizen. In Knightsbridge a belated hansom, with a dim couple, fled jingling by, another and another. Soames walked west to where the house, which he with her would inhabit, stood bright with its fresh paint, and a board with a builder's name. In the garnishing thereof he and she had been more conjoined than ever yet, and he gazed at the little house with gratitude, and a sort of awe. Twelve hours ago he had paid the decorator's bill. And in that house he would live with HER— incredible! It looked like a dream in this early light — that whole small long square of houses like a dream of his future, her future, strange and unlived.

And superstitious dread came to the unsuperstitious Soames; he turned his eyes away lest he should stare the little house into real unreality. He walked on, past the barracks to the Park rails, still moving west, afraid of turning homewards till he was tired out. Past four o'clock, and still an empty town, empty of all that made it a living hive, and yet this very emptiness gave it intense meaning. He felt that he would always remember a town so different from that he saw every day; and himself he would remember — walking thus, unseen and solitary with his desire.

He went past Prince's Gate and turned. After all he had his work — ten-thirty at the office! Road and Park and houses stared at him now in the full light of earliest morning. He turned from them into the Park and crossed to the Row side. Funny to see the Row with no horses tearing up and down, or trapesing past like cats on hot bricks, no stream of carriages, no rows of sitting people, nothing but trees and the tan track. The trees and grass, though no dew had fallen, breathed on him; and he stretched himself at full length along a bench, his hands behind his head, his hat crushed on his chest, his eyes fixed on the leaves patterned against the still brightening sky. The air stole faint and fresh about his cheeks and lips, and the backs of his hands. The first sunlight came stealing flat from trunk to trunk, birds did not sing but talked, a wood pigeon back among the trees was cooing. Soames closed his eyes, and instantly imagination began to paint, for the eyes deep down within him, pictures of her. Picture of her — standing passive in her frock flounced to the gleaming floor, while he wrote his initials on her card. Picture of her adjusting with long gloved fingers a camellia come loose in her corsage; turning for him to put her cloak on — pictures, countless pictures, and ever strange, of her face sparkling for moments, or brooding, or averse; of her cheek inclined for his kiss, of her lips turned from his lips, of her eyes looking at him with a question that seemed to have no answer; of her eyes, dark and soft over a grey cat purring in her arms; picture of her auburn hair flowing as he had not seen it yet. Ah! but soon — but soon! And as if answering the call of his imagination a cry — long, not shrill, not harsh exactly, but so poignant — jerked the blood to his heart. From back over there it came trailing, again and again, passionate — the lost soul's cry of peacock in early morning; and with it there uprose from the spaces of his inner being the vision that was for ever haunting there, of her with hair unbound, of her all white and lost, yielding to his arms. It seared him with delight, swooned in him, and was gone. He opened his eyes; an early water-cart was nearing down the Row. Soames rose and walking fast beneath the trees sought sanity.

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FRANCIE'S FOURPENNY FOREIGNER, 1888

In the latest 'eighties there was that still in the appearance of Francie Forsyte which made people refer to her on Forsyte 'Change as 'Keltic' looking. The expression had not long been discovered, and, though no one had any knowledge of what a Kelt looked like, it was felt to be good.

If she did not precisely suggest the Keltic twilight, she had dark hair and large grey eyes, composed music, wrote stories and poems, and played on the violin. For all these reasons she was allowed a certain license by the family, who did not take her too seriously, and the limit of the license granted is here recorded.

Thin, rather tall, intense and expressive, Francie had a certain charm, together with the power, engrained in a daughter of Roger, of marketing her wares, and at the age of thirty she had secured a measure of independence. She still slept at Prince's Gate, but had a studio in the purlieus of Chelsea. For the period she was advanced, even to the point of inviting to tea there her editors, fellow writers, musicians, and even those young men with whom she danced in Kensington, generically christened 'Francie's lovers' by her brother George.

At Timothy's in the Bayswater Road, they would say to her at times:

"Do you think it's quite nice, dear, to have young men to tea with you?"

And Francie would answer:

"Why not?" which always stopped further enquiry, for the aunts felt that it would be even less nice to put a finer point on it, and, after all, dear Francie was musical. It was believed in the family, rather than known, that she was always in love with someone, but that seemed natural in one of her appearance and was taken to be spiritual rather than bodily. And this diagnosis was perfectly correct, such was the essential shrewdness underlying the verbal niceties on Forsyte 'Change.

It was shortly after she had at last succeeded in getting her violin sonata — so much the most serious item of her music — published, that she met the individual soon to be known as "Francie's Fourpenny Foreigner." The word 'Dago' not having then come to the surface, the antipathetic contempt felt by Anglo-Saxons for everything male, on two legs, deriving from below the latitude of Geneva, had no verbal outlet. From above the latitude of Geneva a foreigner was, if not respected, at least human, but a foreigner from below was undoubtedly 'fourpenny,' if not less.

This young man, whose surname, Racazy, had a catch in it which caught every Forsyte, but whose Christian name was Guido, had come, if Francie was to be believed, from a place called Ragusa to conquer London with his violin. He had been introduced to her by the publisher who had brought forth her sonata, as essentially the right interpreter of that considerable production; partly, no doubt, because at this stage of his career he would interpret anything for nothing, and partly because Francie, free at the moment from any spiritual entanglement, had noticed his hair, like that of Rafael's best young men, and asked for the introduction.

Within a week he was playing the sonata in her studio for the first and last time. The fact that he never even offered to play it again ought to have warned Francie, but with a strange mixture of loyalty to what she admired at the moment and a Forsytean perception that the more famous he became the more famous would she become, she installed him the 'lover' of the year, and proceeded to make his name. No one can deny that her psychology was at fault from the first; she gauged wrongly Guido, her family, and herself; but such misconceptions are slow to make themselves felt, and the license she enjoyed had invested Francie with a kind of bravura. She had the habit of her own way, and no tactical sense of the dividing line between major and minor operations. After trying him out at the Studio on an editor, two girl friends, and a 'lover' so out of date that he could be relied on, she began serious work by inviting the young man to dinner at Prince's Gate. He came in his hair, undressed, with a large bow tie 'flopping about on his chest,' as Eustace put it in his remonstrance after the event. It was a somewhat gruesome evening, complicated by the arrival of George, while the men were still at wine, to 'touch his father for a monkey.' His Ascot had been lamentable, and he sat, silently staring at the violinist as though he were the monkey.

Roger, in his capacity of host, alone attempted to put the young man at his ease.

"I hear you play the fiddle," he said. "Can you make your living at that?"

"But yes, I maka ver' good living."

"What do you call good?" said Roger, ever practical.

"I maka quite a 'undred pound a year."

"H'm!" said Roger: "Do you like the climate here?"

The young man shook his hair.

"No! Rain he rain; no sun to shina."

"Ha!" said Roger. "What's your own part of the world?"

"Ragusa."

"Eh! In the Balkans, um?"

"I am ze 'alf Italiano."

At this moment Eustace, obeying a wink from George's brooding eyes, rose, and said:

"Shall we go up and have some — er — music?"

Roger and George were left; nor was either of them seen again that evening.

In the drawing-room Mrs. Roger, placid by now to the point of torpor, had said to Francie:

"Of course, my dear, he is striking in a way, but he doesn't look very clean, does he?"

"That's only his skin, Mother."

"But how do you know, dear?"

"Oh! Well, he comes from Ragusa."

"I wonder," said Mrs. Roger, "if that is where 'ragouts' originally came from. I felt that he didn't care very much for the dinner to-night."

"He's all spirit," said Francie. "Everybody here thinks so much about food."

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Roger, "if it weren't for your father, I shouldn't think nearly as much about food as I have to. I sometimes wish I could go where sheep and oxen are unknown, and there are no seasons."

"Food is a terrible bore," said Francie.

Her mother looked at her intently.

"I'm sure you had nothing but a bun for lunch."

"A bath bun, dear."

"It's not enough, Francie."

"I never have more if I can help it."

"Your independence will ruin you one of these days. I'm certain your father won't like you seeing much of THAT young man."

"Father's hopeless," said Francie. "He ought to be stuffed."

A faint smile appeared on Mrs. Roger's face, as if she were thinking: 'Perhaps he is,' but she said:

"Don't be disrespectful, dear."

At this moment they came, Eustace exceptionally dandified as though to counterbalance his associate. Francie seated her 'foreigner' on the sofa, dark and sulky, and herself beside him. Eustace and his mother played piquet. The sound of George leaving (without his monkey) and soon thereafter of Roger going up to bed, brought a somewhat painful evening to its end.

In their bedroom, after holding forth on a son like George, Roger said abruptly:

"And as to Francie, what does she want to pick up with a fourpenny foreigner for! That girl will get herself into a mess."

Mrs. Roger having exhausted her powers of palliation over George, did not reply.

"A fiddler, too," added Roger.

"She can't help being musical, dear," said Mrs. Roger.

"No good ever came of music," said Roger. "Wake me if I snore; it gives me a sore throat . . . ."

Undeterred by the wintry nature of that evening, Francie continued to promote the fortunes of her 'lover.' She even took him to Timothy's. It was at a period when the whole family was still slightly in mourning, over that "dreadful business of Soames, Irene and young Bosinney, my dear," which had so nearly got into the papers. Extraordinary sensitiveness prevailed, and anything manifestly unForsytean was scrutinised as with the eyes of parrots.

What Francie was doing with a young man whose hair stood out round him like a tea-tray, whose complexion was olive and whose eyes were almost black, was an insoluble problem which all did their utmost to solve, shaking the head and wagging the tongue. Aunt Juley alone ventured the opinion that he was romantic-looking, and was stigmatised by Swithin as a 'sentimental old fool.'

"The fellow ought to be jumping about on a barrel organ in a red cap," he added: "Romantic!"

It was, indeed, the damning of faint praise among a family who felt that romance was the last thing they wanted to hear of for a very long time to come. The visit to Aunts Hester and Juley, at which only Swithin and Euphemia were present, lasted but twenty minutes and was 'carried off' by Francie's bravura. She took her foreigner away in a bus and soothed him with broken Italian all the way home to her studio. Her protective feeling and something slightly rapturous had been roused in her by the sight of Swithin, block-like and portentous above his waistcoats, in a light blue chair. Guido was so delightfully unlike that! Her main energies were now concentrated on securing a concert for him. There was little she did not dare to this end. It took place just as the season closed in a small hall newly opened by a firm of piano-makers.

Among many others, the whole Forsyte family were sent cards of invitation written by Francie. Even Swithin received one at his Club. This was probably the first time he had ever been invited to a concert and he announced his intention of going and seeing what it was all about. In his opinion the girl was spending a pretty penny on this fourpenny foreigner (Roger's phrase having become current). From uneasy curiosity, in fact, rather than from love of music, a considerable number of the clan attended. Swithin found himself situated between his niece Winifred Dartie, whom he always found personable, and his niece Euphemia, who was too thin and squeaked. He slept heavily during the second number and woke just in time, with a snore so loud that it elicited from Euphemia one of the most outstanding squeaks that even she had ever let escape. During the applause which followed, he turned to her, so far, indeed, as he was able, and enquired: 'What on earth she had made that noise for?' To which Euphemia replied:

"Oh! Uncle Swithin, you'll kill me!" She had a great, if inconvenient, sense of humour.

During the third number Swithin remained awake, staring, pop-eyed, at the young man's agility and wishing he had remembered to put cotton-wool in his ears. In the interval which followed he manoeuvred himself out of his seat, and not waiting for his carriage, took a four-wheeled cab to his Club, where he lit a cigar and instantly fell asleep. It was his opinion, afterwards recorded, that the fellow had made a lot of noise — a capering chap!

The concert, which produced the sum of thirteen pounds, three shillings and sixpence, cost Francie practically all her savings. Far more serious, however, was its spiritual effect. The notices were bad. Francie was furious. Guido, who had borne one bad notice beautifully with a curl of his lip, broke into imprecations at the second, tore at his hair after the third, and dissolved into tears with the fourth. Greatly moved, Francie took his head between her hands and kissed him above the tears. And with that kiss was born in her a serious feeling, not exactly bodily, but as if he belonged to her, and must be sustained through thick and thin. A fortnight later — a fortnight spent in storm and shine, during which she gave him a pair of silver-backed brushes, some special hair shampoo, some new ties, and an umbrella — she announced to her mother by note that she and Guido were engaged. She added that she was going to sleep at the Studio till father had got over the fit he would certainly have.

There again she went wrong in her psychology, incapable, like all the young Forsytes, of appreciating exactly the quality which had made the fortunes of all the old Forsytes. In a word, they had fits over small matters, but never over large. When stark reality stared them in the face they met it with the stare of a still starker reality.

Beyond the words: "The girl's mad," Roger, to the infinite relief of Mrs. Roger, said absolutely nothing. His face acquired a sudden dusky-red rigidity, and he left the dining-room. He went into his sanctum — the room where he had thought out the future of countless pieces of house property — took up a paper-knife and sat down in an armchair. He sat there for fully half an hour without a sound except the dull click of the paper-knife against his lower teeth still firm as rocks. Francie was his only daughter, and in his peculiar way (not for nothing was Roger considered eccentric in the family) he was fond of her; fonder than of his mere sons Roger, George, Eustace, and Thomas; and he sat, not fuming — the matter was too serious. Presently he arose and returned to the dining-room where Mrs. Roger was in distraction over the composition of a letter to her daughter.

“Do you know where that young fellow lives?” he said.

“Yes, Roger, at 5, Glendower Mews, Kensington.”

“Write a note asking him to lunch here with Francie today week. Do the same to Francie. Where’s The Times?”

Mrs. Roger produced The Times, and faltered out:

“What are you going to do, Roger?”

“Ask no questions and you’ll be told no lies; don’t get into a fantod, leave it to me!”

He took The Times to his sanctum, scanned a page carefully, looked at his calendar, and wrote a note. Then he got up and stood with his square back to the fireplace and his head bent forward. His full, rather bumpy forehead was flushed. He alone of the old Forsytes had become entirely clean-shaven — another sign of eccentricity at that period — and his rather full lips were compressed into a straight line. The die he was going to cast was momentous even for one who had been bidding at auctions all his life. Ten minutes to ten! Taking up his cheque book, he signed a cheque form, tore it out, put his cheque book into his pocket and rang the bell.

The broad and cheerful butler stood within the doorway.

“Yes, Sir?”

“Come in, Smith, and shut the door. I want you to do a job for me. Take this note down in a cab at once, get what I’ve asked for, pay for it with this cheque — you can fill in the right amount; then bring it straight to me at 5, Glendower Mews. I’ll expect you soon after eleven. Look sharp, and take your toothbrush; you may be away for the night.”

“Yes, Sir.”

When the butler had removed his smile Roger stood at the window looking at the day. It was fine.

“I’ll take no chances,” he said, and went out into the hall. There he took down a grey top hat — the only one then in the family, extracted his umbrella from the stand, and went out. It was the Friday before August Bank Holiday, and he was only in town because a house that he intended to buy was coming up to auction on the Tuesday. He walked slowly, taking care not to get hot. The young fellow — a fiddler and a foreigner — would not be up before eleven, but he had no intention of missing him, and he arrived at Glendower Place about half-past ten. He knew it well enough, for he owned a house there. The Mews was round the corner. Noting that it had but one entrance, he went on patrol. Beyond cats and caretakers no one took any interest in him, and he spent thus a good half-hour. As a neighbouring clock struck eleven a hansom cab drew up and Smith alighted. He handed Roger a large envelope. Having perused its contents, Roger nodded. “Wait here,” he said to the cabman. “Now, Smith, follow me.” At Number 5 he raised his umbrella and knocked. The door was opened by the very pattern of a coachman’s wife.

“I want to see the young foreign gentleman who lodges here — Mr. Guido Ratcatski.” The strains of a bow being scraped up and down a violin were audible. “Up these stairs, I suppose?”

The coachman’s wife, with her eyes on Roger’s hat, replied:

“Yes, Sir, and mind the little step at the top.”

Roger ascended, followed by the smiling Smith.

“Stay here,” said Roger, at the little step; and, raising his umbrella, tapped. The door was opened.

“Good morning,” said Roger, removing his hat and walking in. “Good place for practising you have here. Sit down, I want to talk to you.”

The young man, who was in his hair and shirt-sleeves, put down his violin, and, frowning darkly, leaned against the window-sill, crossing his arms.

Roger surveyed the room. It was, in his view, exceptionally sordid, containing a yellow chest of drawers, an iron bedstead, a round washstand, some clothes littered about, and little else. It was hot, too, had a sloping roof, and smelled of stables. “Phew!” he said.

Behind the young foreigner’s glowering gaze, his shrewd grey eyes had not failed to remark a certain panic.

“Well, young man, I take it you’re ambitious.”

“Ambeetious? Vot is dat?”

“Want to get on in your profession.”

"Yees."

"That's right — quite right, and so you will! Now, about this affair with my daughter?"

"Vell!"

Roger looked straight into his eyes.

"It won't do, you know. You can't afford to marry a girl who'll have nothing. I won't beat about the bush. She's got no money of her own, and if she marries you, she won't get a penny from me."

"Money!" said the young man, violently: "Money! It ees all money!"

"Yes," said Roger, "all money. And I repeat, she won't get a penny from me. How old are you?"

"Tventee-fife."

"She was bottled in fifty-eight. She's thirty if a day. You told me you made a hundred a year. With her stories she makes fifty if she's lucky. A hundred and fifty a year between you? Are you going to support babies on that, at the beginning of your career?"

"Ve lof each oder," said the young man, sullenly.

Roger shook his head.

"No such thing as love on a hundred and fifty a year. Now listen to me."

"I vill not listen — I vill not listen."

Roger slowly raised his umbrella, as if taking a lunar of the young man's capacity.

"This is a passing fancy of my daughter's," he said; "she has one every year — you're the last. Now you're not getting on in London, your concert was a failure, the climate doesn't suit you. I make you an offer." He drew the envelope and his cheque book from his breast pocket. "Here's a first-class passage to New York by the boat tomorrow morning from Liverpool." He tapped his cheque book: "And three hundred pounds if you'll go straight off now, without saying good-bye to her."

He paused, steadily regarding the unfortunate young man, who broke into a violent perspiration, writhed on the window-sill, thrust his hands into his hair, and uttered a curious hissing. Roger made out the words:

"It ees dishonourable. She lof me."

"Nonsense!" he said. "However, I'll make it four hundred, and you can cash it on the way to the station. Now be sensible. My butler's outside. He'll see you comfortably off at Liverpool. With four hundred pounds you can make your name. With a wife and babies you'll starve in a kennel. Give me a pen and ink."

The young man's face was 'a study,' his hair stood up, he stammered incomprehensible words, while his eyes made desperate efforts to avoid the cheque book. Roger waited, holding it open. It was like bidding at an auction.

"I'll throw you in another fifty to start you fair. Don't be a fool and condemn my daughter and yourself to wretchedness. I mean what I said — not one penny will she have from me. Now be a man and save her."

The young man clapped his hand to the breast of his pink striped shirt.

"I feel it 'ere," he said. "I cannot go like that."

"Save her!" repeated Roger. "Come! Where's the ink?"

The young man pointed. Roger saw on the mantelpiece a penny bottle of ink, and suddenly his nerves twittered. It was as if he had seen the brink on which his daughter was standing.

"Five hundred!" he said, sharply.

The young man threw up his hands. "I save her!" he cried.

Roger wrote the cheque.

"Smith! Take Mr. Ratcatski to Euston and catch the next train to Liverpool. Go to a good hotel, see he has everything he wants, and put him on board the boat for New York in the morning. He is called there on important business. On the way to the station go to my bank and get this cheque cashed, and give him the notes and his ticket, when he's on board and NOT BEFORE. He's a foreigner, and might get imposed on." Then, turning to the young man, who was staring dreadfully, he added: "There's a cab waiting. Smith will put your things together."

Francie's foreigner remained rooted to the window-sill, his hands embedded in his hair. Suddenly he came to life, and, seizing his violin, clasped it to his pink striped chest.

"Dees is my vife," he said.

A feeling that the young man was at the moment perfectly sincere quarrelled violently in Roger with the desire to kick him.

"That's right!" he said.

In the doorway he heard Smith murmur: "He'll not get away from me, Sir, if I 'ave to 'old 'im by the slack of his breeches. I'll get 'im off all right."

Roger nodded. "Mum's the word! And if he writes any letters, collar them."

Out in the Mews, he wiped his forehead. Hot work! Passing the cab, he stopped at the corner to watch. He didn't trust that young beggar a yard. In a few minutes, however, he saw him coming hugging his violin and followed by Smith carrying a large bag. They got into the cab and drove off. Roger uttered a sigh of such relief that a passer stopped to look at him; his knees had suddenly given way, and but for the man's arm he would have fallen.

"'Allo, Sir!" said the man. "Took ill?"

Roger shook off his arm.

"No," he said, testily.

He moved away a few steps to assert his independence, but was obliged to stand still again. After all, he was seventy-five, the day was hot, and he had been bidding for the life of his only daughter. To think that a fourpenny foreigner had cost him five hundred odd pounds! Yes, and he'd only got him by pure bluff. HE knew — if that young beggar didn't — that no Forsyte would be capable of watching his own daughter in actual want. If the fellow had held out and refused to budge, the fat would have been in the fire. Sooner or later he would have had to make them an allowance to keep the wolf from the door. A narrow shave! A regular squeak! And seeing a hansom in the distance, he hailed it.

At home, under the strict seal of secrecy, he retailed the matter to Mrs. Roger. She listened in a turmoil of admiration and dismay. "Poor Francie!" she said, tremulously.

"Poor fiddlestick! A fourpenny foreign adventurer! she ought to thank me on her knees. But there it is, I never get thanked for anything."

"Oh! Roger, I'm sure we're all very grateful; but — er — poor dear Francie!"

"If you ever tell her," said Roger, "I'll cut you off with a shilling."

"Of course I shan't tell her, Roger. But why did you make me ask them to lunch next week?"

"To put her off the scent, of course! What did you think? But women never think. Here! Give me one of those powders. I've got a headache."

Smith returned the following afternoon. He had seen 'Mr. Ragcatchy' off. The young man had seemed low-spirited but had counted the notes twice. So far as he — Smith — knew, he had written no letter. As the ship moved out, Smith from the dock below had noticed that he was like a bear on hot bricks, and had caught hold of his hair.

"Hope he pulled some out," said Roger. "I shall raise your wages for this."

"Thank you, Sir," said Smith, "but it was a reel pleasure to me, I do assure you. 'E wouldn' never 'ave done for Miss Francie, if I may say so, Sir."

And Francie! What she suffered, what she suspected, what she knew, no one ever heard. She wrote to her mother after four days saying that there had been a mistake and Guido had gone away. A week later she returned to Prince's Gate, paler, thinner, more Keltic-looking than ever. She left town for Ilfracombe on the following day. In the autumn she took another 'lover.' No one ever heard her allude again to her "fourpenny foreigner." In Roger's mind alone did he remain enshrined as the most expensive fourpennyworth ever known.

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FOUR-IN-HAND FORSYTE, 1890

Such historians as record the tides of social manners and morals, have neglected the bicycle. Yet would it be difficult to deny that this 'invention of the devil,' as Swithin Forsyte always called it because 'a penny-farthing' had startled his greys at Brighton in 1874 — has been responsible for more movement in manners and morals than anything since Charles the Second. At its bone-shaking inception innocent, because of its extraordinary discomfort, in its 'penny-farthing' stage harmless, because only dangerous to the lives and limbs of the male sex, it began to be a dissolvent of the most powerful type when accessible to the fair in its present form. Under its influence, wholly or in part, have wilted chaperons, long and narrow skirts, tight corsets, hair that would come down, black stockings, thick ankles, large hats, prudery and fear of the dark; under its influence, wholly or in part, have bloomed week-ends, strong nerves, strong legs, strong language, knickers, knowledge of make and shape, knowledge of woods and pastures, equality of sex, good digestion and professional occupation — in four words, the emancipation of woman. But to Swithin, and possibly for that reason, it remained what it had been in the beginning, an invention of the devil. For, apart from that upset to his greys, having lived his first sixteen years with 'Prinny' in the offing, and formed himself under Lord Melbourne, the Cider Cellars and the Pavilion at Brighton, he remained to the end in taste and deportment a Buck of the Regency, unable to divest himself of a love for waistcoats and jewellery, or the conviction that women were perquisites to whom elegance and — ah — charm were of the first necessity.

These are the considerations which must be borne in mind when we come to the recital of an episode current on Forsyte 'Change in the year 1890.

Swithin had spent the early months at Brighton and was undoubtedly feeling his liver by April. The last three years had tried him severely and for some time past he had parted with his phaeton, confining his carriage exercise to a double brougham, in which, drawn by his greys, he passed every afternoon up and down the front from the end of Hove to the beginning of Kemptown. What he thought of during these excursions has never been disclosed. Possibly of nothing. And why not? For so entirely lonely an old man, provocation towards thought was conspicuous by its absence; and though there was always himself to think about, a man cannot for ever be bothered by that. The return to his hotel would be achieved by four o'clock. He would be assisted to alight by his valet, and would walk into the hotel unaided, Alphonse following with the specially strong air-cushion on which he always sat, and his knee rug of a Highland plaid. In the hall Swithin would stand for perhaps a minute, settling his chin more firmly, rounding his heavy eyelids more carefully over his gouty eyes. He would then hold out his gold-headed malacca cane to be taken from him, and slightly spread his hands, gloved in bright wash-leather, to indicate that his coat, blue, lined with squirrel and collared with astrakhan, should be removed. This having been done and his gloves and black felt hat with somewhat square top taken off, he would touch the tuft on his lower lip, as if to assure himself that its distinction was still with him.

At this hour he was used to take a certain seat in a certain draughtless corner and smoke half a cigar before ascending in the lift to the sitting-room of his suite. He sat there so motionless and was known to be so deaf, that no one spoke to him; but it seemed to him that in this way he saw more life and maintained the out-lived reputation of 'Four-inHand' Forsyte. Wedged forward by cushions, as though still in his brougham, with his thick legs slightly apart, he would apply the cigar to his ear; having heard it carefully in its defence, he would hold it a minute between puffy thumb and puffier forefinger of that yellowish-white which betokens the gouty subject, then place it in his mouth and wait for it to be lighted. With chest pouted, under a black satin stock and diamond pin, so that he appeared to be of one thickness from neck down, he would sit, contemplating that which was not yet called the Lounge from under drooped puffy lids, as might some Buddha from the corner of a temple. His square old face, perfectly pale, of one long withdrawn from privilege of open air, would be held so still that people would glance at it as they might have at a clock. The little white moustaches and tuft on the lower lip, the tufts above the eyes, and hair still stylish on the forehead, accentuated perhaps its resemblance to a dial. Once in a way, someone whose father or uncle had known him in old days would halt in passing, as though about to set his watch by him, and say: "How d'you do, Mr. Forsyte?" Then would an expression as of a cat purring spread on Swithin's face, and he would murmur in a voice fat and distinguished: "Ah! How de do? Haven't seen your father lately." And as the father was almost always dead, this would end the conversation. But Swithin would sit the squarer because he had been spoken to.

When his cigar was about half smoked a change would come. The hand holding it would loll over the arm of the chair, trembling a little. The chin would slip slowly down between the wide apart points of the stiff white collar; the puffy rounding of the eyelids would become complete; a slight twitching would possess the lips, a faint steady puffing take its place — Swithin would be asleep. And those who passed would look at him with cold amusement, a kind of impatience, possibly a touch of compassion, for, on these occasions, as if mindful of past glories, Swithin did not snore. And then, of course, would come the moment of awakening. The chin would jerk up, the lips part, all breath would seem to be expelled from him in a long sigh; the eyes coming ungummed would emit a glassy stare; the tongue would move over the roof of the mouth and the lips; and an expression as of a cross baby would appear on the old face. Pettishly he would raise the half-smoked cigar, look at it as if it owed him something which it was not going to pay, and let it slip between finger and thumb into a spittoon. Then he would sit the same, yet not the same, waiting for some servant to come near enough for him to say: "Hi! Tell my valet to come, will you?" and when Alphonse appeared: "Oh! There you are! I nodded off. I'll go up now."

Assisted from the chair, he would stand fully a minute feeling giddy, then square but bearing heavily on the cane and one leg, would move towards the lift, followed by Alphonse and the special cushions. And someone perhaps would mutter as he passed: "There goes old Forsyte. Funny old boy, isn't he?"

But such was not the order of events on that particular April afternoon reported on Forsyte 'Change. For when, divested of hat and overcoat, he was about to walk to his accustomed corner, he was observed to raise his cane with the words: "Here! There's a lady sitting in my chair!"

A figure, indeed, in rather a short skirt, occupied that sacred spot.

"I'll go up!" said Swithin, pettishly. But as he moved, she rose and came towards him.

"God bless me!" said Swithin, for he had recognised his niece Euphemia.

Now the youngest child of his brother Nicholas was in some respects Swithin's pet aversion. She was, in his view, too thin, and always saying the wrong thing; besides, she squeaked. He had not seen her since, to his discomfort, he had sat next her at the concert of Francie's fourpenny foreigner.

"How are you, Uncle? I thought I MUST look you up while I was down."

"I've got gout," said Swithin. "How's your father?"

"Oh! just as usual. He says he's bad, but he isn't." And she squeaked slightly.

Swithin fixed her with his stare. Upset already by her occupation of his chair, he was on the point of saying: 'Your father's worth twenty of you,' but, remembering in time the exigencies of deportment, he murmured more gallantly: "Where have you sprung from?"

"My bicycle."

"What!" said Swithin. "You ride one of those things!"

Again Euphemia squeaked.

"Oh! Uncle! One of those things!"

"Well," said Swithin, "what else are they — invention of the devil. Have some tea?"

"Thank you, Uncle, but you must be tired after your drive."

"Tired! Why should I be tired? Waiter! Bring some tea over there — to my chair."

Having thus conveyed to her the faux fas she had committed by sitting in his chair, he motioned her towards it and followed.

On reaching the chair there was an ominous moment.

"Sit down," said Swithin.

For a moment Euphemia hovered on its edge, then with a slight squeak said: "But it's your chair, Uncle."

"Alphonse," said Swithin, "bring another."

When the other chair had been brought, the cushions placed for Swithin in his own, and they were seated, Euphemia said:

"Didn't you know that women were beginning to ride bicycles, Uncle?"

The hairs on Swithin's underlip stood out.

"Women," he said. "You may well say women. Fancy a lady riding a thing like that!"

Euphemia squeaked more notably.

"But, Uncle, why LIKE THAT?"

"With a leg on each side, disturbing the traffic," and glancing at Euphemia's skirt, he added: "Showing their legs."

Euphemia gave way to silent laughter.

"Oh! Uncle," she said, at last, in a strangled voice, "you'll kill me!"

But at this moment came tea.

"Help yourself," said Swithin, shortly; "I don't drink it." And, taking from the waiter a light for his cigar, he sat staring with pale eyes at his niece. Not till after her second cup did she break that silence.

"Uncle Swithin, do tell me why they called you 'Four-inHand Forsyte,' I've always wanted to know."

Swithin's stare grew rounder.

"Why shouldn't they?"

"'Four-inhand'; but you never drove more than a pair, did you?"

Swithin preened his neck. "Certainly not! It was just a compliment to my — er — style."

"Style!" repeated Euphemia. "Oh, Uncle!" and she grew so crimson that he thought she had swallowed a crumb.

Then slowly but surely it dawned on him that he was the cause of her emotion. Into his cheeks a faint pink crept; something moved in his throat, something that might choke him if he were not careful. He did not stir.

Euphemia rose.

"I MUST be going, Uncle. I HAVE enjoyed seeing you, you're looking so well. Don't get up, please, and thank you ever so for the tea." She bent above him, pecked at his forehead, and showing her legs, walked towards the door. Her face was still very red and as she went, Swithin seemed to hear her squeak.

He stayed unmoving for a second, then struggled to get up. He had no stick to help him, no time to give to the process, and he struggled. He got on his feet, stood a moment to recover, and then, without his cane, walked, he knew not how, to the window of the hall that looked out on to the parade. There she was — that niece of his, that squeaker, mounting her bicycle, moving it, mounting it, riding it away. Into the traffic she went, pedalling, showing her ankles; not an ounce of grace, of elegance, of anything! There she went! And Swithin stood, drumming a puffy forefinger against the pane, as if denouncing what he saw. Style! Style! She — she had been laughing at him. Not a doubt of it! If he HAD only driven a pair, it had been the finest in the kingdom! He stood with that distressing pink still staining the pallor of his cheeks — ruffled to the bottom of his soul. Was he conscious of the full sting in his niece's laughter? Conscious of how the soubriquet 'Four-inhand Forsyte' epitomised the feeling Society had ever held of him; the feeling that with his craving for distinction he had puffed himself out into the double of what he really was? Was he conscious of that grievous sneer? Only, perhaps, subconscious, but it was enough; a crabbed wrath possessed him to the soles of the patent leather boots still worn, in public, on his painful feet. So she rode one of 'those things,' and laughed at him, did she? He would show her. He left the window and went to the writing table. And there, his eyes round and yellow, his hand trembling, he took paper and began to write. In a shaky travesty of what had once been almost copperplate, he traced these lines:

"This is a codicil to the last Will of me Swithin Forsyte. To mark my disapproval of the manners and habits of my niece Euphemia, the daughter of my brother Nicholas Forsyte and Elizabeth his wife, I hereby revoke the bequest of the share of my property left to her in my said Will. I leave her nothing whatever."

He paused and read it through. That would teach her! Faithful to the ladies, the half of his property he had left to his three sisters in equal shares; the other half to his eight nieces in equal shares. Well, there would only be seven now! And he sounded the bell.

"Boy, fetch my valet and tell the hall porter to come here."

When they arrived he was adding the words: "Signed in the presence of —"

"Here!" he said. "This is a codicil to my Will. I want you to witness it. Write your names and occupations here."

When they had done so, and he had blotted the whole, he addressed an envelope, wrote:

"DEAR JAMES

“This is a codicil. Put it with my Will, and let me know you’ve had it.

“Your affectionate brother,

“SWITHIN FORSYTE.”

and sealed the envelope with the ‘pheasant proper’ obtained from the College of Arms in 1850 at some expense.

“Take that,” he said to Alphonse, “and post it. Here, help me back to my chair.”

When he was settled in again, and Alphonse had gone, his eyes roved restlessly.

Style! His old cronies — all gone! No one came in here now who had known him in the palmy days of style! Days when there was elegance. Bicycles, forsooth! Well, that young lady had had an expensive ride, an expensive laugh. Cost her a matter of six or seven thousand pounds. They laughed best who laughed last! And with the feeling that he had struck a blow for elegance, for manners, for — for style, Swithin regained his pallor, his eyes grew less yellow, his eyelids rounder over them, and the expression in those eyes became almost wistful. This damned East wind — if he didn’t take care he’d have no appetite for dinner.

Four-inhand Forsyte! Why not — why not? He could have driven four-inhand if he’d liked, any day. Four-inha —! His chin dropped slightly. Four-in-! His eyes closed; his lips puffed; he slept, his hand still resting on his cane.

Into the hall strolled two young men on a week-end from town. Hatted, high-collared, with their canes swinging, they passed not far from Swithin’s chair.

“Look at that old buck,” said one in a low voice. And they halted, staring at him sideways.

“Hallo! It’s old Uncle Swithin, Giles.”

“By George! So it is. I say, Jesse, look at his rings, and his pin, and the shine on his hair and his boots. Fancy the old josser keeping it up like that!”

“By Jove! Hope I’LL never be old. Come on Giles!”

“Stout old boy!”

And ‘the Dromios,’ as they were called, swung on, their lean hungry faces bravely held above their collars.

But the old pale lips of Swithin, between the little white moustaches and the little white tuft, puffed and filled, puffed and filled. He had not heard.

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THE SORROWS OF TWEETYMAN, 1895

When Marian, daughter of Nicholas Forsyte, married Edward Tweetyman in 1882, Nicholas was heard to say: "That chap'll never make money, she'd better have married his brother." The remark, repeated on Forsyte 'Change, invited the family's dispassionate consideration of two individuals as far apart in character and appearance as is permitted by the laws of consanguinity and partnership. The two Tweetymans were engineers by profession, and regrettably, it was felt, pump manufacturers in practice, having their business premises in King William Street. Albert, the elder, was square and stocky in build, red and fleshy in face, with an early smile, and Georgian eyes that reminded one of a bull concerned with Europa. He it was who took the orders, directed the operations, and made the money. Edward, the younger, was a little taller and a great deal thinner, with a refined white face and hollowed temple bones; his weak hair waved faintly on his white forehead, his weak and fair moustache drooped like twin wisps of hay above a selfless smile, and his pale blue eyes looked wistfully forth with the saintlike fervour of an inventor. He invented the pumps, or at least understood how they worked, had a passion for truth, and lived as it were at the bottom of the wells for which they were both designed. Incidentally he received what his brother didn't. It was not much. But being of a loyal and unassuming nature he was not conscious of the discrepancy. Albert had the force of one born to rake in, Edward the charm of one born to give out. The family soon perceived how just had been the remark of Nicholas. But it is not improbable that in this conclusion Marian had been before them. She had, for a daughter of Nicholas, a somewhat sweetened disposition, redeemed by a distinctly having tendency; a good-looking, well-built young woman with an instinctive knowledge of how to dress any shop window. In marrying Edward Tweetyman she had perhaps overlooked the fact that before you can dress a shop window there must be one to dress. The fellow had none. His frontage, as it were, was of stained glass, and she could set nothing in it. With the real shrewdness which she inherited from her father, she had accepted the fact before her honeymoon was over, and had decided to exhibit him unvarnished and ungarnished for what he was worth. This was extraordinarily little in a monetary sense — say four hundred a year and possibilities. She herself had the three hundred and fifty which Nicholas, with a perfect equity, gave to all his children when he threw them out of the nest in Ladbroke Grove. But even in the 'eighties, seven hundred and fifty a year was not the income of a Forsyte with a collecting propensity and fashionable proclivities, so that it was not surprising that Marian banked on the 'possibilities.' Difficult indeed to live with Edward Tweetyman without noticing how illumined by ideas he was: as from one of those wells to which he was always fitting his pumps, they bubbled from him by day and even by night. But with her more practical nature Marian soon grasped the fact that Edward's mind never pursued those ideas to the pitch of profit; his mind stopped at the discovery — the invented machine; what would come of it he left to "my brother." So left, they were not possibilities; Albert, in the words of the prophet, or rather of her cousin George Forsyte, would always 'nobble the lot.' It was not long before she was saying on Forsyte 'Change that Edward was 'a genius and a saint'; which in the terms of family common-sense equalled 'unpractical and rarefied in his conjugal attentions.' And every sympathy was felt with Marian's obvious intention to fill the silk purse she had acquired. It was thought, however, that she might have trouble, bounded on the West by Nicholas, and on the East by Edward's brother. She herself recognised these limitations, for her first attempt was to break towards the South and ally her Tweetyman with one Charles Podmore of North Street, Westminster. He it was who, not long before, had eaten the cherries of Rachel and Cicely, on the Lake of Lucerne, to show them that maggots were harmless when taken in any quantity, and had been a friend of the family ever since. Meeting him at a dance given by her Aunt, Mrs. Roger Forsyte, at Prince's Gate, Marian soon discovered in him a fanatical devotee of ice cream. He had, in advance of science, expressed the opinion that there was nothing more nourishing and wholesome, a very daring view at a period when what gave sensual pleasure was still almost universally regarded as harmful. "Everybody," he said, "ought to eat it; it only wants a really good machine." She had introduced him and his idea to Edward in a corridor, certain that something would come of it. The acquaintanceship ripened at Hurlingham on tickets furnished by Podmore, a man of independent means, who desired them to see him shooting pigeons; for this was in the full blush of that desirable practice, when a robuster community still connected the expression pigeon-shooting with the expression sport. The afternoon, however, furnished Marian with a fresh instance of her Edward's impracticability and plunged her into a certain gloom. For as Podmore was about to destroy his seventh pigeon running, Tweetyman, who had hitherto been occupied by an idea for helping the seat of his chair to turn itself up on a spring, said loudly: "Look out, bird!" and Podmore missed. Marian took him away almost immediately. “How on earth, Edward,” she said, in the hansom cab, “you expect ever to get on if you are so absentminded, I can’t think.” Edward smiled, and looking forth with his pale fervour, said: “Pigeon’s wings are hinged like this,” moving a bluish white forefinger in front of Marian’s eyes. “Quite!” she answered drily — perhaps the first use of this expression —“but are you going to do anything about that ice cream machine? Charles Podmore is set on it, and he has lots of money.” He had pressed her hand. “The Romans,” he said, “knew how to make ice cream better than we do”; and then began nodding his head, from which she understood that an idea had come to him. She had lived on hopefully and abstained from bothering him with questions, for she had a horror of fussing, till one day, going almost mechanically through his pockets, she came on a beautiful little drawing of an ice cream machine in a catalogue connected with the pumps of A. & E. Tweetyman, and realised that it had been finished and had passed into the keeping of his brother. She was really angry. The incident raised so acutely the whole question of his brother in relation to his possibilities. Something must be done! And she did it! She invited his brother to dinner, and on the principle of Greek cut Armenian, exerted all her wiles to get her father to meet him. It was seldom indeed that Nicholas would budge from his fireside, his papers, and his evening journal, except for those public functions at which he invariably made the best speech of the evening. But, though he had no declared preferences among his children, Marian was secretly his favourite; and he came. The evening was one long battle for the soul, or rather the possibilities, of Tweetyman, and he remained completely unconscious of the fact. The whole difficulty with the man, indeed, arose from the impossibility of making him realise his own sorrows. Here he was, with his real gifts, wholly at the beck and call of that despoiler his brother, and incapable of resenting it. Here, if the battle went against his brother, he would be — as Marian realised before the night was out — wholly at the beck and call of Nicholas’s Companies, and incapable of profiting by it. For a side of her father’s character which she had never yet realised, was revealed to Marian that evening: If he secured and employed Edward, it would be as a servant to his Companies and not as a son-inlaw — no nepotism for HIM! In other words Edward the inventor would jump out of one sorrow into another just as deep, and do it without a sigh. Marian had seldom been more disillusioned. The net result of the affair was that Nicholas left the house with an added respect for Albert, and less respect for Edward. When Marian got her husband to bed, she did not blow out the candle, but lay on her side and looked at him. He was lying on his back, with his temple bones extremely hollowed, and a slight smile under the wisps of his moustache. Something Nicholas had said in connection with the watering of engines on his railway had started his inventivity, and he was already halfway towards an improvement. In that dim light he looked almost too saint-like, above his flannel nightgown. Marian was moved; there was charm in the man in spite of the sorrows of which he was so unconscious, and after all she had married him for love. A long time she looked at him with a faint greed in her eyes, and a faint flush on her cheeks.

“Edward,” she said at last, “you seem very far away. After all, I AM your wife.”

The lever which at the moment was engaging his attention, dropped.

“Certainly, my dear!” he said, and turned towards her. She took full advantage of the movement. After all, he had other possibilities, and the evening need not be entirely wasted.

The result, Patricia, was in 1895 already twelve years old, and to her father one of his best inventions. The years had contracted his girth and increased that of his brother, now an Alderman. The aspirations of Marian had remained unfulfilled. True, Nicholas now allowed his children £500 a year apiece, and Edward was drawing £700 a year from his brother, but what was this to a comely and fashionable young matron? The sorrows of her Tweetyman seemed to her more, and to him, if anything, less noticeable than ever. For he was engaged on what he regarded as, so far, his prime invention, a species of pump for the evacuation of goods from Cross Channel and other steamers. He was almost blue-white now and perfectly happy. His cheeks were even more hollow than his temple bones, and Marian had almost despaired of his possibilities. So much so, that her old feeling against his brother had changed to a sort of regard for his possessive genius. That she had remained entirely faithful to her man of sorrows says much for his charm, and the sterling qualities of a Forsyte.

The year of 1895 will long be remembered for its weather. After opening with a frost of some two months’ duration, it broke into a passion of warmth and life which lingered on into the late autumn. A bone-shaking automobile rattled people around at the South Kensington Exhibition, bicycles were all the rage, the river Thames was covered with punts; young matrons went astray. That Marian felt the temper of the year cannot be denied, but to say that she had anything but the most domestic intentions in what has now to be related, would not be true. As Edward approached the finish of his momentous invention, she approached her Waterloo. It was surely now or never, if his possibilities were ever to be capitalised, and his sorrows abated! And she conceived a plan which for daring and realism was indeed worthy of a daughter of Nicholas. To snatch her Edward out of the jaws of sorrow she proceeded to lay deliberate siege to Albert. Though an Alderman, he was still a bachelor, a man of full habit and much red blood, in every respect the reverse of her poor Edward. She besieged him with little dinners, after which she would place him with his cigar in a very easy chair; and send Edward up to his invention. Sitting well within Albert's view in an evening dress admirably cut to display her charms, she would soothe and incite him with conversation bordering on sex: the scandal of the year (that year fortunately very considerable), the latest dancer, this novel, that play. From this it was easy to pass to the playing of piquet, a game during which the knees of opponents can with a little care be made to touch. Nor was it many days before she perceived with a well-simulated surprise that the virile Albert was smouldering. Her duty was then plain. She threw with circumspection just enough cold water on him; performed just sufficiently the function of the wet blanket; watched him fume and then begin to go out; and lit him again with her eyes and knees. After many evenings of this careful preparation she felt that to whatever lead she gave, he would respond adequately; and her only fear was that he would respond before she gave it. This, though it might not be altogether unpleasant, would defeat the truly domestic object she had in view, namely, that Edward should discover her in his arms. She wished to synchronise this discovery by Edward so far as possible with the actual completion of his invention. For she reasoned thus: Unless he had finished it he might be so upset that he would never finish it; whereas if he had finished it she would beg him to take her right away from this man, his brother, to have nothing more to do with him, and to go straight into Featherstone's firm on his own terms with his new invention. It was essential to get Edward to realise that Albert was violently in love with her, and that he would never believe unless he saw it for himself. She had already prepared Featherstone's firm, which was indeed monetarily composed of Charles Podmore; and she had prepared Albert. It now remained to prepare Edward. This caused her much reflection. The room where Edward wrestled with his inventive fancy was at the top of the house, and the problem was how to get him down to the drawing-room so that he could surprise her in the arms of Albert, without going up to fetch him. It was some time before she hit on the solution — simple when thought of, like all great solutions: She would hide the model. She calculated that it would take him two minutes to get upstairs and moon around, finding that it was gone. Another three minutes to search and return to the drawing-room to ask her what could have happened to it. If then she lighted Albert up four minutes after Edward went upstairs she would be fairly safe.

It was not till the morning of the longest day that Edward, singing like a wren in his bath, announced to her that he had completed the model of his invention. Looking at his emaciated form, she said drily: "And high time too." After breakfast she wired to Albert (telephones were not yet installed) to come and dine that evening. Having carefully ordered a heating meal she awaited the crisis with a fluttering heart. All went well during dinner, even to the touching of her foot by Albert, to which she did not respond, so that his eyes became more than ever like the bull's in connection with Europa. She brought up the subject of the new invention, and suggested to Edward that after dinner he should go up and bring the model down. Sitting there, opposite her, his face, though hollow and almost blue, had the shining happiness of one about to enter heaven; and a certain compunction seized on her for the shock she was going to give him. 'It's for his good,' she thought, and passed the tip of her toe across Albert's instep. Dear Edward, how blind he was! When, in the drawing-room, they had partaken of coffee, she said: "Now, Edward!" and looked at the clock. As Edward left the room, she left the sofa, and moved towards the clock. It was of ormolu, a wedding present from her Uncle Roger, and stood on the mantelpiece.

"Albert!" she said, "come here! I want your opinion on this clock."

The Alderman rose. Through her lashes she could see the added flush on his fleshy face, and his quivering lips that almost seemed to slobber. He stood beside her, and with her eyes on the clock Marian pointed out its period. When exactly four minutes had elapsed her straining ears caught a sound on the stairs, and she moved awkwardly, so that her white shoulder came in contact with his chest. The rest was automatic; she found herself face to face with him, his arms round her waist and his lips inclining for her lips. She reined back and his mouth came forward, reaching for her neck. All was as it should be. Then the door opened, and there stood Patricia in her dressing-gown.

"Mummy!" came her treble cry, "Daddy's lost his — Oh!" She vanished: and with a sensation as of vertigo Marian heard her shriller:

"Daddy, Daddy! Quick! Uncle Albert's biting Mummy's neck!"

Then it was that Marian showed her breeding. With inimitable presence of mind she lost it and fell on the sofa in one of those dead faints which are so difficult to see through. Edward, attended by the scared Patricia, found her with Albert standing by and running his fingers through his somewhat scant but well-pomatumed hair.

“Here, I say!” he said, “she’s fainted”; and with a certain aplomb, added: “It’s the heat.”

They revived her with some difficulty, and on Edward’s arm she went up to bed. Albert departed.

“If Albert hadn’t caught me,” she said on the stairs, “I should have fallen badly; it’s lucky he’s so strong. Patricia, Daddy’s model is in the top cupboard. I put it there for safety, and forgot to tell him.”

Three days later the model was patented by A. & E. Tweetyman. Edward had seen nothing. Patricia, who had seen everything, was young and easily gulled; but for some days Marian’s manner to her offspring, who had spoiled it all, was somewhat sharp. Her defeat had been so signal that, like the sensible woman she was, she accepted it completely. Edward was hopeless! She gave him up. A man of sorrows, who, until he died of it, would never know what manner of man he was. As for Albert, she gave him up too. With difficulty Edward noticed that his brother was never asked to dinner again.

It was in a mood of Forsytean humour, one day, that Marian told the story of her defeat to her sister Euphemia, whose squeaks on the occasion were notable; and through this source it became current on Forsyte ‘Change.

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THE DROMIOS, 1900

When the Boer war had been in progress for some time and things were going badly, Giles and Jesse Hayman — commonly known in the Forsyte family as 'the Dromios'— decided to enlist in the Imperial Yeomanry. Their decision, a corporate one — for they never acted apart — was made without unnecessary verbal expenditure. Giles, the elder by one year and of the stronger build, withdrew his pipe from between his teeth, turned a fox-terrier off his lap, and, pointing to the words 'Black week' in the Daily Mail said:

"Those beggarly Boers!"

Jesse, in an armchair on the other side of the hearth, took the fox-terrier on his lap, tapped out his pipe, and answered: "Brutes!"

There was again silence. Then Giles said:

"What price the Yeomanry? Are you on?"

Jesse put his empty pipe between his teeth and nodded. The matter had been concluded. They then remained a considerable time with their high-booted legs outstretched towards the fire, their grey thrusting eyes fixed on the flames, and no expression whatever on their lean red-brown faces.

Being almost majestically without occupations except riding, shooting and games of various kinds, they dwelt in a small timbered manor-house close to some racing stables on the Hampshire Downs. Each had five hundred a year and no parents; their mother — Susan, the married Forsyte sister — having followed Hayman to his rest at Woking in 1895. Neither of them had married or even dreamed of it, neither of them had a mistress; but periodically they went up to London.

Having thus decided to enlist, the first step was naturally to have a night out; and they took train to the Metropolis. They put up at their usual quarters — a hostelry called 'Malcolm's', of a somewhat sporting character in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden; and, after dressing themselves, went to dine at the 'Cri.' There they ate in silence, despatching the preliminaries of a 'night out'— oysters, devilled kidneys, a partridge, a welsh rabbit, 'a bottle of the boy,' and a glass of old port, with only two lapses into conversation, the first when Jesse said:

"Those Johnny birds, the Boers, are getting above themselves!"

To which Giles replied:

"You bet."

And the second when Giles said:

"Buller'll stay the course."

To which Jesse replied:

"Good old Buller."

Having finished, placed cigars in their mouths, secured their coats, and put on their Opera hats, they went out into a mild night, to walk to the 'Pandemonium.'

In old days when they were living in the Hayman house on Campden Hill and reading for examinations which, by some curious fatality not unconnected with brains, they never passed, so that they had been compelled to remain without professions, there had been few evenings when they could not be observed leaning over the balustrade of the Promenade at that establishment. Thence had they watched the acrobats, ventriloquists, conjurers, ballad singers, comedians, and ballet dancers of the period, never manifesting approbation, but not infrequently with a sort of smile bitten in on their faces. Generally they left as much with each other as they arrived, occasionally they left without each other, but with somebody else. It was not known even to each other whether they ever spoke to those others with whom they left.

Having been out of London since the Boer war broke out they had not yet heard 'Tommy Atkins' sung; and when this inevitable item was reached the effect on Giles was observed by Jesse to be as noticeable as the effect on Jesse observed by Giles. After a certain resistance to words and tune due to the need for maintaining 'form' their heads began almost imperceptibly to move in time to the refrain, and, a line or so behind the rest of the audience, their mouths began in a muffled manner to take up the chorus. The effect on them, in fact, was distinctly emotional, which to some extent explains what happened afterwards. The song was scarcely over and a ventriloquist had taken his seat on the stage with a midshipman on his knee when Jesse's attention was diverted by smothered voices behind him. His hearing, trained by listening in coverts for the music of hounds or the flushing of birds, was sharp, and he distinctly heard the following conversation:

"If you don't get me ten pounds to-night it'll be the worse for you."

"Ten pounds? How can I?"

"Well, don't you come home without it."

"Oh! You are a brute!"

"All right, my girl!"

Jesse turned round. He saw, moving away, a hulking fellow of an unpleasant type, and a young woman, rouged but rather pretty, under a big hat, looking after him.

"Hear that, Giles?"

Giles nodded. "Swine!"

Having thus registered their disapproval, they re-concentrated their attention on the stage. It was during the song of a gentleman in a kilt that Jesse felt his arm pressed, and heard a voice in his ear say:

"Oh! Beg pardon! He IS funny, isn't he?"

The same rouged young woman in the big hat was leaning over the balustrade beside him.

She was really young; her mouth was pretty if somewhat artificial, and her eyes, which were dark, looked scared.

"Are you having a night out?" she whispered.

Jesse shrugged his shoulders. Then the strains of 'Tommy Atkins' moving within him, he said:

"I heard what that swine said to you just now."

The professional smile died off the young woman's lips. She crossed her arms on her breast, and air escaped her in a long: "Oh!" Jesse edged his arm away from hers. A minute passed; then her arm pressed his again, and out of the corner of his eye, accustomed to the observation of woodcock, he could see her glancing furtively round. The 'swine' in question was just behind again with two male friends; he was bending on the girl such a look that Jesse said with surprising suddenness:

"Send the swine to hell!"

"What?" said Giles.

"That swine behind us. Swine who live on girls!"

"Steady, old man!" said Giles.

The man and his companions moved on, muttering.

"Oh!" said the girl under her breath: "whatever made you? I'll never dare to go 'ome to-night. What shall I do?"

Jesse did not answer, having no idea. An objection to scenes, rooted in his type, caused him to resume his stare at the stage, now occupied by a male dancer with brisk and glancing legs; but he was conscious of a tear slowly trickling down the girl's cheek, making a narrow track in her rouge and powder.

"You wouldn't take me on, I suppose?" he heard her say.

Jesse shook his head.

"Only up for the night. Going to the war."

"Oh!" said the girl, blankly. "HE WILL wallop me."

Jesse stared.

"D'you mean to say —"

The girl nodded violently.

"Hear that, Giles?"

Giles grunted.

The girl stealthily removed the traces of emotion.

Jesse turned, and, leaning back against the balustrade, surveyed the promenaders. Giles, with mechanical conformity, had done the same. The girl continued to stare at the stage. If she had been ‘kidding’ him — Jesse thought — she would have turned too; besides, her face had gone a queer colour.

“I believe she’s going to cat,” he murmured to Giles.

They both looked at her, but she seemed to have recovered from the impulse, and was sniffing at a bottle of salts. Deciding to move away from her, Jesse had raised his hand to his hat, when he caught sight of the ‘swine’ among a group of men, all of whom were gazing in his direction.

“See those swine?” he said.

Giles nodded.

The group, seeing the brothers staring at them, moved on. Jesse turned to the girl.

“Look here,” he said, “you go to an hotel for the night. We’ll see you there. Better come now.”

The girl, who still looked very queer, turned from the balustrade.

“Thank you very much,” she said, “but I ‘aven’t any money.”

“That’s all right,” said Jesse. “Come on!”

They crossed the promenade and went down the steps with the girl between them.

“D’you know an hotel?” said Jesse, in the Square. “They won’t take you at ours — men only.”

“There’s Robin’s Hotel, off Covent Garden.”

“All right; that’s on our way. Here’s a fiver for you. You’re looking queer.”

“I feel queer,” said the girl, simply. They walked a little in silence, and then she said:

“I couldn’t have stood being walloped to-night — I just couldn’t.”

“Swine!” said Jesse. Giles growled.

Turning into Bedford Street, the girl touched Jesse’s arm.

“Oh!” she said in a scared voice; “they’re after us!”

About fifty yards behind, five men were strolling, keeping their distance, but quite clearly following. Instinctively the Dromios increased their pace, turning into Henrietta Street.

“If they turn down here too, we’ll know,” said Giles.

“I think I’m going to faint,” said the girl.

“Bosh!” said Jesse. “If they follow, we’ll stop them at the bottom here. You can slip on to the hotel sharp. They won’t know where you are. Take her other arm, Giles.”

At the Covent Garden end, he looked back; the men were just turning into Henrietta Street. He gave the girl a shove.

“Now run for it! Don’t be a little fool! They shan’t see where you go; we’ll stop ’em here. Cut on!”

The girl caught her breath, and stammered out:

“Oh! Thank you!” Then, helped by a push from Giles, she vanished round the corner. The Dromios began walking with extreme slowness back towards the men. Giles hummed out of tune, the air of ‘Tommy Atkins.’ The five pursuers, who had been hurrying, slowed up, and came to a halt. Indeed, without going off the pavement, the two parties could not pass each other. ‘That swine’ who was the biggest of the lot, took a step forward, and raising his fist, thus addressed the Dromios.

“We want you two ——. What the —— did you mean by what you said just now? Swine indeed? Swine yourselves!”

The Dromios did not answer.

“You —— have got to learn manners, and you’re —— well going to.”

Giles turned to Jesse, “These sportsmen,” he said, “are rather a bore.”

“Give ’em socks, boys!” said the ‘swine.’

The proceedings which followed had elements so unsporting as to offend every instinct of the Dromios. From the point of view of ‘form’ the whole thing was deplorable; the only feature in good taste being the first blow, a lefthander from Giles which tapped the ‘swine’s claret.’ He was instantly thereafter involved with three of the ‘sportsmen’ and Jesse with the other two. The Dromios were expert boxers, but their opponents butted, kicked, and collared below the belt, so that the brothers were unable to assume any attitude other than those in which circumstances placed them. They were, however, lean and in hard condition, their winds were good, and they fought like tiger cats. The sight of Giles, overborne by weight, being dragged horizontally, so stimulated Jesse that, contrary to all the canons of sportsmanship, he brought his knee up against the chin of one of his opponents; springing at the other, he seized him by the throat in a manner totally unorthodox, and rammed his head against the lintel of a door, then, dashing to Giles's rescue he so socked one of the 'sportsmen' behind the ear that he fell prone. The other two let go of Giles, and the two Dromios were able to place themselves in proper postures of defence. Thereon the combat ceased as instantly as it had begun, the 'sportsmen' vanished and the Dromios were left in an empty Covent Garden. Giles had a cut on his cheekbone, a broken knee, a rent in the tail of his overcoat; Jesse a bruised jaw. Both their ties had come untied, both their Opera hats were in the gutter. In silence they retied their ties, pinned up the rent, brushed each other, recovered their hats, and walked on towards their hotel.

Going up to their bedrooms, they washed, plastered Giles's cheek, bound a handkerchief round his knee, put on smoking jackets, and went down to the billiard-room. There in a corner they sat down, ordered themselves whiskies and sodas, and lit their pipes.

"Those sportsmen!" said Giles. "They got what for, all right!" said Jesse. Both grinned, and for a long time, in silence, gazed before them with the same hungry expression in their thrusting grey eyes.

"Hang that Judy!" said Jesse suddenly. Giles nodded. Soon after, they retired to bed, and completed their night out.

The next day they enlisted, and a month later 'went out' on horses.

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A FORSYTE ENCOUNTERS THE PEOPLE, 1917

In October 1917, when the air raids on London were acutely monotonous, there was a marked tendency on the part of Eustace Forsyte to take Turkish baths. The most fastidious of his family, who had carried imperturbability of demeanour to the pitch of defiance, he had perceived in the Turkish bath a gesture, as of a finger to a nose, in the face of a boring peril. As soon then as the maroons of alarm went off, he would issue from his rooms or Club and head straight for Northumberland Avenue. With his springy and slightly arched walk, as of a man spurning a pavement, he would move deliberately among the hurrying throng; and, undressing without haste, would lay his form, remarkably trim and slim for a man well over fifty, on a couch in the hottest room at about the moment when less self-contained citizens were merely sweating in their shoes. Confirmed in the tastes of a widower of somewhat self-centred character, he gave but few damns to what happened to anything — he it was who used to set his study on fire at school in order to practise being cool in moments of danger, and at college, on being dared, had jumped through a first-floor window and been picked up sensible. On his back, with his pale clean-shaven face composed to a slight superciliousness and his dark grey eyes, below the banding towel, fixed on those golden stars that tick the domed ceilings of any room with aspirations to be oriental, he would think of Maidenhead, or of Chelsea china, and now and then glance at his skin to see if it was glistening. Not a good mixer, as the saying was, he seldom spoke to his bathing fellows, and they mostly fat. Thus would he pass the hours of menace, and when the 'all clear' had sounded, return to his club or to his rooms with the slight smile of one who has perspired well. There he would partake of a repast feeling that he had cheated the Boche.

On a certain occasion, however, towards the end of that invasive period, events did not run true to type. The alarm had sounded, and Eustace had pursued his usual course, but the raid had not matured. Cool and hungry, he emerged from the Baths about eight o'clock and set his face towards the Strand. He had arrived opposite Charing Cross when a number of explosions attracted his attention; people began to run past him and a special constable cried loudly: "Take cover, take cover!" Eustace frowned. A second Turkish bath was out of the question, and he stood still wondering what he should do, the only person in the street not in somewhat violent motion. Before he could make up his mind whether to walk back to his club or on to the restaurant where he had meant to dine, a large and burly 'special' had seized him by the shoulders and pushed him into the entrance of the Tube Station.

"Take cover, can't you!" he said, rudely.

Eustace freed his sleeve. "I don't wish to."

"Then you — well will," replied the 'special.'

Perceiving that he could only proceed over the considerable body of this intrusive being, Eustace shrugged his shoulders and endeavoured to stand still again, but an inflowing tide of his fellow-beings forced him down the slope into the hallway and on towards the stairs. Here he made a resolute effort to squeeze his way back towards the air. It was totally unavailing, and he was swept on till he was standing about halfway down the stairs among a solid mass of men, women and children of types that seemed to him in no way attractive. He had frequently noticed that mankind in the bulk is unpleasing to the eye, the ear, and the nose; but this deduction had, as it were, been formed by his brain. It was now reinforced by his senses in a manner, to one purified by a Turkish bath, intensely vivid and unpleasing. The air in this rat-run, normally distasteful to Eustace, who never took the Tube, was rapidly becoming fetid, and he at once decided that he would rather brave all the shrapnel of all the anti-aircraft guns defending him than stay where he was. Unfortunately the decision was rendered nugatory by the close pressure of a stout woman with splotches on her face, who kept saying: "We're all right in 'ere, 'Enry"; by 'Enry, a white-faced mechanician with a rat-gnawed moustache; by their spindle-legged child, who muttered at intervals: "I'll kill that Kaiser"; and by two Jewish-looking youths, on whom Eustace had at once passed the verdict 'better dead'! His back, moreover, was wedged partly against the front of a young woman smelling of stale powder who panted in one of his ears, and partly against the bow window of her partner, who, judging from the breeze that came from him, was a whisky-taster. On the slopes to right and left, and further to the front were dozens and dozens of other beings, none of whom had for Eustace any fascination. It was as if Fate had designed at one stroke to remove every vestige of the hedge which had hitherto divided him from 'the general.'

Placing his handkerchief, well tinctured by eau-de-Cologne, to his nose, he tried to calculate: It would probably be a couple of hours before the 'all clear' sounded. Could he not squeeze his way very gradually to the entrance? His neighbours seemed to think that by being where they were they had ‘struck it lucky’ and scored off the by-our-lady Huns. Since they evidently had no intention of departing, it seemed to Eustace that they would prefer his room to his company. He was startled, therefore, when his attempt to escape was greeted by growling admonitions not to ‘go shovin’,’ ‘to keep still, couldn’t he,’ and other displeased comments. It was his first lesson in mob psychology: what was good enough for them was good enough for him. If he persisted, he would be considered a traitor to the body politic, and would meet with strenuous resistance! So he abandoned his design and endeavoured to make himself slimmer, that the bodies round him might be in contact with his shell rather than with his essence. Behind his fast evaporating eau-de-Cologne he developed a kind of preservative disdain of people who clearly preferred this stinking ant-heap to the shrapnel and bombs of the open. Had they no sense of smell; were they totally indifferent to heat, had they no pride that they let the Huns inflict on them this exquisite discomfort? Did none of them feel, with him, that the only becoming way to treat danger was to look down your nose at it?

On the contrary, all these people seemed to think that by taking refuge in the bowels of the earth they had triumphed over the enemy. Their mental pictures of being blown into little bits, or stunned by the shrapnel, must be more vivid than anything he could conjure up. And Eustace had a stab of vision. Good form discouraged the imagination till it had lost the power of painting. Like the French aristocrats who went unruffled to the guillotine, he felt that he would rather be blown up, or shot down, than share this ‘rat-run’ triumph of his neighbours. The more he looked at them, the more his nose twitched. Even the cheeriness with which they were accepting their rancid situation annoyed him. The sentiment of the spindly child: “I’ll kill that Kaiser,” awakened in him, for the first time since the war began, a fellow-feeling for the German Emperor; the simplification of responsibility adopted by his countrymen stood out so grotesquely in the saying of this cockney infant.

“He ought to be ‘ung,” said a voice to his right.

“My! Ain’t it hot here!” said a voice to his left. “I shall faint if it goes on much longer.”

‘It’ll stop her panting,’ thought Eustace, rubbing his ear.

“Am I standing on your foot, Sir?” asked the stout and splotchy woman.

“Thanks, not particularly.”

“Shift a bit, ‘Enry.”

“Shift a bit?” repeated the white-faced mechanician cheerfully: “That’s good, ain’t it? There’s not too much room, is there, Sir?”

The word ‘Sir’ thus repeated, or perhaps the first stirrings of a common humanity, moved Eustace to reply:

“The black hole of Calcutta’s not in it.”

“I’ll kill that Kaiser.”

“She don’t like these air-raids, and that’s a fact,” said the stout woman: “Do yer, Milly? But don’t you worry, dearie, we’re all right down ’ere.”

“Oh! You think so?” said Eustace.

“Ow! Yes! Everyone says the Tubes are safe.”

“What a comfort!”

As if with each opening of his lips some gas of rancour had escaped, Eustace felt almost well disposed to the little family which oppressed his front.

“Wish I ‘ad my girl ’ere,” said one of the Jewish youths, suddenly; “this is your cuddlin’ done for you, this is.”

“Strike me!” said the other.

‘Better dead!’ thought Eustace, even more emphatically.

“‘Ow long d’you give it, Sir?” said the mechanician, turning his white face a little.

“Another hour and a half, I suppose.”

“I’ll kill that Kaiser.”

“Stow it, Milly, you’ve said that before. One can ‘ave too much of a good thing, can’t one, Sir?”

“I was beginning to think so,” murmured Eustace.

"Well, she's young to be knocked about like this. It gets on their nerves, ye know. I'll be glad to get 'er and the missis 'ome, and that's a fact."

Something in the paper whiteness of his face, something in the tone of his hollow-chested voice, and the simple altruism of his remark, affected Eustace. He smelled of sweat and sawdust, but he was jolly decent!

And time went by, the heat and odour thickening; there was almost silence now. A voice said: "They're a —— long time abaht it!" and was greeted with a sighing clamour of acquiescence. All that crowded mass of beings had become preoccupied with the shifting of their limbs, the straining of their lungs towards any faint draught of air. Eustace had given up all speculation, his mind was concentrated blankly on the words: 'Stand straight — stand straight!' The spindly child, discouraged by the fleeting nature of success, had fallen into a sort of coma against his knee; he wondered whether she had ringworm; he wondered why everybody didn't faint. The white-faced mechanician had encircled his wife's waist. His face, ghostly patient, was the one thing Eustace noticed from time to time; it emerged as if supported by no body. Suddenly with a whispering sigh the young woman, behind, fell against his shoulder, and by a sort of miracle found space to crumple down. The mechanician's white face came round:

"Poor lidy, she's gone off!"

"Ah!" boomed the whisky-taster, "and no wonder, with this 'eat." He waggled his bowler hat above her head.

"Shove 'er 'ead between her knees," said the mechanician.

Eustace pushed the head downwards, the whisky-taster applied a bunch of keys to her back. She came to with a loud sigh.

"Better for her dahn there," said the mechanician, "the 'ot air rises."

And again time went on, with a ground bass of oaths and cheerios. Then the lights went out to a sound as if souls in an underworld had expressed their feelings. Eustace felt a shuddering upheaval pass through the huddled mass. A Cockney voice cried: "Are we dahn-'earted?" And the movement subsided in a sort of dreadful calm.

Down below a woman shrieked; another and another took it up.

"'Igh-strikes," muttered the mechanician; "cover 'er ears, Polly." The child against Eustace's knee had begun to whimper. "Milly, where was Moses when the light went out?"

Eustace greeted the sublime fatuity with a wry and wasted smile. He could feel the Jewish youths trying to elbow themselves out. "Stand still," he said, sharply.

"That's right, Sir," said the mechanician; "no good makin' 'eavy weather of it."

"Sing, you blighters — sing!" cried a voice: "'When the fields were white wiv disies.'" And all around they howled a song which Eustace did not know; and then, abruptly as it had gone out, the light went up again. The song died in a prolonged "Aoh!" Eustace gazed around him. Tears were running down the splotchy woman's cheeks. A smile of relief was twitching at the mechanician's mouth. "The all clear's gone! The all clear's gone! . . . 'Ip, 'ip, 'ooraay!" The cheering swelled past Eustace, and a swinging movement half lifted him from his feet.

"Catch hold of the child," he said to the mechanician, "I've got her other hand." Step by step they lifted her, under incredible pressure, with maddening slowness, into the hall. Eustace took a great breath, expanding his lungs while the crowd debouched into the street like an exploding shell. The white-faced mechanician had begun to cough, in a strangled manner alarming to hear. He stopped at last and said:

"That's cleared the pipes. I'm greatly obliged to you, Sir; I dunno' ow we'd 'a got Milly up. She looks queer, that child."

The child's face, indeed, was whiter than her father's, and her eyes were vacant.

"Do you live far?"

"Nao, just rahnd the corner, Sir."

"Come on, then."

They swung the child, whose legs continued to move mechanically, into the open. The street was buzzing with people emerging from shelter and making their way home. Eustace saw a clock's face. Ten o'clock!

'Damn these people,' he thought. 'The restaurants will be closed.'

The splotchy woman spoke as if answering his thought.

"We oughtn't to keep the gentleman, 'Enry, 'e must be properly tired. I can ketch 'old of Milly. Don't you bother with us, Sir, and thank you kindly."

"Not a bit," said Eustace: "it's nothing."

"'Ere we are, Sir," said the mechanician, stopping at the side door of some business premises; "we live in the basement. If it's not presuming, would you take a cup o' tea with us?" And at this moment the child's legs ceased to function altogether.

"'Ere, Milly, 'old up, dearie, we're just 'ome."

But the child's head sagged.

"She's gone off — paw little thing!"

"Lift her!" said Eustace.

"Open the door, Mother, the key's in my pocket; you go on and light the gas."

They supported the spindly child, who now seemed to weigh a ton, down stone stairs into a basement, and laid her on a small bed in a room where all three evidently slept. The mechanician pressed her head down towards her feet.

"She's comin' to. Why, Milly, you're in your bed, see! And now you'll 'ave a nice 'ot cup o' tea! There!"

"I'll kill that Kaiser," murmured the spindly child, her china-blue eyes fixed wonderingly on Eustace, her face waxy in the gaslight.

"Stir yer stumps, Mother, and get this gentleman a cup. A cup'll do you good, Sir, you must be famished. Will you come in the kitchen and have a smoke, while she's gettin' it?"

A strange fellow-feeling pattered within Eustace looking at that white-faced altruist. He stretched out his cigarette case, shining, curved, and filled with gold-tipped cigarettes. The mechanician took one, held it for a second politely as who should imply: 'Hardly my smoke, but since you are so kind.'

"Thank'ee, Sir. A smoke'll do us both a bit o' good, after that Tube. It was close in there."

Eustace greeted the miracle of understatement with a smile.

"Not exactly fresh."

"I'd 'a come and 'ad the raid comfortable at 'ome, but the child was scared and the Tube just opposite. Well, it's all in the day's work, I suppose; but it comes 'ard on children and elderly people, to say nothing of the women. 'Ope you're feelin' better, Sir. You looked very white when you come out."

"Thanks," said Eustace, thinking: 'Not so white as you, my friend!'

"The tea won't be a minute. We got the gas 'ere, it boils a kettle a treat. You sit down, old girl, I'll get it for yer."

Eustace went to the window. The kitchen was hermetically sealed.

"Do you mind if I open the window," he said, "I'm still half suffocated from that Tube."

On the window-sill, in company with potted geraniums, he breathed the dark damp air of a London basement, and his eyes roved listlessly over walls decorated with coloured cuts from Christmas supplements, and china ornaments perched wherever was a spare flat inch. These presents from seaside municipalities aroused in him a sort of fearful sympathy.

"I see you collect china," he said, at last.

"Ah! The missis likes a bit of china," said the mechanician, turning his white face illumined by the gas ring; "reminds 'er of 'olidays. It's a cheerful thing, I think meself, though it takes a bit o' dustin'."

"You're right there," said Eustace, his soul fluttering suddenly with a feather brush above his own precious Ming. Ming and the present from Margate! The mechanician was stirring the teapot.

"Weak for me, if you don't mind," said Eustace, hastily.

The mechanician poured into three cups, one of which he brought to Eustace with a jug of milk and a basin of damp white sugar. The tea looked thick and dark and Indian, and Eustace, who partook habitually of thin pale China tea flavoured with lemon, received the cup solemnly. It was better than he hoped, however, and he drank it gratefully.

"She's drunk her tea a treat," said the splotchy woman, returning from the bedroom.

"'Ere's yours, Mother."

"'Aven't you 'ad a cup yerself, 'Enry?"

"Just goin' to," said the white-faced mechanician, pouring into a fourth cup and pausing to add: "Will you 'ave another, Sir? There’s plenty in the pot.”

Eustace shook his head: “No, thanks very much. I must be getting on directly.” But he continued to sit on the window-sill, as a man on a mountain lingers in the whiffling wind before beginning his descent to earth. The mechanician was drinking his tea at last. “Sure you won’t ‘ave another cup, Sir?” and he poured again into his wife’s cup and his own. The two seemed to expand visibly as the dark liquid passed into them.

“I always say there’s nothin’ like tea,” said the woman.

“That’s right; we could ‘a done with a cup dahn there, couldn’t we, Sir?”

Eustace stood up.

“I hope your little girl will be all right,” he said: “and thank you very much for the tea. Here’s my card. I’ve enjoyed meeting you.”

The mechanician took the card, looking up at Eustace rather like a dog.

“I’m sure it’s been a pleasure to us, and it’s you we got to thank, Sir. I shall remember what you did for the child.”

Eustace shook his head: “No, really. Good-night, Mrs. — er —”

“Thompson, the nyme is, Sir.”

He shook her hand, subduing the slight shudder which her face still imposed on him.

“Good-night, Mr. Thompson.”

The hand of the white-faced mechanician, polished on his trousers, grasped Eustace’s hand with astonishing force.

“Good-night, Sir.”

“I hope we shall meet again,” said Eustace.

Out in the open it was a starry night, and he paused for a minute in the hooded street with his eyes fixed on those specks of far-off silver, so remarkably unlike the golden asterisks which decorated the firmament of his Turkish bath. And there came to him, so standing, a singular sensation almost as if he had enjoyed his evening, as a man will enjoy that which he has never seen before and wonders if he will ever see again.

❦

SOAMES AND THE FLAG 1914-1918

On that day of 1914 when the assassinations at Serajevo startled the world, Soames Forsyte passed in a taxi-cab up the Haymarket, supporting on his knee a picture by James Maris, which he had just bought from Dumetrius. He was pleased at the outcome of a very considerable duel. The fellow had come down to his price at the last minute, and Soames had wondered why.

The reason dawned on him that night in Green Street, while reading his evening paper: "This tragic occurrence may yet shake Europe to its foundations. Sinister possibilities implicit in such an assassination stagger the imagination." They must have staggered Dumetrius. The fellow had suddenly seen "blue." The market in objects whose "virtue" varied with the quietude of men's minds and the tourist traffic with America, was — Soames well knew — extremely sensitive. Sinister possibilities! He put the paper down and sat reflecting. No! The chap was an alarmist. What, after all, was an Archduke more or less — they were always getting into the papers, one way or another. He would see what The Times said about it tomorrow, but probably it would turn out a storm in a tea-cup. Soames was not in fact of a European turn of mind. 'Trouble in the Balkans' had become a proverb; and when a thing became a proverb there was nothing in it.

He read The Times journeying back with the James Maris to Mapledurham the following day. Editorial hands were lifted in the usual horror at assassination, but there was nothing to prevent him going out fishing.

Indeed, in the month that followed, even after the Austrian ultimatum had appeared, Soames, like ninety-nine per cent. of his fellow-countrymen, didn't know what there was "to make such a fuss about." To suppose that England could be involved was weak-minded. The idea, indeed, never seriously occurred to one born just after the Crimean war, and accustomed to look on Europe as fit to be advised, perhaps, but nothing more. Fleur's holidays, too, were just beginning, and he was thinking of buying her a pony: at twelve years old it was time she learned even that rather futile accomplishment — riding. Besides, was there not plenty of fuss in Ireland, if they must have something to fuss about? It was Annette who raised the first bubbles of an immense disquiet. Beautiful creature as she was at that period —"rising thirty-five," as George Forsyte put it — she did not read the English papers, but she often had letters from France. On the 28th of July she said to Soames:

"Soames, there is going to be war — those Germans are crazy mad."

"War over a potty little affair like that? Nonsense!" growled Soames.

"Oh! you have no imagination, Soames. Of course there will be war, and my poor country will have to fight for Russia; and you English — what will you do?"

"Do? Why, nothing! If you're fools enough to go to war, WE can't help it."

"We expect you to help us," said Annette; "but you English we never can rely on. You wait always to see which way the cat jump."

"What business is it of ours?" Soames answered testily.

"You will soon find what business when the Germans take Calais."

"I thought you French fancied yourselves invincible." But he got up and left the room.

And that evening it was noticed even by Fleur that he took no interest in her. All Saturday and Sunday he was fidgety. On Sunday afternoon came a rumour that Germany had declared war on Russia. Soames put it down to the papers; but he remained awake half the night, and, on reading of its confirmation in The Times on Monday morning, went up to Town by the first train. It was Bank holiday, and he sought his City Club as the only spot where he might possibly get City news. He found that a good many other men were there with the same object, among them one of the partners in the firm of his brokers, Messrs. Green and Greening — more familiarly known as "Grin and Grinning." To him he detailed his views on the sale of certain stocks. The fellow — it was 'Grin'— regarded him askance.

"Nothing doing, Mr. Forsyte," he said: "The Stock Exchange will be closed some days they say."

"Closed?" said Soames. "You don't mean to say they'd let business stop, even if —"

"It will HAVE to stop, or prices will flop to nothing. As it is, there's panic enough —"

"Panic!" repeated Soames, staring at his broker —'a sleek beggar!' "Cancel those orders; I shan't sell anything."

Not realising that in this he had voiced more than a personal decision, he got up and went to the window. Outside was a regular fluster. Newsvendors were crying: “German ultimatum to Belgium!” Soames stood looking down at the faces in the street. It was not his custom, but he found himself doing it. One and all had a furrow between the eyes. Here was a how-de-do! Down there, on the river, he hadn’t realised. And he had a sudden longing for telegraphic tape.

It was surrounded by men he did not know, and Soames, who had a horror of doing what other people were doing, and especially of waiting to do it, moved into the smoking-room and sat down. One of the least of club-men, he literally did not know how to get into conversation with strange members, and was confined to listening to what they were saying. This was sufficiently alarming. The three or four within earshot seemed suffering only from fear that “this damned Government” wouldn’t “come up to the scratch.” Soames’ ears stood up more and more. He was hearing more abuse of radicals and the working classes than he had ever heard in so short a space of time. The words “traitors” and “politicians” beat through the talk with a sort of rhythm. Though the general trend of the sentiments voiced might be his own, all that was reticent, measured and calculating within him was shocked. What did they think a war would be — a sort of water picnic?

“If we don’t go in now,” said one of the group, “we shall never hold up our heads again.”

Soames sniffed audibly. How? He didn’t see. Germany and Austria against France and Russia — if they chose to make such fools of themselves. Europe was always at war in the old days. And now that they had these thundering great armies, it was a wonder they hadn’t come to loggerheads long since. What was the use of having no conscription and a big navy, if one wasn’t going to keep out of war? Fellows like these! All they thought of was their dividends; and much good that would do them. If England lost her head now, and went in, there wouldn’t BE any dividends. War, indeed! The whole interior of one, who for all his sixty years had been at peace as a matter of course, rose against that grisly consummation. What had the Russians ever done, or the French for that matter, that they should expect England to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them? As for the Germans — their Kaiser was a “cock-snoop” of a chap, always rattling his sabre, and talking through his hat — but they were at least more understandable than the Russians or the French; as for Austria — the idea of going to war with her was simply laughable.

“Albert has appealed to the Powers,” said a voice.

Albert! That was the King of Belgium. So he’d appealed, had he? Belgium! Wasn’t she guaranteed like Switzerland? The Germans would never be fools enough to —! This was a civilised age — treaties and that! He rose. It was no use listening to jingo chatter. He would go and lunch.

But he could scarcely eat — the weather was so hot. He shouldn’t be a bit surprised if that had a lot to do with the state of affairs. Put these Emperors and General chaps on ice, and you’d have them piping small at once. He was drinking a glass of barleywater, when he heard the waiter at the next table say to a member: “So it says, Sir.”

“Good God!” said the member, starting up.

Soames forgot his manners.

“What does it say?”

“The Germans have invaded Belgium, Sir.”

Soames put down his glass.

“Who told you that?”

“It’s on the tape, Sir.”

Soames emitted a sound that might have come from his very boots — so deep it was. He must think. But you couldn’t tell what you were thinking in this place.

“My bill,” he said.

When it came, he gave the waiter a shilling against club rules and the habit of a lifetime; for he had an obscure feeling that the fellow had done something unique to him. Then with a sudden homing instinct, he took a cab to Paddington, and all the way in the train read the evening paper, or sat staring out of the carriage window.

He said nothing when he got home — nothing whatever to anybody of what he had heard — the whole of him absorbed in a sort of silent and awful adjustment. That fellow Grey — a steady chap, best of the bunch — must be making his speech to the House by now. What was he saying? And how were they taking it? He got into his punt and sat there listening to the wood-pigeons, in the leafy peace of the bright day. He didn’t want a soul near him. England! They said the fleet was ready.

His mind didn't seem able to get further than that. To be on water gave him queer consolation, as if his faith in the fleet would glide with that water down to the sea whereon the pride and the protection of England lay. He put his hand down and the water flowed green-tinged through his opened fingers. By George! There went that kingfisher — hadn't seen him for weeks — flash of blue among the reeds. He wouldn't be that fellow Grey for something. They said he was a fisherman and liked birds. What was he saying to them in there under Big Ben? The chap had always been a gentleman, could he say anything but that England would stand by her word? And for the second time Soames uttered a sound which seemed to travel up from the very tips of his toes. He didn't see what was to be done except agree with that. And what then? All this green peace, every home throughout the land, and stocks and shares — falling, falling! And old Uncle Timothy — ninety-four! He would have to see that they kept it from the old chap. Luckily no newspaper had come into the "Nook" since Aunt Hester died; reading about the House of Lords in 1910 had so upset Timothy, that he had given up taking even The Times.

'And my pictures!' thought Soames. Yes, and Fleur's governess — a German, Fleur having always spoken French with her mother. Annette would want to get rid of her, he wouldn't be surprised. And what would become of her — nobody would want a German, if there were war. A dragon-fly flew past. Soames watched it with an ache, dumb and resentful, deep within him. A beautiful summer, fine and hot, and they couldn't leave it alone, but must kick up this devil's tattoo, all over the world. This thing might — might come to be anything before it was over. He got up and slowly punted himself across. From there he could see the church. He never went to it, but he supposed it meant something. And now all over Europe they were going to blow each other to bits. What would the parsons say? Nothing — he shouldn't wonder — they were a funny lot. Seven o'clock! It must be over by now in the House of Commons. And he punted himself slowly back. The scent of lime blossom and of meadow-sweet, the scent of sweetbriar and of honeysuckle, yes, and the scent of grass beginning to cool, drifted and clung. He didn't want to leave the water, but it was getting damp.

The mothers of the boys going off to the war out there; young chaps — conscripts — Russia and Austria, Germany and France — and not one knowing or caring a dump about it. A pretty how-de-do! There'd be a lot of volunteering here — if — if —! Only he didn't know, he couldn't tell what use England could be except at sea.

He got out of the punt and walked slowly up past the house to his front gate. Heat was over, light paling, stars peering through, the air smelled a little of dust. Soames stood like some pelican awaiting it knew not what. A motor-cycle came sputtering from the direction of Reading. The rider, in dusty overalls, flung words at him:

"Pawlyment! We're goin' in!" and sputtered past. Soames stretched out a hand. So might a blind man have moved.

Going in? With little food inside and the stars above him, all the imaginative power, which as a rule he starved, turned active, clutched and groped. Scattered, scuttling images of war came flying across the screen of his consciousness like so many wild geese over the sand, over the sea, out of the darkness into the darkness of a layman's mind; a layman who had thought in terms of peace all his days, and his days many. What a thing to happen to one at sixty! They might have waited till he was like old Timothy. Anxiety! That was it, anxiety. Kitchener was over from Egypt, they said. That was something. A grim-looking chap, with his eyes fixed beyond you like a lion's at the Zoo; but he'd always come through. Soames remembered, suddenly, his sensations during the black week of the Boer war — potty little affair, compared with this. And there was old Roberts — too old, he supposed.

'But perhaps,' he thought, 'we shan't have to fight on land.' Besides, who knew? The Germans might come to their senses yet, when they heard England was going in. There was Russia, she had more millions than all the rest put together — Steam-roller, they called her; but had she the steam? Japan had beaten her.

'Well!' and the thought gave him the queerest feeling, proud and miserable: 'If we begin, we shall hold on.' There was something at once terrible to him and deeply satisfying about that instinctive knowledge. They'd be singing "Rule Britannia" everywhere to-night — he shouldn't wonder. People didn't THINK— a little-headed lot!

The stars burned through a sky growing blue-dark. All over Europe men and guns moving — all over the seas ships tearing along. And this silence — this hush before the storm. That couldn't last. No; there they were already — singing back there along the road — drunk, he should say. Tune — words — he didn't know them — vulgar stuff:

> "It's a long long way to Tipperary,
> It's a long, long way to go . . .
> Good-bye, Piccadilly, Farewell, Leicester Square!
> It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
> And my heart's right there!"

What had that to do with it — he should like to know? They were cheering now. Some beanfeast or other had got the news — common people! But — common or not, tonight all was England, England! Well, he must go indoors.

2

Silence, as of one stricken by decision, come to instinctively rather than by will, weighed on Soames that night and all next day. He read 'that chap Grey's' speech and, in conspiracy with his country, waited for what he felt would never come: an answer to the ultimatum sent. The Germans had tasted of force, and would never go back on their invasion of Belgium.

In the afternoon he could neither bear his own gloom nor the excitement of Annette, and, walking to the station, he took a train to Town. The streets seemed full and to get fuller every minute. He sat down late, at the Connoisseurs' Club, to dine. When he had finished a meal which seemed to stick in his gizzard, he went downstairs. From his seat in the window he could see St. James' Street, and the people eddying down it towards the centre of the country's life. He sat there practically alone. At eleven — they said — the ultimatum would expire. In this quiet room, where the furniture and wall-decorations had been accumulated for men of taste throughout a century of peace, was the reality of life as he had known it, the reality of Victorian and Edwardian England. The Boer wars, and all those other little wars, Ashanti, Afghan, Soudan, expeditionary adventures, professional affairs far away, had hardly ruffled the minds of Connoisseurs. One had walked and talked upon one's normal way, just conscious of their disagreeable necessity, and their stimulation at breakfast time, like a pinch of Glauber's salts. But this great thing — why, it had united even the politicians, so he had read in the paper that morning. And there came into his mind Lewis Carroll's rhyme:

> "And then came down a monstrous crow,
> As black as a tar-barrel;
> It frightened both the heroes so
> They quite forgot their quarrel."

He got up and moved, restless, into the hall. All there was of connoisseur in the club was gathered round the tape — some half-dozen members, none of whom he knew. Soames stood a little apart. Somebody turned and spoke to him. A shrinking from his fellows, accentuated in Soames' emotional moments, sent a shiver down his spine. He couldn't stay here and have chaps babbling. Answering curtly, he got his hat and went out. In the crowd he'd be alone, and he moved with it down Pall Mall towards Whitehall. Thicker every moment, it was a curious blend of stillness and excitement. Down Cockspur Street into Whitehall he was slowly swept, till at the mouth of Downing Street the crowd became solidity itself, and there was no moving. Ten minutes to the hour! Impervious by nature and by training to mob-emotion, Soames yet was emotionalised. Here was something that was not mere mob-sensation — something made up of individual feelings stronger than mere impulse; something to which noise was but embroidery. There was plenty of noise, rumorous, and strident now and again, but it didn't seem to belong to the faces — didn't seem to suit them any more than it suited the stars that winked and waited. All sorts and conditions of men and women, and he cheek by jowl with them — like sardines in a box — and he didn't mind. Civilians, they were, peaceful folk — not a soldier or a sailor in the lot! They had begun to sing 'God save the King!' His own lips moved; he could not hear himself, and that consoled him. He fixed his eyes on Big Ben. The hands of the bright clock, halfway to the stars, crept with incredible slowness. Two minutes more and the thing would begin — the Thing! What would come of it? He couldn't tell, he didn't know. A bad business, a mad business — once in, you couldn't get out — you had to hold on — to the death — to the death! The faces were all turned one way now under the street lights, white faces, from whose open mouths still came that song; and then — Boom! The clock had struck, and cheering rose. Queer thing to cheer for! "Hoora-a-ay!" The Thing had started! . . .

Soames walked away. Had he cheered? He did not seem to know. A little ashamed he walked. Why couldn't he have waited down there on the river, instead of rushing up into the crowd like one of these young clerks or shop fellows? He was glad nobody would know where he had been. As if it did any good for him to get excited; as if it did any good for him to do or get anything at his age. Sixty! He was glad he hadn't got a son. Bad enough to have three nephews. Still, Val was in South Africa and his leg wasn't sound; but Winifred's second son, Benedict — what age was he — thirty? Then there was Cicely's boy — just gone up to Cambridge. All these boys! Some of them would be rushing off to get themselves killed. A bad sad business! And all because —! Exactly! Because of what?

Walking in a sort of trance he had reached the Ritz. All was fiz-gig in the streets. Waiters stood on the pavement. Ladies of the night talked together excitedly or spoke to policemen as though they had lost their profession. Soames went on down Berkeley Square through quieter streets to his sister's house. Winifred was waiting up for him, still in that half mourning for Montague Dartie, which Soames considered superfluous. As trustee, he had been compelled to learn the true history of that French staircase, if only to keep it from the rest of the world.

“They tell me war’s declared, Soames. Such a relief!”

“Relief! Pretty relief!”

“You know what I mean, dear boy. One never knows what those Radicals might have done.”

“This’ll cost a thousand millions,” said Soames, “before it’s over. Over? I don’t know when it’ll be over — the Germans are no joke.”

“But surely, Soames, with Russia and ourselves. And they say the French are so good now.”

“They’d say anything,” said Soames.

“But you’re glad, aren’t you?”

“Glad we haven’t ratted, yes. But it’s ruination all round. Where’s your boy Benedict?”

Winifred looked up sharply.

“Oh!” she said. “But he’s not even a volunteer.”

“He will be,” said Soames, gloomily.

“Do you really think it’s as serious as that, Soames?”

“Serious as hell,” answered Soames; “you mark my words.”

Winifred was silent for some minutes; on her face, so fashionably composed, was a look as though someone had half drawn up its blind. She said in a small voice:

“I’m thankful dear Val has got his leg. You don’t think we shall be invaded, Soames?”

“Not if they keep their heads. All depends on the fleet. They say there’s a chap called Jellicoe, but you never know. There are these Zeppelins, too — I shall send Fleur down to school in the west somewhere.”

“Ought one to lay in provisions?”

“If everyone does that, there’ll be a shortage, and that won’t do. The less fuss the better. I shall go down home by the first train. Going to bed, now. Good-night.” He kissed the forehead of a face where the blind was still half drawn down.

He slept well, and was back at Mapledurham before noon. Fleur’s greeting, and the bright peace of the river, soothed him, so that he lunched with a certain appetite. On the verandah, afterwards, his head gardener came up.

“They’re puttin’ off the ‘orticultural show this afternoon, Sir. Looks as if the Germans had bitten off more than they can chew, don’t you think, Sir?”

“Can’t tell,” said Soames. Everybody seemed to think it was going to be a picnic, and this annoyed him.

“It’s lucky Lord Kitchener’s over here,” said the gardener, “he’ll show them.”

“This may last a year and more,” said Soames; “no waste of any sort, d’you understand me?”

The gardener looked surprised.

“I thought —”

“Think what you like, but don’t waste anything, and grow vegetables. See?”

“Yes, Sir. So you think it’s serious, Sir?”

“I do,” said Soames.

“Yes, Sir.” The gardener moved away; a narrow-headed chap! That was the trouble; hearts were in the right place, but heads were narrow. They said those Germans had big round heads and no backs to them. So they had, if he remembered. He went in and took up The Times. To read the papers seemed the only thing one could do. While he was sitting there Annette came in. She was flushed and had a ball of wool in her hand.

“Well,” he said, over the top of the paper, “are you satisfied now?”

She came across to him.

“Put your paper down, Soames, and let me kiss you.”

“What for?” said Soames.

Annette removed The Times and sank on his knees. Placing her hands on his shoulders she bent and kissed him.

"Because you have not deserted my country. I am proud of England."

"That's new," said Soames. She was a weight, and smelled of verbena; "I don't know what we can do," he added, "except at sea."

"Oh! it is everything. We have not our backs on the wall any more; we have our backs on you."

"You certainly have," said Soames; not that it was unpleasant.

Annette rose. She stood, slightly transfigured.

"We shall beat those 'orrible Germans now. Soames, we cannot keep Fräulein, she must go."

"I thought that was coming. Why? It's not her fault."

"To have a German in the house? No!"

"Why not? She's harmless. If you send her away, what'll she do?"

"What she likes, but not in this house. Who knows if she is a spy."

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"Oh! you English are so slow — you wait always till the fat is in the fire, as you say."

"I don't see any good in hysteria," muttered Soames.

"They will talk in the neighbourhood."

"Let them!"

"Non! I have told her she must go. After the holiday Fleur must go to school. It is no use, Soames, I am not going to keep a German. 'A la guerre comme à la guerre!'"

Soames uttered a sound of profound disapproval. There she went on her high horse! Something deeply just within him was offended, but something sagacious knew that if he opposed her, the situation would become impossible.

"Send her to me, then," he said.

"Do not be sloppee with her," said Annette, and went away.

Sloppy! The word outraged him. Sloppy! He was still brooding over it, when he became conscious that the German governess was in the room.

She was a tall young woman, with a rather high-cheek-boned, high-coloured face, and candid grey eyes, and she stood without speaking, her hands folded one over the other.

"This is a bad business, Fräulein."

"Yes, Mr. Forsyte; Madame says I am to go."

Soames nodded. "The French have very strong feelings. Have you made any arrangements?"

The young woman shook her head. Soames received an impression of desolation from the gesture.

"What arrangements could I make? No one will want me, I suppose. I wish I had gone back to Germany a week ago. Will they let me now?"

"Why not? This isn't a seaside place. You'd better go up and see the authorities. I'll give you a letter to say you've been quietly down here."

"Thank you, Mr. Forsyte. That is kind."

"*I* don't want you to go," said Soames. "It's all nonsense; but one can't control these things"; and, seeing two tears glistening on her cheekbones, he added hastily: "Fleur'll miss you. Have you got money?"

"Very little. I send my salary to my old parents."

There it was! Old parents, young children, invalids, and all the rest of it. The pinch! And here he was administering it! A personable young woman, too! Nothing against her except the war! "If I were you," he said slowly, "I shouldn't waste time. I'd go up before they know where they are. There'll be a lot of hysteria. Wait a minute, I'll give you money."

He went to the old walnut bureau, which he had picked up in Reading — a fine piece with a secret drawer, and a bargain at that. He didn't know what to give her — the whole thing was so uncertain. Though she stood there so quietly, he was conscious that her tears were in motion.

"Damn it!" he said, softly, "I shall give you a term's salary and fifteen pounds in cash for your journey. If they won't let you go, let me know when you come to the end of it."

The young woman raised her clasped hands.

"I don't want to take money, Mr. Forsyte."

"Nonsense," said Soames; "you'll take what I give you. It's all against my wish. You ought to be staying, in my opinion. What's it to do with women?"

He took from the secret drawer an adequate number of notes and went towards her.

"I'll send you to the station. Go up and see the authorities this very afternoon; and while you get ready I'll write that letter."

The young woman bent and kissed his hand. Such a thing had never happened to him before, and he didn't know that he ever wanted it to happen again.

"There, there!" he said, and turning back to the bureau, wrote:

"SIR —

"The bearer of this, Fräulein Schulz, has been governess to my daughter for the last eighteen months. I can testify to her character and attainments. She has lived quietly at my house at Mapledurham all the time with the exception of one or two holidays spent, I believe, in Wales. Fräulein Schulz wishes to return to Germany, and I trust you will afford her every facility. I enclose my card, and am, Sir,

Faithfully yours,

"SOAMES FORSYTE."

He then telephoned for a car, having refused so far to have one of his own — tearing great things, always getting out of order.

When the machine arrived, he went out into the hall to wait for the young woman to come down. Fleur and a little friend had gone off to some wood or other; Annette was in the garden and would stay there, he shouldn't wonder; he didn't want the young woman to go off without a hand to shake.

First they brought down a shiny foreign trunk, then a handbag, and a little roll with an umbrella stuck through it. The young woman came last. Her eyes were red. The whole thing suddenly seemed to Soames extraordinarily barbarous. To be thrown out at a moment's notice like this because her confounded Kaiser's military cut-throats had lost their senses! It wasn't English!

"Here's the letter. You'd better stay at that hotel near Victoria until you go. Good-bye, then; I'm very sorry, but you'll be more comfortable at home while the war's on."

He shook her gloved hand, and perceiving that his own was again in danger, withdrew it hastily.

"Give Fleur a kiss for me, please, Sir."

"I will. She'll be sorry to have missed you. Well, good-bye!" He was terrified that she would begin crying again, or attempt to thank him, and he added hastily: "You'll have a nice drive." As a fact he doubted it, for in fancy he could see her oozing into her handkerchief all the way.

The luggage was in now, and so was she. The car was making the usual noises. Soames, in the doorway, lifted his hand, twiddling it towards her turned red face.

Her lip was drooping, she wore a scared expression. He gave her a wan smile, and turned back into the house. Too bad!

3

Rumours! Soames would never have believed that people could be such fools. Rumours of naval engagements, rumours of spies, rumours of Russians. Take, for instance, his meeting with the village schoolmistress outside the school.

"Have you heard the terrible news, Mr. Forsyte?"

Soames' hair stood up under his hat.

"No; what's that?"

"Oh! there's been a dreadful battle at sea. We've lost six battleships. Isn't it awful?"

Soames' fists clenched themselves in his pockets.

"Who told you that?"

"It's all over the village. Six ships — isn't it terrible?"

"What did the Germans lose?"

"Twelve!"

Soames almost jumped.

"Twelve! Then the war's over. What do you mean — terrible — why, it's the best news we could have!"

"Oh! but six of our own ships — it's awful!"

"War is awful," said Soames. "But if this is true —" He left her abruptly and made for the Post Office. It was not true, of course. Nothing was true. Not even his own suspicions. Take, for instance, those two square-shouldered men in straw hats whom he met walking down a lane with their feet at right angles, as Englishmen never walked. Germans, and spies into the bargain, or he was a Dutchman; especially as his telephone went out of order that very afternoon. And of course they turned out to be two Americans staying at Pangbourne on a holiday, and the wire had been affected by a thunderstorm. But what were you to think, when the newspapers were full of spy stories, and the very lightning was apparently in the German secret service. As to mirrors in daylight and matches after dark, they were in obvious communication with the German fleet in the Kiel Canal, or wherever it was. Time and again Soames would say:

"Bunkum! The whole thing's weak-minded!" Only to feel himself weak-minded the next moment. Look at those two hundred thousand Russians whom everybody was seeing in trains all over the country. They turned out to be eggs, and probably addled at that; but how could you help believing in them, especially when you wanted to! And then the authorities told you nothing; dumb as oysters; as if that were the way to treat an Englishman — it only made him fancy things. And there was Mons. They couldn't even let you know about the army, except that it was heroic, and had killed a lot of Germans, and was marching backwards in order to put the finishing touch to them. That was about all one heard, till suddenly one found it was touch and go whether Paris could be saved, and the French Government had packed their traps and gone off to Bordeaux. And all the time nothing to do but read the papers, which he couldn't believe, and listen to the click of Annette's needles. And then came the news of the battle of the Marne, and he could breathe again.

He breathed freely — he had gone weeks, it seemed to him, without taking a deep breath. People were saying it was the beginning of the end, and the Allies — he himself had always called it Allies — and why not? — would soon be in Germany now. He wanted to believe this so much, that he said he didn't believe a word of it, much as when, the weather looking fine, he would take his umbrella to make sure. And then, forsooth, they went and dug themselves in! This beginning of warfare which was to last four years, produced but moderate premonition in his mind. There was a certain relief in the immobility of things after the plunging excitement of Mons and the Marne. He continued to read the papers, shake his head, and invest in War Loan. His nephew Benedict was training for a commission in Kitchener's army; Cicely's boy, also, had joined up, as they called it. He supposed they had to. Annette had said several times that she wanted to go to France and be a nurse. It was all her fancy. She could do much more good by knitting and being economical.

Presently he took Fleur down to her school in the West; and not much too early, for the Zeppelins became busy soon after. In regard to their exploits, he displayed a somewhat natural perversity, for though he had taken his daughter down to a remote region to avoid them, he thought people made much too much fuss about them altogether. From a top window in his Club he was privileged to see one of them burst into flames. He said nothing and was glad of it afterwards — some of his fellow-members had shown their feelings, and those not all they should be. There was provocation, no doubt; but, after all, the crew were being burned alive. Generally speaking, while the war dragged on, the reality of it was kept from him most efficiently not only by the Government, the papers, and his age, but by a sort of barrage put up by himself from within himself. There the thing was, and what was the use of making more of it than he absolutely had to? If one ever came to the end, one might indulge one's feelings, perhaps. And always the doings at sea, the adventures and misadventures of ships, impinged on him with a poignancy absent from the events on land. Of all that happened in the early part of the war, the bombardment of Scarborough affected him, perhaps, most painfully. It was like a half-arm jab above the heart. His pride was stunned. The notion that ships had dared to come so near as to throw shells into English houses and not been sunk for doing it, was peculiarly horrible to him. What would they be doing next? He had a continual longing for something definite at sea, some sign there of British superiority, as if "Rule Britannia" had got into the composition of his blood. The sinking of the Lusitania gave him at first much the same shock that it gave everyone else, but when he heard people abusing the

Americans for not declaring war at once, he felt that they were extravagant. The Americans were a long way off — to talk about their being in danger was as good as saying that England was going to be defeated; which, curiously, considering his constitutional apprehensiveness, Soames never could believe. He had a sort of deep feeling, indeed, that he did not want to be rescued by America or anybody else. But these feelings were curiously mixed up with another feeling that if England had, like America, lost a lot of English people drowned like that, she would have gone to war like a shot, and with his approval, into the bargain.

Early in 1915, owing to depletion of the office staff, he had gone back into regular harness at Cuthcott Kingson and Forsyte's. He worked there, harder than he had ever worked. In view of national anxieties the legal issues he was dealing with often seemed to him "petty," but he dealt with them conscientiously; they took his mind off, and incidentally gave him more money to invest in War Loan. After the second battle of Ypres, he had contributed an ambulance, and had the exquisite discomfort of seeing his name in the papers. When in the train, going up and down, or at lunch time in his City Club, he listened to elderly wiseacres discussing the conduct of the war, the nature of Germans, politicians, Americans, and other reprehensible characters, he would look exactly as if he were going to sniff.

'What do they know about it,' he would think, 'talking through their hats like that — it's unEnglish.' There was so much in those days that was hysterical and 'unEnglish'; the papers encouraged it with their "intern-the-Hun" and other "stunts," as they called it nowadays. If ever there were a time when mouths required shutting, it was now; and there they were, spluttering and bawling all over the place.

In these ways, then, nearly two years passed before in his paper that June morning he read the first official account of the battle of Jutland. Taking the journal in his hand so that no one else should see it till he himself had recovered, he passed out of the drawing-room window on to the dewy lawn, and walked blindly towards the river. There was a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Standing there bareheaded in the sunshine and the peace of leaves and water, with birds all round as if nothing had happened, he tried to get hold of himself. Almost a sense of panic he had. A real battle at last, and all those losses! Under a poplar tree he read the account again. The sting was in the head of it; the tail was all right! Why couldn't they have reversed the order and begun with the fact that the Germans had run for home? What had possessed them to make him feel so bad? It was a victory even if we HAD lost all those ships. A blundering lot — making the worst of it like that! It was like being shot by your own side. Tell the truth — yes; but not so as to give you a stomach-ache, where there was no need for it. He went back to breakfast with his jaw set.

"There's been a big battle at sea," he said to Annette; "we lost a lot of ships, but the Germans cut and ran for it. I shouldn't be surprised if they never come out again." Thus out of instinctive perversity did he foretell the future.

The rest of the day and the day after, further reports confirmed his resentment with the authorities for making him suffer like that. What on earth had they been about! They kept all sorts of things from you, and then when they had what really amounted to good news, blurted it out as if it were a disaster.

The death of Kitchener a few days later, though lowering to his temperature, had not the same staggering effect. He had done a lot for the country, and looked like a lion in a Zoo, but in the ebb and flow of world events even his great figure seemed small.

Towards the end of 1916 he had a curious little personal experience which affected him more than he would have admitted, so that he never mentioned it. This was in the train going up to London. From patriotic motives he was at that time travelling third, but on this particular morning, the train being full, he got into a first-class compartment, occupied by a young officer in uniform with his military kit in the rack above, and a pretty young woman whose eyes were red. From behind his paper Soames felt that if they were not married, they ought to be, for they were mutually occupied with each other's eyes and hands and lips. At stations where their occupation had to cease he observed them round his nose. The pallid desperation of the young man's face and the look in the girl's reddened eyes gave him definite discomfort. Here was a case of impending separation, with all the tragic foreboding, and utter grief of war-time partings such as were taking place millionfold all over the world. It was the first Soames had seen, close up, and far more painful than he had realised. They were locked in a desperate embrace when the train ran in to Westbourne Park. The girl was evidently to get out here, and seemed incapable of doing so. She stood swaying with the tears running down her face. The young officer wrenched the door open and almost pushed her out. Her face, looking up from the platform, was so intensely wretched that it made Soames sore. The train moved on, the young officer flung himself back into his corner with a groan. Soames looked out of the opposite window. For a whole minute even after the train had reached Paddington, he continued to gaze in at a deserted carriage alongside. At last, grasping his umbrella, he evacuated the now empty compartment and getting into a taxi, uttered the word “Poultry” in a gruff voice. He was gruff all day. All over the world it was like that — a shocking business! And yet, by now, people seemed more concerned about their sugar and butter rations than about the war itself. Air-raids, ships being sunk, and what they could get to eat, were all people thought about — except, of course, dancing in night clubs and making up their faces. In all his life he had never seen so many made-up faces as he saw now. In coming from the office late and passing down the Strand, every woman he met seemed like the street women he used to see in his younger days. Paint and powder, with khaki alongside!

And so 1917 went by, and Fleur was getting a big girl. He had good reports of her — she was quick at lessons and games; it was some comfort. At her school down in the west, he gathered, they heard and saw very little of the war; and in the holidays he kept her at home as much as he could. There were few signs of war at Mapledurham, though of course khaki was everywhere. When conscription came in, Soames had shaken his head. He didn’t know what the newspapers were about. The thing was unEnglish. Once it was introduced, however, he supposed it was the only thing. All the same, he never approved of the way they bullied those conscientious objectors. He had no sympathy with the fellows’ consciences, of course, but the idea of harassing your fellow-countrymen at a time like this, repelled him; all his native individualism, too, remained in secret revolt against the slave-driving which had become the everyday procedure of abominable times. He had lost two gardeners in the opening year, and now they took the other two and left him with an old man and a boy, so that he often took a spud and dug up weeds himself, while Annette killed slugs with a French mixture. In the house he had never had anything but maids, so that they couldn’t take the butler he hadn’t got, which was some consolation. But if he’d had a car, they’d have taken his chauffeur. He felt he could have lost the lot with composure, if they’d gone of their own free will, but he would not have urged their going. Some reticent, secret belief in the sanctity of private feelings, even feelings about the country, would have prevented him. They had a right, he supposed, to their own ideas about things. If he, himself, had been under forty, he supposed he would have gone — though the mere notion gave him a pain below the ribs, so crude, so brutal, and so empty did all this military business appear to him; but he was not prepared to tell anybody else to go. His retention of this kind of delicacy made him lonelier than ever in the City, in the Club, and in trains, where most people seemed prepared to tell anybody to do anything. Soames himself was almost ashamed of his delicacy; you couldn’t carry on a war without ordering people about. And he tried to conduct himself so that people shouldn’t suspect him of this weakness. But on one occasion it led him into a serious tiff with his cousin George Forsyte at the “Iseeum” Club. George, just a year younger than himself, had, it appeared, gone in for recruiting down in Hampshire; while spending the week-ends in town “to enjoy the air-raids,” as he put it. Soames suspected him of enjoying something else, besides. Catching sight of George, then, one Saturday afternoon, sitting in the bow window of the “Iseeum,” Soames had inadvertently returned his greeting and was beckoned up.

“Have a drink?” said George: “No? Some tea, then; you can have my sugar.”

His japing, heavy-lidded eyes took Soames in from top to toe.

“You’re thin as a lathe,” he said: “What are you doing — breeding for the country?”

Soames drew up the corner of his lip.

“That’s not funny,” he said tartly. “What are you doing?”

“Getting chaps killed. You’d better take to it, too. The blighters want driving, now.”

“Thank you,” said Soames; “not in my line.”

George grinned.

“Too squeamish?”

“If you like.”

“What’s your general game, then?”

“Minding my own business,” said Soames.

“Making the wills, eh?”

Soames put his cup down, and took his hat up. He had never disliked George more than at that moment.

“Don’t get your shirt out,” said George; “somebody must make the wills. You might make mine, by the way — equal shares to Roger, Eustace and Francie. Executors yourself and Eustace. Come and do an air-raid with me one night. Did you see St. John Hayman's boy was killed? They say the Huns are preparing a big push for the spring."

Soames shrugged.

"Good-bye," he said; "I'll send you a draft of your will."

"Pitch it short," said George, "and have me roasted. No bones by request."

Soames nodded, and went out.

A big push! Would they never tire of making mincemeat of the world? He had often been tempted towards the Lansdowne attitude; but some essential bulldog within him had always stirred and growled. An end that was no end — after all this, it wouldn't do! Hold on — until! For never, even at the worst moments, had he believed that England could be beaten.

In March 1918 he had been laid up at Mapledurham with a chill and was only just out again, when the big German "push" began. It came with a suddenness that shook him to the marrow, and induced the usual longing to get away somewhere by himself. He went up rather slowly on to a bit of commonland, and sat down on his overcoat among gorse bushes. It was peaceful and smelled of spring; a lark was singing. And out there the Germans were breaking through! A sort of prayer went up from him while he sat in the utter peace of the mild day. He had heard so many times that we were ready for it; and now we weren't, it seemed. Always the way! Too cocksure! He sat listening, as if — as if one could hear the guns all that way off. The man down at the lock was reported to have heard them once. All me eye! You couldn't! Couldn't you? Wasn't that —? Nonsense! He lay back and put his ear to the ground, but only the whisper of a very gentle wind came to him, and the hum of a wild bee wending to some blossom of the gorse. A better sound than that of guns. And then the first chime of the village church bell tingled his ears. There they would soon be sitting and kneeling and thinking about the break-through, and the parson would offer up a special prayer for the destruction of Germans — he shouldn't wonder. Well, it was destroy or be destroyed — it all came back to that. Funny thing, life — living on life, or rather on death! According to the latest information, all matter was alive, and every shape lived on some other shape, or at least on the elements of shape. The earth was nothing but disintegrated shape, out of which came more shapes and you ate them, and then you disintegrated and gave rise to shapes, and somebody ate them, and so it went on. In spite of the break-through, he could not help being glad to be alive after a fortnight cooped up in the house. His sense of smell, too, so long confined to eau-de-Cologne, was very keen this morning; he could smell the gorse — a scent more delicate than most, 'the scent of gorse far-blown from distant hill,' he'd read somewhere. And to think that out there his countrymen were struggling and dying and being blown to smithereens — young fellows, from his office, from his garden, from every English office and garden to save England — to save the world, they said — but that was flim-flam! And, perhaps, after all these horrible four years they wouldn't save England! Drawing his thin legs under him, he sat staring down towards the river where his home lay. Yes, they would save her, if it meant putting another ten years on to the conscription age, or taking the age limit off altogether. England under a foreigner? Not for Joe! He scrabbled with his hand, brought up a fistful of earth, and mechanically put it to his nose. It smelled exactly as it should smell — of earth, and gave him ever so queer and special a sensation. English earth! H'm! Earth was earth, whether in England or in Timbuctoo! Funny to give your life for what smelled exactly like his mushroom house. You put a name to a thing and you died for it! There was a lark singing — very English bird, cheery and absent-minded, singing away without knowing a thing about anything and caring less, he supposed. The bell had ceased to toll for service. If people thought God was particularly interested in England, they were mistaken. He wouldn't do a thing about it! People had to do things for themselves, and if they didn't, that was the end. Take those submarines. Leave them to God and see what happened — one would be eating one's fantails before one could say Jack Robinson!

The mild air and a slant of March sunlight gently warmed his cheek pale from too much contact with a pillow. And — out there! If ever this thing ended, he would come up here again and see what it was like without an ache under his fifth rib. A nice spot — open and high. And now he would have to get back to the house and they would give him chicken broth, and he would have to listen to Annette saying that the English never saw an inch before their noses — which as a matter of fact they didn't — and tell her that they did. A weary business when you felt as he felt about this news. He rose. Twelve o'clock! They'd have finished praying now and got to the sermon. He pitied that parson — preaching about the Philistines, he shouldn't wonder! There were the jawbones of asses about, plenty, but not a Samson among the lot of them. The gorse — it was early — looked pretty blooming round him — when the gorse was out of bloom, kissing was out of fashion. He wondered idly what had to go out of bloom before killing was out of fashion. There was a hawk! He stood and watched it hover and swoop sideways, and the red glint of it, till again it rested hovering on the air; then slowly in the pale sunlight he wended his way down towards the river.

4

July came. The break-through had long been checked, the fronts repaired, the Americans had come over in great numbers, Foch was in supreme command. Soames didn't know — perhaps it was necessary, but Annette's undisguised relief was unpleasant to him, and so far as he could see, things were going on as interminably as before. It was to Winifred that he spoke the words which definitely changed the fortunes of the world.

"We shall never win," he said, "I despair of it. The men are all right, but leaders! There isn't one among the lot — I despair of it." No one had ever heard him talk like that before, or use such a final word. The morning papers on the following day were buoyant with the news that the German offensive against the French had been stopped and that the French and Americans had broken through. From that day on the Allies, as Soames still called them, never looked back.

Those interested in such questions will pause, perhaps to consider whether Soames — like so many other people — really won the war, or whether it was that in him some hidden sensibility received in advance of the newspapers the impact of events and put up the instantaneous contradiction natural from one so individualistic. Whichever is true, the relief he felt at having his dictum contradicted was extraordinary. For the first time in three years he spent the following Sunday afternoon in his picture gallery. The French were advancing, the English were waiting to advance; the Americans were doing well; the air-raids had ceased; the submarines were beaten. And it all seemed to have happened in two days. While he stood looking at his Goya and turning over photographs of pictures in the Prado, a notion came to him. In that painting of Goya's called "La Vendimia," the girl with the basket on her head reminded him of Fleur. There was really quite a resemblance. If the war ever stopped, he would commission an artist to make him a copy of that Goya girl — the colouring, if he remembered rightly, was very agreeable. It would remind him of pleasant things — his daughter and his visit to the Prado before he bought Lord Burlingford's 'Goya' in 1910. A notion so utterly unconnected with the war had not occurred to him for years — it was almost like a blessing, with its suggestion of life apart from battle and murder, and once more connected with Dumetrius. And ringing the bell, he ordered a jug of claret cup. He drank very little of it, but it gave him a feeling that was almost Victorian. What had that fellow Jolyon, and Irene, done with themselves all these war years? Had they sweated in their shoes and lost weight as he had done — he hoped so! Their boy, if he remembered, would be of military age next year; for the thousandth time he was glad that Fleur had disappointed him and been a girl. That day was, on the whole, the happiest he had spent since he bought his James Maris in July 1914 . . .

He began now to put on weight slowly, for though the battles went on, anxious and bloody, the movement was always in the right direction, of which he had despaired just in time. The enemy was caving-in; the Bulgarians, the Turks, soon the Austrians would go — they said. And all the time the Americans were swarming over. Soames met their officers in London on his way to and from the City. They wore khaki with high collars and sometimes pince-nez — they must feel very uncomfortable; but they seemed in good spirits and had everything money could buy — which was the great thing. He often thought what he would do when the end came. Some men would get drunk, he supposed; others would lose their heads and probably their hats; but so far as he could see, there didn't seem to be any adequate way of expressing what he himself would feel. He thought of Brighton, and of fishing in a punt; he thought of taking train down to Fleur's school and taking train back; he thought of standing in a crowd opposite Downing Street, as he had stood when the thing began. Nothing seemed satisfactory. Then the Austrians gave up. Somehow he had never thought that he had actually been at war with the Austrians — they were an amiable lot, with too many archdukes. And now that they were down and out, and the archdukes done with, he felt quite sorry for them. People were saying it had become a question of days. Soames didn't know. The Germans always seemed to have something up their sleeves. They had been marvellous fighters — no good saying they hadn't — in fact, they had fought too well altogether. He shouldn't be surprised if they tried to destroy London at the last minute. And with unconscious perversity he took up his quarters with Winifred in Green Street. On the ninth of November he had his sixty-fourth birthday there — fortunately no one remembered it; he never could bear receiving presents and being wished many happy returns, such nonsense! Everybody was sure now that it was all over bar the shouting. Soames, however, said: "You mark my words — they'll try a big air-raid before they finish." Terms for an Armistice were being prepared: it was rumoured that they would be signed at any moment. Soames shook his head. He was sufficiently in two minds, however, not to go to the City on November 11th, and was seated in the dining-room at Green Street, when there came the sound of maroons which always preluded an air-raid. What had he told them? It would be a quarter-of-an-hour or more before the raid began. He would put his nose out, and see what they were up to. The street was empty but for an old woman — charlady she seemed to be — standing with a duster in her hand on the doorstep of the next house. Soames was struck by her face. It wore a smile such as a poet might have called ecstatic. She waved her duster at him, and then — most peculiar — began to wipe her eyes with it. Sound rolled into the street from Park Lane — cheering, gusts of it, waves of cheering. Soames saw other people rushing out of houses. One of them threw his hat down and danced on it. It couldn't be an air-raid then — no man would do that for an air-raid. Why? Why — of course — it was the Armistice! AT LAST! And very quietly, trembling all over, Soames muttered: "Thank God!" For a moment he was tempted to hurry down towards Park Lane whence the sound of cheering came. Then, suddenly, the idea seemed to him vulgar. He walked back into the house and slammed the door. Going into the dining-room, he sat down in an armchair which had its back to everything. He sat there without movement except that he breathed as if he had been running. His lips kept quivering. It was queer. And then — he never admitted it to a soul — tears ran out of his eyes and rolled on to his stiff collar. He would not have believed them possible and he let them roll. The long, long Thing — it was over. All over! Then suddenly, feeling that if he didn't take care he would have to change his collar, he took out his pocket handkerchief. This confession of his emotion acted like a charm. The moisture ceased, and removing all trace of it, he leaned back with eyes closed. For some time he stayed like that, as if at the end of a long day's work. The clamour of bells and rejoicing penetrated the closed room, but Soames sat with his head sunk on his chest, still quivering all over. It was as if age-long repression of his feelings were taking revenge in this long, relaxed, quivering immobility. Out there, they would be dancing and shouting; laughing and drinking; praying and weeping. And Soames sat and quivered.

He got up at last and going to the sideboard, helped himself to a glass of his dead father's old brown sherry. Then taking his overcoat and umbrella, he went out — he didn't know why, or whither on earth.

He walked through quiet streets towards Piccadilly. When he passed people they smiled at him, and he didn't like it — having to smile back. Some seemed to toss remarks at the air as they passed — talking to themselves, or to God, or what not. Every now and then somebody ran. He reached Piccadilly, and didn't like it either — full of lorries and omnibuses crowded with people all cheering and behaving like fools. He crossed it, as quickly as possible, and went down through the Green Park, past the crowds in front of Buckingham Palace. He walked on to the Abbey and the Houses of Parliament — crowds there — crowds everywhere! He skirted them and kept on along the Embankment — he didn't know why and he didn't know where. From Blackfriars he moved up Citywards and reached Ludgate Hill. And suddenly he knew where he was going — St. Paul's! There stood the dome, curved massive against the grey November sky, huge above the stir of flags and traffic, silent in the din of cheering and of bells. He walked up the steps and went in. He hadn't been since the war began, and his visit now had no connection with God. He went because it was big and old and empty, and English, and because it reminded him. He walked up the aisle and stood looking at the roof of the dome. Christopher Wren! Good old English name! Good old quiet English stones and bones! No more sudden death, no more bombs, no more drowning ships, no more poor young devils taken from home and killed! Peace! He stood with his hands folded on the handle of his umbrella and his left knee flexed as if standing at ease; on his restrained pale face upturned was a look wistful and sardonic. Rivers of blood and tears! Why? A gleam of colour caught his eye. Flags! They couldn't do without them even here! The Flag! Terrible thing — sublime and terrible — the Flag!

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Danaë

CHAPTER I

An Introductory Afternoon

In the Board-room of the Bhang and Sciatic, on the second floor of a mansion in Cannon Street, one afternoon of November 1890, an odour of turbot, sauce mousseline, of apple tart, and Camembert cheese pervaded an atmosphere already tempered by a hot fire, some fine samples of the Company's india-rubber in its more primitive conditions, and the prolonged presence of a Chairman, Secretary, and five Directors.

The Meeting was over, but old Anthony Thornworthy, solitary in his Chairman's seat, stayed with closed eyes, as if recovering the power of thought. His large, bald, and perfectly round head shone under the electric light; the finger and thumb of the hand on the table still held a pen. Between the silver-white of his high, unwrinkled forehead and the silver-white of a round beard that concealed all vestige of neck, were cheeks the colour of apples. He breathed without noise; no movement stirred his bulky form. So some old Roman might have sat, renewing his power after a contest with the new School of thought.

For two hours had Anthony made front against his five colleagues, and by virtue of the strange power that lies in a fixed principle, the prestige of his long career, the glamour attaching to the advocacy of the bolder course, he had remained master of the field.

On the agenda, the issue was thus stated — a decision had unfortunately no longer been postponable in accordance with the safe traditions of the Board:

"Consider application of the workmen for higher wages. Read correspondence with the Works officials in connection therewith. Read letter from the Proofer's Union.

"Report the visit to the Works of Mr. Simon Harnutt, of the Central Committee of Trades Unions."

Anthony's dictum at the commencement of the debate: "The more you give them the more they will want. No concessions," had pleased everyone. It was obvious that the men's demands were unreasonable. It was known what men were like. They were never satisfied. They were only asking because the Bhang and Sciatic had, since its reconstruction two years back, paid large dividends. Trust men for watching the price of rubber, and finding out the profit made; trust men for wanting a bit themselves. There was something both underhand and grasping about men's conduct in thus taking advantage of the Company's prosperity. Thomas Brandwhite, Director of the firm of Brandwhite and Brown, the leading rubber men, spoke thus: "Ready enough to ask for a rise when times are good, but as for a reduction in bad times — you may whistle for that. I know them, they're all alike."

No words could more admirably have summed up the cynicism of men's attitude; their unswerving attempts to benefit themselves at the expense of shareholders, indirectly at the expense of Directors whose prestige and, incidentally, whose fees they endangered by such sinister demands.

A hum of approval went round the table, as every Director's private thought arose with whirring wings.

Then spoke the youngest Director, the Chairman's son Solomon; his were the first words that disturbed the general harmony: "Why shouldn't the poor devils want to benefit? I should, myself!" His tall stout form was thrown back in his chair, his chest was expanded, his thumbs buried in the upper pockets of his waistcoat; his large, round, clean-shaven face resembled a moon, and his fine eyes beamed good-naturedly from behind gold spectacles. He wore in his tie a diamond pin, on the little finger of his left hand a large gold seal ring.

Anthony Thornworthy looked fixedly at his son; and no one answered. It was only young Thornworthy, to whom indeed, though he sat now on three Directorates (of which one was a brewery), no one paid a great deal of attention in matters of business. Some called him a 'doctrinaire,' others a Radical; all agreed that he was amiable and harmless. He had passed through Harrow and Oxford without notoriety, and had eaten dinners at the Inner Temple. The habits of his mind and body had acquired him friends who had pushed him, characteristically unable to push himself, into one or two 'soft things.' He was still unmarried, and lived in rooms adjoining a famous Liberal Club, at whose open windows he could be seen seated, in the season, under a white top hat.

He beamed back at his father's eyes, thus fixed on him, and there was silence; for though no one attached importance to Solomon, his remark had brought nearer to each Director the inherent discomfort of men's demands.

Then Thomas Brandwhite said: "If they go out — a pretty mess we shall be in, with all those stocks half called-up, and rubber on the drop."

At these words James Forsyte raised his long visage framed in white Dundreary whiskers, and taking a shifting, anxious survey of surrounding facts, said: "Go out? Who says they're going out? Surely they won't go out! What do you say, Hammings? You ought to know," thus hoping, in accordance with his guiding principle, to throw the burden of a decision upon the shoulders of the Secretary. But for once 'Down-by-the-starn' Hemmings failed him. His fine eyes looked sadly upon his Director, and he answered: "I don't know, Sir. There's a nasty spirit abroad amongst them!"

And James took alarm. "Well, I don't think we ought to run any risk," he said. "Rubber's a good price. What do you say, Santerbury?"

But Santerbury made no reply, seldom speaking, except by accident.

The remaining member of the Board, Mr. Horace Pendyce, took up the word: "In 1867," he said, "when my dear old father owned his tin mine, there was a strike, and my dear old father went down every day armed with a pistol to help the foremen keep the pumps going. But they laid in wait for him and shot him in the legs. And the poor old fellow was never able afterwards to take more than is five glasses of port; the sixth invariably went to is feet. Now, my doctor told me a curious thing—" The voice of Anthony Thornworthy was heard, distant and muttering, like the growl of thunder: "No concessions." Mr. Horace Pendyce stopped. Each member of the Board looked at the others and Thomas Brandwhite remarked:

"You hear that? The Chairman says — no concessions. My opinion — you can take it or not — is that we're running a great risk."

The Chairman's voice was again heard; feeble, unvarying, distinct: "Fight them!"

There was a pause; then James Forsyte said suddenly, as though some secret force had thrown the words up from his very depths: "I don't like a fight. I never did. You get the worst of it in the end."

Mr. Horace Pendyce, rising from his seat, helped himself to grapes: "Did you read that in *The Times*?" he said, "about the Phylloxera? Now, I've some grapes in my vinery that are better than any grapes I ever remember eating, except some my dear old father—"

Solomon Thornworthy interrupted thus: "Looking at the question broadly, we surely ought to give and take; we ought—"

Thomas Brandwhite, from his seat opposite, replied querulously: "I don't agree with you at all, Mr. Solomon; we oughtn't to give anything. But what I ask is — if we have a strike, where's the money to come from for the March dividend? The shareholders will look pretty blue."

James Forsyte chimed in: "Yes, that's what I say. Here we're sitting representing the shareholders, and we ought to do the best we can for them. I'm a large shareholder myself; what I say is, we ought to put ourselves in their place."

Solomon said: "But we ought to put ourselves in the men's place, too."

Anthony muttered: "We ought to stay in our own."

Mr. Horace Pendyce leaned forward: "What's that the Chairman says? We ought to take the Chairman's advice. The Chairman has had a lot of experience with men. Now, my Uncle George Pendyce never would have a strike; he was perfectly beloved by the men; gave them cottages, gave them everything they wanted; they'd nothing to do but ask — and, they never touched him, not a bit of it! While there was my dear old father, as I was just saying — they shot him in the legs. But he was such an obstinate man!"

He emitted stones of grapes, and wiped a napkin over a fresh-coloured face, with dyed whiskers. Farming his own estate at a small loss, fifty-five miles from London, it was to the fact of being a man of considerable property rather than to any great knowledge of business that he owed his seat on the Board — a strong Board, every member of which, with the exception of the Chairman and his son, could write his name for a hundred thousand pounds.

And at this strong Board the Chairman looked, with small deep-set eyes niched in between his overhanging brows and his plum-apple coloured cheeks; what were they afraid of — not a backbone amongst the lot!

At the age of seventy-five, labouring under an accumulation of physical ailments, harassed by want of money, suspended indeed over the abyss of bankruptcy by the single rope of this very Bhang and Sciatic, old Thornworthy was conscious of more fight in his little finger than in all their bodies put together. This reflection gave him pleasure, and he looked at his son mockingly. It was difficult to believe that he was responsible for the entrance into the world of that big, soft, mooney, generalising chap! He had never had reason to suspect the virtue of his wife, a Welsh lady of the name of Meryon, who had given him, in Solomon and Danaë, two pledges of an extremely moderate affection. And so he looked steadily at his son. He had never known the fellow stand up for himself; he was always talking of 'the other side.' He had never known him hit out, he had never known him out of temper. He had never known him condemn anybody or anything, or come to any point whatever. Certainly he had never seen him show the white feather, or known him do a mean thing; but there was no 'go,' no push, no enterprise about him anywhere. He was a sort of professed heathen, too; for, though Anthony himself had not been to church since his wife's death, and had a contempt for parsons (whom he described as 'old women'), yet he was a strictly orthodox Christian, and regarded his son's opinions, if anything so soft could be described as opinions, as un-English. Those opinions did not, indeed, disturb him, for he was a philosopher; they merely excited his contempt, as a sign of a negative, self-sacrificing turn of mind. For himself he had but the one motto: 'Fight it out!' To this he had tuned his harp all his life long, necessarily when he was young, more necessarily now that he was old and had nothing left to live for but the comfort of never giving in.

And Anthony looked at his son. The Bhang and Sciatic paid good fees, or he would never have put Solomon on the Board; for with his mooney goodnature he was worse than useless. But Anthony had inherited the instincts of a father. His own father, Squire Baldwin Thornworthy of Bovey Tracey, in addition to Anthony and other offspring of wedlock, had had more children than any man in Devonshire. Hardly a parish in the county but had been enriched y the strain of Thornworthy, in those fine old days which were passed in an Omar-like worship of horses and women — books, the third article of that creed, having been exchanged for a more English article.

For all his contempt, Anthony was fond of his son, and found it not only convenient but necessary that that son should have an independent income. For many years his own position had been that of a tight-rope walker balancing before the public eye upon the narrow wire of Director's fees, holding his creditors at bay by the fear that should they, by their interference, cause him to fall from his giddy perch into the abyss of bankruptcy, they would deprive themselves even of the interest on their money which old Anthony's fees still enabled him to pay them. It was a defence characteristic of a man who had all his life faced facts and stared them out of countenance; and thanks to this cool and cynical courage, once and once only during the twenty years of his financial insecurity had he visibly wobbled. This was in the spring of 1888, when the Bhang and Sciatic, after a long period of depression, had shown unmistakable signs of collapse. Following his habit of taking the bull by the horns Anthony, instead of retirement or liquidation, had carried through a reconstruction on lines which had placed the Company once more in funds. It had been a hard fight, and so far crowned with exemplary success. He had been fortunate enough at that juncture to secure the very man who, in the position of Secretary, was most likely to foster the confidence of shareholders. Joseph (better known in the City, from the peculiar dignity of his posture, as 'Down-by-the-starn' Hemmings) had been compelled just then, by the obviously impending decline of the New Colliery Co. Ltd to look about him. The promise of a salary of fifteen hundred a year had decided him to the wiser course of abandoning his ship before it abandoned him. As he said to his wife, with his coat-tails parted before the fire, in the drawing-room at Streatham: "I made the concern; it wouldn't become a man in my position to be obliged to go begging round the City for a post. I have to think of myself. I have to think of what's due to me; I know what I am. It's not right that a man in a thousand should be chucked out of his job for no fault of his. I know what I am." And Mrs. Hemmings, on the yellow tapestry sofa, drawn up at an elegant angle on the carpet covered with pink cabbages, had repeated: "Yes, Jos; yes, Jos."

On another evening he had not expressed himself so mildly. It was after the interview with his then Chairman, old Jolyon Forsyte, at which he had tendered his resignation. Striding about the Streatham drawing-room and kicking the legs of the furniture, his fine eyes alight with anger, he had blasphemed freely: “The old fool — he called me a sneak; the old — ! He talked about rats. If he’d been younger I’d have knocked that white head of his against the walls. I’d have given him ‘rats’!” And Mrs. Hemmings, cowering on the sofa, had answered: “Yes, Jos; yes, Jos!” It was seldom that Streatham was called upon to pass through so psychological a moment.

To Anthony, his great ability and thorough mastery of accounts had proved of the utmost service. A chance meeting with his old friend Jolyon Forsyte at the Disunion Club might indeed have produced unpleasantness. For old Jolyon, very upright, and looking better than ever at eighty-three, with his great white drooping moustache, and his direct deep-grey eyes, had opened fire thus: “So you’ve got that precious sneak, Hemmings!” Anthony nodded, and through his little blue eyes there shone so shrewd and cynically humorous a gleam, that old Jolyon’s eyes reflected it in a sudden twinkle. “Wish you joy of him!” he said. “After all, I don’t know why the beggar shouldn’t do the best he can for himself!” And again Anthony nodded....

The dividend in March 1889 had been one of three shillings per share, or at the rate of fifteen per cent; in the following September the Board had declared an interim of a shilling. The year 1890 had seen the position still further strengthened, and it was upon an almost blue horizon that the cloud of these Labour troubles had gathered. In his precarious pecuniary position a strike in the Bhang and Sciatic factories might have very serious consequences for Anthony; a blow to his prestige in any direction might well bring the whole card-house down about his ears. His reason told him this (for he was a man of wide and even subtle reasoning powers), but there was in his soul something deeper and more powerful than reason — the instinct of battle, and autocracy, as high and stiff-necked as Haman; and, skirmish around it as his reason might, bedded in the silent recesses of a soul firm as his native Dartmoor rocks, that instinct dwelt immovable.

He sat with eyes closed, utterly motionless, and at the green baize door the Secretary, a fine figure, bearded in iron-grey, stood watching him, an expression of half-contemptuous malevolence clouding his handsome eyes. Himself a masterful man, Down-by-the-starn’ Hemmings had experienced the misfortune of falling out of the frying-pan into the fire. Old Jolyon Forsyte had been bad enough, Anthony Thornworthy was worse. Thus, he suffered continually the mortification of not, as he would have said it: “bossing the show.” It was as though an absurd Fate, ignorant of the fitness of things, perhaps a little jealous, were for ever planting itself in the path of his deserts. In small, everyday matters he had his way of course, and the rest of the Board he held in the hollow of his hand; but, and herein lay the sting, in questions of large policy (of which he was so peculiarly fitted to judge) his Chairman sat there like the Czar of all the Russias, obstinate as an old pig, to knock up against whom was like knocking your head against a wall. With his superior commercial instinct ‘Down-by-the-starn’ knew well enough when he was on the losing side; knew well enough that in this dispute his Chairman had taken the wrong line, was courting disaster. He had not watched the rising strength of Labour and Unions for nothing. Hating ‘men’ with a hatred only felt by members of the clerk and shopkeeper class — a hatred that had its roots in the consciousness of too thin a barrier between himself and his ‘inferiors,’ he was all the more alive to the necessity of not opposing them except with victory in his trousers pockets. No more whole-hearted supporter of Capital was perhaps at that time alive than ‘Down-by-the-starn’ Hemmings, who had investments of his own in the Bhang and Sciatic, and in other enterprises where the success of Capital over Labour was vital. A member of the Church of England too — and churchwarden, he knew that the greatest danger to that edifice of which he was a pillar — to that body which guaranteed him his social position — lay in those irresponsible masses who had nothing to lose and everything to gain by nonconformity and by rebellion. As he would express himself among intimates at Streatham: “I’m a good Christian; it’s my duty to extend peace and goodwill to all men; but as to these Socialists and Labour fellows — a set of ruffians — nonconformists to a man — I draw the line at them, that’s flat; and what’s more, I believe our Saviour would have, too.” Nor could many be found in Streatham to disagree with this sturdy British view of Christianity.

Among the factory hands no one could have been more unpopular; as he passed along the grimy sheds low-muttered wishes that his soul might repose in hell testified to a still stronger Christian spirit amongst his adversaries.

But at this moment he felt that no good purpose could be served by withstanding their demands, and it was with an irritation the deeper that it was grounded in fear, that he bore towards his Chairman the draft letter to the Manager of the Company’s Works:

“Dear Sir” (it ran), The Directors met to-day, and had under discussion the men’s demands. While viewing the situation with considerable disquietude, they considered it inadvisable at the present moment to make the concessions asked for. You are instructed therefore to tell the men that the Directors regret that at the present time they cannot see their way to advancing the existing rates of wages.

I — am, dear Sir, Yours faithfully Jos. HEMMINGS. (Sec.)”

And over the motionless Anthony he stood still. In; those old days, before Commerce had civilised the world, when men by swift strokes attained their ends, Hemmings with one blow of his strong fist on the bald head beneath, would have sent to the Shades the soul of his Chairman. Now, with a touch on his: shoulder and a deprecating smile, he did but place the document under his nose.

Anthony stirred; he made a sound in his depths — a sighing sound like the groan of an old tree. One eye unclosed, his hand moved the pen as though asking for it to be given drink; and, taking it from him, Hemmings dipped it in the pot. Slowly Anthony read the letter. With a scratch he drew his pen through it, then, in his slow large hand, wrote:

“At the Board Meeting to-day it was decided to reject the men’s demands,” — and held it out to his Secretary without a word. Then, by the edge of the table pulling himself to his feet, he walked slowly towards the sideboard. There, with tumbler held out in his broad hand, mottled strangely with white patches as though half-dead, he invited the Secretary to give him the draught of brandy and soda which closed the labours of the day. And presently, with infinite slowness and care, he descended to the street.

The Secretary followed; it was a custom he never neglected. The old man was very feeble; he might topple over any day! And it was with a strange pleasure, as though venting a store of secret spite, that he made his wonted remark: “You’d better let me call you a four-wheeler, Sir!”

Anthony shook his head and with infinite slowness made his way out into the traffic, towards the Underground. He was a well-known figure on that platform; the porters nudged each other, and, as the train came in, one of them moved up close behind him. Anthony waved him aside. It was as good as a play to see the old fellow try to get into the train by himself! So — the porters to each other; but down in their hearts was a deep, unvoiced admiration for that vain, heroic effort renewed each day. And it was the most gentle, the most delicate of pushes that heaved the feeble, bulky form into its place.

CHAPTER II

LEANING back, motionless against the padded cushions of the railway carriage, Anthony mused. He was not a man who helped trouble to come by going to meet it; and he had lived too long on the brink of a financial volcano to suffer apprehension; moreover, in the last resort, he could always await death at Coombe Honey. For Anthony, in the days when his wife was alive, before his monetary troubles began, had, with his habitual astuteness, settled a farm which he had inherited from his father, upon his wife for life, with remainder to whomsoever she should appoint. In view of Anthony's monetary embarrassments she had, at his suggestion, appointed in favour of the Trustees of the settlement, Gregory Vigil, a man of unquestioned probity, who now held the property for the benefit of Anthony. And sometimes he would go down and stay there for the good of his health — on the borders of Dartmoor, under the shelter of that queer rock — Solomon's Chin; there was no better air in England.

But it was not of Coombe Honey, nor of the Bhang and Sciatic that Anthony was thinking. He thought of his daughter. Her position caused him at times considerable anxiety. The shrewd and daring cast of a mind which had never hesitated to face facts enabled him to know her perhaps better than anyone; and he did not exaggerate a situation which in women of less vitality than Danaë, would have been intolerable. He did full justice to her buoyancy, to her quality of getting a positive enjoyment out of the ups and downs of Fate, and making a positive luxury of her own misfortunes. But she had recently spoken of going on the stage, and this did not accord with Anthony's ideas of the dignity of a Thornworthy.

Married at an early age to Jaspar Bellew., their marital relations were now of a most anomalous order. They were not divorced, nor separated, but they did not live together. The children, Meryon and Thyme, belonged neither to one nor to the other. The boy Meryon was at school; and each, swooping down on him as the spirit moved them, would carry him off for the holidays. Bellew paid for the schooling, no doubt. Thyme lived with her mother, but there was no settled arrangement; Bellew made his wife no definite allowance, and for the last three years she had lived with her father. The situation taxed Anthony's cynical philosophy, t was not his business to dictate how they should live, but their relations were neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring. They would meet and be good enough friends; he would give Danaë money and presents; then there would be a row, and so things went on. Bellew was a hard-drinking fish. He had been in a Cavalry regiment and had retired; he had had money and had spent most of it. Anthony shrewdly suspected him of relations with other women. For months past nothing had been seen or heard of him; it was this, no doubt, this prolonged estrangement and prolonged failure of supplies, which made Danaë talk of the stage. As a girl she had been a good amateur actress; her figure, her appearance were in her favour; she was friends with George Forsyte, who had a share in 'The Athenian,' and had promised to see her started! She might be successful, so Anthony thought; but the idea was most displeasing to him. Luckily Vigil's influence was all against it. But had he any influence with her? Anthony doubted it. As for her brother — Solomon would listen, perhaps shake his head, and in the end say: "Well, old girl, you know best!"

Anthony opened his eyes. By his side, holding out a hand, was Gregory Vigil himself. Tall, with a fresh-coloured face and grey moustache, he had the look of a man who has just drunk two glasses of red wine — sad or dejected, anxious or calculating, he was never without this look; it was as essentially a part of him as his light, long stride, his pleasant high voice, the whispering affectionateness of his manner. His prominent blue-grey eyes, suffused with a moist gleam, seemed to brim with affection, as though he had been long baulked of an overmastering desire to embrace something. And such indeed had been his fate. His life had been singularly pure. In the course of fifty years he had known but one brief period of lapse, one brief period when he had eaten husks with the swine. Out of that short and bitterly-sweet sleep he had suddenly awakened. A deep and painful convulsion, shaking the very roots of his being, had left him at the age of twenty-six with the conviction that he was defiling himself, that he was meant for higher things. And in that cataclysm he suddenly found God, as it were, at his elbow, like a kind but strict Father, guiding him to a loftier state. Through all his after-struggles, painful, sometimes despairing, with a nature sensuous and disposed to love, he had never lost that sense of personal contact and overmastering fortuitous guidance, without which he must so often have yielded to his instincts. And that kind of moist light which shone from his eyes, that almost prophetic faith in which all his actions and words were steeped, were physiologically, no doubt, due to the habitual starvation of his lower nature. He had commenced life as a schoolmaster in one of our largest Public Schools, nor was it till he was thirty-five and had attained therein to a position of conspicuous influence, that he felt called upon to resign his post and devote himself to higher and more important work. The death of a relative about this time, leaving him his own master, afforded him the opportunity for realising a conviction that had long been forcing itself upon him, the conviction that he had no right any longer to keep to himself the purity which he had struggled so desperately to bring into his own life. Whether from some Norse strain in his ancestry or from the fact of birth in a seaport town, the sea and such as had to do with the sea had always possessed a fascination for him. He had travelled as a young man, had talked to sailors and seen something of their life — and now that he was free to enter that channel in which he might do most good in the world, he had felt himself mysteriously impelled towards endeavouring to shield and save seamen from the temptation to which, by the very nature of their lives, more than any other men, they were exposed. After long and arduous canvassing, in the course of which he met with indifference, sympathy, and opposition, he succeeded in founding the "Society for the Protection of British Seamen in Foreign Ports" — more shortly known as the S.P.B.S. Probably, though he would never personally admit it, he was greatly helped in its institution by the fact that the seamen to be protected were British, and the temptations from which they were to be protected were foreign; be this as it may — the Society, once initiated, was unquestionably successful in saving many a seaman from himself; and though its various branches required Gregory's constant attention, he still found time and energy to devote to his other neighbours' affairs.

It was in his struggle to launch the Society that he first came into contact with Anthony Thornworthy, then Chairman of the Mexico and Peru Shipping Co., upon whom he called one afternoon by appointment at the Company's offices in Moorgate Street.

Anthony, then in the prime of his capacity, a handsome man just going grey, eyed his visitor with a keen smile, and listened courteously to this sanguine nervous young man with the high and pleasant voice.

“But, come, what’s it to me,” he said at last, “if a sailor lets out a little of his vitality at the end of a voyage?” And with some curiosity he waited for the answer. How would the young man justify his idea? If this were the scheme of a crank, or a church matter — he would have nothing to do with it!

Gregory had agreeably disappointed him; with a shrewdness for which Anthony gave him full credit, he had kept strictly to the material advantages of his scheme, producing figures which proved incontestably that drink and disease contracted by British seamen at foreign ports were two of the principal reasons why captains of British ships were obliged to enlist so many foreigners amongst their crews. And it was in a cynical admiration of this shrewdness, rather than with any belief in the enterprise, that Anthony promised his support. He took a liking, in fact, for this fresh-coloured, active young fellow who was so thoroughly English. If the young man found it profitable to spend his time in reforming other people, it was nothing to him, Anthony! And when, soon afterwards, he made that provision for his wife and for old age that has been alluded to, it was to Gregory that he paid the compliment of appointing him sole trustee.

This was before Danae’s marriage to Bellew, when she was but seventeen; and Gregory shyly, furtively adoring, had only too happily assented to fulfil a position which promised a permanent connection with her. From her marriage he had suffered silently and loyally; when that marriage assumed the spasmodic character which had marked the last five years, he suffered perhaps still more. With his belief in the sanctity of the marriage tie, it shocked and dismayed him that they should live apart; it shocked and dismayed him still more to find that he dwelt on the fact that she lived apart, with a sort of unholy relief; most of all was he dismayed by the accesses of rage which seized on him when Jaspar Bellew paid her one of his rare visits; and now that these rare visits, even, seemed to have ceased, he lived like a man exhausted, wondering and relieved, after the strange healing of the old intermittent wound, refusing to believe that it would ever break out again. With Anthony he had remained on good terms. One day at dinner, a glass of port in his hand, the old man had thus summed up Gregory’s character to his daughter: “A good fellow, but he can’t let well alone — must have a finger in the pie.” Immovable himself, he did not find this peculiarity disturbing. It amused him....

The two walked together from St. James’s Park station towards the pile of buildings in Victoria Street which contained Anthony’s flat.

A lift, worked by a man in a short brown livery jacket, with the peculiar pale sad face of those whose lives are passed in watching others going up and down, soon brought them to the fifth floor. Anthony said:

“They pay eighty pounds more on the first floor — twenty pounds for each storey’s worth of stink and noise.”

With a latchkey attached to a coat button with black silk, where he could come at it without labour, he opened the door. A long corridor was visible, illumined by a single light; on the walls were paintings which nobody at any time of the day could see. A heavy carved oak stand nearly blocking one end, received their hats and coats. A faint odour of good French cooking came to the nostrils. Anthony led the way. A door stopping at length all further promenade, they passed into a room meriting description not so much for the beauty of its furniture as for certain psychological indications. Though now dark outside, the long French window stood wide, and through it could be seen a vista of black roofs, the tops of two trees, the brooding outline of a spire; the booming of distant traffic came in. A great fire, consuming cedar logs, blazed in a hearth constructed for the more modest coal; two high vases of carmine lilies exhaled a penetrating scent, which blended with the fame of the logs. On an open grand piano stood a full-length photograph of a woman; a fur cape that must have slipped from the shoulders of the pianist draped the music stool even to the floor, and scattered sheets of music lay around. The room was profusely lighted. On a large sofa before the fire were seated a woman and a man, who rose as Anthony and Vigil came in.

Danaë Bellew at the age of thirty-six was like nothing so much as a ripe cornfield in the afternoon sun when a breeze blows over it. Her tall form had the swelling billowy look, and her hair the yellow-brown rippling look of corn; her lips and cheeks, which had been too close to the fire, were poppy-red; her silk blouse, of cornflower blue. There was an exuberance of form and colour about her, a prodigality which she seemed to fling at the beholder.

The simile ends. The sun sets, the breeze dies down, and grey quiet settles over the corn. Not so with Danaë; there was no sunset with this woman, at most the filmy veiling of transient clouds, which dimmed in an unconvincing manner her light.

Men were not in the habit of psychologising her; they fell under her sway, or in a few cases retired — finding her too broad for their taste; these called her vulgar. But vulgar was too strong a word, for she had her charm — the truly vulgar have none. To a describer the expression of her face was puzzling. It was neither frank nor disingenuous, yet had the broad naïveté of its overpowering vitality. About the lips was a dash of sensuality, but of a sensuality too quick and sane for vice. Her grey-green eyes were the eyes of a coquette, but her broad low brow and the whole mould of her, that of a woman who could have borne her part in the siege of Lucknow and come through it, while others died. She was so extremely, so irritatingly human, that only once in a way, and by a sort of process of elimination, could there be seen in her the elements of an abstract and classical figure, a sort of Greek breadth and profusion, a natural immorality, now alas! nearly lost.

She came forward with a smile, holding out her hand, and her eyes that took in everything under their lids, glanced from Vigil to the man beside her, who stood with his top hat in his gloved hand, a sardonic smile on his mottled brown face. From his patent-leather boots to a simple sailor-knot tie, her visitor was dressed with that unostentatious modishness which denotes the man to whom Club life has become a necessity. His full eyes, of an undetermined grey, stared at the newcomer, and in that stare was a sort of permanent and secret jeer. This was George Forsyte, second son of Roger Forsyte of Prince’s Gardens, who, like his three brothers, Roger and Thomas and Eustace, had been brought up to the profession invented by old Roger — collection of house property. Unlike them, he had not prospered. There was something in his soul above house property; the collection of it had not presented to him the facility for sportsmanlike adventure which his nature demanded. Two or three financial crises had been tided over by old Roger, who, having lived all his life in the faith of his own invention, was loath, at the age of seventy-two, to admit a case of failure. And indeed, since the last crisis, the wheel of fortune seemed to have turned in his son’s favour. George now spoke of his condition as ‘rosy,’ talked of a purchase in Shaftesbury Lane and some property in Epsom as ‘AI.’ Roger, still a busy man, and at that time particularly absorbed in the acquisition of a block of buildings in Fulham, a neighbourhood just then beginning to be known, had not made himself completely master of all the details of these adventures. Divested of George's peculiar and often witty verbiage, they amounted to a fifth share in 'The Athenian' theatre (until lately in low water), and the whole of a three-year-old, trained by Blacksmith of Epsom. Both — as he phrased it — were 'doing him well.'

'The Termagant,' a piece not wholly unconnected with ladies' legs, was now about entering its second century, and in the then condition of public taste, promised to run for ever. The three-year-old, baptized by George 'The Ambler,' having shown more than a suspicion of form in one or two home trials, had been withdrawn from the public gaze, and supported judiciously, till he stood in the 'Rutlandshire' quotations at 10-1. The commission had been executed by Barney's, than whom no commissioners can be more strongly recommended to owners, for enlisting in a horse's favour the public sympathy. And now that the public was determined to 'have'

'The Ambler' at 10-I George found himself in the position of one who was able to lay off his bets, some of which were at very nice outside prices, and stand to win the sum of four thousand pounds to nothing. A few more substantial bets against the horse, and he might have made certain of a large stake even should the animal not start. But, a Public School man and a gentleman, his turf morality was sound; he had a sense of good form, and was one of the last to lend himself to anything that would look shady; no idea of pushing the situation further and making himself absolutely certain of gain, by scratching, or forbidding his horse to win, would he for a moment have entertained. Moreover, unlike many men, the idea of a race really appealed to him; his sound nerve, just pleasantly soothed by drink, enjoyed the exhilaration of the 'finish.' Even when beaten there was a sort of enjoyment to be had out of the imperturbability with which he could take the beating, a sense of superiority to men who were not quite so well-bred or so sportsmanlike as himself. And George set much store by his breeding, which he felt in some inscrutable way to be more distinguished than it would have proved, if looked into — (his grandfather had been a master-builder, his great-grandfather a farmer). He had acquaintance with Arthur Badstock, Conny Boyle, and Lord Frittlestoke, amongst others of the racier aristocracy. To find him seated in a lady's drawing-room at the hour commonly consecrated to the cardroom at the Haversnake would to his intimates have seemed a portent; but the two men who entered were not of that large class, though Anthony had known him from his boyhood. Associated in business with the Forsyte family for many years, a former colleague of old Jolyon Forsyte on the Board of the Rhyndy Pandy Coalfields, a present colleague of James Forsyte on the Bhang and Sciatic, he had been accustomed to meet George at Forsyte dinner tables, and looked upon him with that peculiar half understanding, half-distrust, with which the men of the world of one generation look upon the men of the world of the next. There appeared to him something lacking in the way these young fellows went to work; something half-hearted about them, as though they were afraid of the cup they had set to their lips! Even in their knowingness they seemed to be ashamed of themselves; they were so cautious, as though they had no belief in their pleasures, in their lives, in anything! And deep down, Anthony nourished contempt; it seemed to him that there was no blood in them....

But putting out his hand he enquired for George's father; and George, who had an admiration for old Thornworthy and would speak of him kindly as a leery old cock,' answered: "Thanks; the governor's as bright as a star!" And he opened the door for the old man, who excused himself with the courtesy which was habitual to him George Forsyte came back from the door with a queer, sardonic smile on his lips. He was looking at Vigil who still held Danaë's hand. The 'parson,' as he called him, had from the moment of their first meeting excited George's amusement; he was quick to perceive in this grey-haired man with the high colour and the moist, bright eye, a strain of fanaticism at which he looked askance, as ridiculous, dangerous and lacking in taste. He was the sort of fellow, in fact, who spoiled sport, and for such — in the language of the Haversnake — he had 'no use.' And he was the sort of fellow, too, who hung about a woman and liked to pretend he was doing her good! Doing her good! — Why couldn't the fellow say at once that he — . You had only to look at him!

And George's acerbity was increased by consciousness of Gregory's shrewdness, by the practical side of his character. He, the 'parson,' was wideawake, it was difficult to get the laugh of him; he was hot-tempered, too; you had to mind where you stepped, or he went off like a match! Altogether, perhaps no more unfortunate collection of qualities could have been found, for George's taste. He felt his dislike returned, but Gregory had not yet shown his hand. His dealings with men and things as Secretary of the S.P.B.S. had steeled and toughened the surface of a sensitive but naturally reserved nature. When he met George at Danaë Bellew's (the two men were constant callers) he preserved towards him an interested, scrutinising, suave demeanour, which afforded George but small scope for taking a rise out of him; and our Forsyte could not help feeling admiration for the way the fellow kept his end up. It came home to him now with strange vividness that he was fighting, if not against Vigil himself, against his influence, for the possession of this woman. Yet he was not seriously alarmed, for, like her own father, he felt that she with whom he was in love was not really influenced by anyone. It was her great attraction. She was not possessed of any striking eccentricity or originality of mind which would have been no attraction to George, who rightly considered originality subversive of good taste; she was not that hard-mouthed thing, a 'strong-minded woman'; it was something in her quite different, deeper. George had not explained it to himself; he was no eloquent psychologist. But she seemed to swim on the top of things, to 'bob up' serenely to-morrow, however down in the depths she might be to-day. She was always well, and looked beautiful, however she complained (as she not infrequently did) of life's treatment. And it was by instinct, by no reasoned conclusions, that he knew nothing could really turn her, for nothing — such was her vitality — could really touch her. In his dumb and peculiar philosophy, being neither a bad-hearted nor a stupid man, he found it comforting to feel that, whatever the outcome of this passion which he no longer attempted to disguise from himself, she would not really suffer, however he might himself come off. And at times he felt sorry for the 'parson,' handicapped as he was by his principles. There were moments when he felt himself winning. More generally, he smothered with difficulty, under his sardonic grin, jealousy at that caressing, deferential manner she always displayed in Vigil's presence. And he would wonder what it was she expected to get out of the fellow, or whether it was merely her woman's whim to keep in his good graces. But dumb was his wonder, dumb his speculation, for he had come to have for her the sort of longing he had believed himself to have outgrown — a longing that made him seek solitary nooks at the Haversnake, made him by turns indifferent to, and passionately impatient of, its cooking, a longing that brought at times a worn look to his fleshy face. However hedonistic the order of his life, a man cannot deny his blood; and to George, born and bred to commercialism, this passion for a married woman, coming not in his first youth, was charged with the countless doubts and fears that hover around passion in a fundamentally commercial mind. It set the scheme of things awry, fogged values which had seemed as clear as summer daylight. Sleeping and waking, he was haunted by the nightmare of that question:

Was it worth it? — that he should be thus deprived of his natural liking for the gossip of his fellows, for long hours of 'poker,' and whist, and billiards; deprived of aspirations which for years had been the loftiest in his soul; deprived of the philosophy that to be out in the air all day, to dine well, drinking a special brand of Pol Roger, and now and then thereafter to enjoy the society of women, was the highest happiness a man could hope for. Was it worth it — to look forward to the Divorce Court and perjury as a co-respondent; or alternatively, an existence with a woman you were tired of, on the fringe of Society? Was it worth it — with the governor so strait-laced and the chance of his cutting you off with a shilling? Was it worth it — to drag round day after day, perspiring lest you should find her out, and as often as not come on that d — d parson seated there? Was it worth it — for a woman that you couldn't make out, that had something in her that beat you altogether; who enjoyed things too much, too unreflectingly, or was down, down in the depths? Was it worth it —— —— George's reason told him 'No.' He was putting his money on the wrong horse, and with all his might he tried to hedge his bets; but secretly he felt that he could not.

And with his profound commercial morality, typical of his breed and class, believing that a man should not spend himself without reward, he really understood the 'parson' with his ascetic morals better than he understood the woman he loved. Vigil expected to get something for his abstinence, no doubt; if not in this world, then in the next. But Danaë went her way without thinking of the future; it was his belief that she had no morals.

And seeing from her manner that Vigil was now to have his innings he came forward and held out his hand.

"Well, I'll be toddling," he said. "You won't forget the 24th," and took his way downstairs.

CHAPTER III

BUT George, in estimating the character of the man he left behind him in Danaë's drawing-room, had, as is ever the case, done but half the sum.

True, Gregory looked for recompense from that fatherly figure at his side, but this with him was not the whole story. To have gone on, assured of his own benefit, without bringing that benefit to others, was a tasteless business, and life — thus — one long egg without salt. In assisting the salvation of others was he predestined to satisfy his competitive and fighting spirit, inherited from his Norse and Anglo-Saxon ancestors and the centuries of Christianity in which they had been brought up. Neither ill-naturedly nor unnaturally, he did not like other men to enjoy pleasures which he felt were not beneficial to himself. The process in his mind was too subtle for the proverb: 'Sour grapes' — a proverb never kindly used in a universe where each man, woman or child is to that man, woman or child the most important thing in all the world. A true Englishman, there was but little of the impersonal in his character. Fate, or more precisely the trend of his own nature, had ruled that he should not enter that

Church for which he had been destined. Through the earlier stages of preparation at College he had passed to the later reading necessary to enable him at the age of twenty-three to point out the true path of life to such as, for double that time, had been stumbling about to find it. And this later reading had brought seriously to his notice the doctrine of the resurrection of the body; for some inscrutable reason he began to think about this doctrine, and ultimately decided that he could not believe it. He had much of the spirit that conforms to attain its end, and if left to himself it is possible that Gregory would have come to see that he was justified in placing on this doctrine such an interpretation of his own as would meet the difficulty. But it so happened that at this crisis he became acquainted with a young man in Holy Orders who withstood him in argument throughout a College evening, endeavouring to force on him a literary acceptation. Gregory was aroused. From that day he felt it his duty to renounce his intention of entering the Church. Nothing in after life had modified this conviction, or caused him to regret the decision to which he had come; in every other respect he remained a true Christian, English and individualistic to the core. He held the near and personal conception of the Deity, characteristic of men who do most good in the world. God to him was an incarnation of all the best points and qualities that he recognised in himself and the most admirable people that he met and read of, a sort of idealised Brown, Smith, and Robinson — it is doubtful if he admitted Jones, a Welshman and deeply imbued with the Celtic temperament. This personal conception of the Deity gave him a clarity and directness of view over his own and his neighbour's duties, such as would otherwise have been lacking, and inspired in him a power of convinced and ecstatic vision. Nothing could be doubtful, submitted to and judged by so definite a personality as his God; all the struggles and fears of his man's heart he felt must be unreal and shadowy; at bottom all was certain and arranged. It surprised and annoyed him that he suffered, but this suffering made him tolerant of the sufferings of others, up to a point not exceeding that which his nature told him was reasonable, and his religion showed him to be lawful. Yet, in his compassion, strange to say, there was no real certainty; it was ill prophesying; for, as in his religion he was personal, so in human matters was he very personal, and liable to be swayed by the affections. He found, for instance, Mrs. Dance — the wife of the dissolute Dance, a lady for whom he had no real liking — unintelligibly weak to suffer the desertion of her husband, and the matter left him cold; while in Danaë's case his blood boiled at the thought of that fellow Bellew. He longed to mount, and tide upon him, to call him to appreciate his wife at her proper worth or take the consequences. And he was quite capable, in the generosity of his homage, of overlooking any other side there might be to the case. It is true that Danaë did not give him much chance of seeing any other side; she had been so used to his sympathy and admiration from girlhood that it had become essential to her. She was sincere to her moods, and to Gregory her mood was always soft, always the most subdued and appealing mood of which her exuberant vitality was capable. Her softness and appeal were not deliberate; originally inspired by his own deference, it had become a habit. Her greatest difficulty, now and always, was financial, yet in Gregory she had established a fixed belief that this was only incidental to her matrimonial position. In fact, it went deeper. From the day when she first had money in her pinafore, she had never been out of debt; it was a constitutional matter, occasioning other people more suffering than herself. Those who heard her lament her unfortunate position were ever touched to the heart; strangely moved, their hands went mechanically to their pockets. Danaë herself was not moved; her lament was too chronic. Nor was it for the sake of getting money from people that she made her moan; it was more an unconscious luxuriating in the mood of the moment, an unconscious indulgence that had incidentally good effects. Continually, remorselessly immersed in monetary troubles and transactions, she had perhaps the only truly uncommercial disposition of her time. She owned, in fact, her father's full-blooded fidelity to his sensations, and from her Welsh mother derived that which some people called her unreliability. She was happy, she was often miserable — she enjoyed being both; she enjoyed being as happy as she could, she enjoyed being as miserable as she could; and the future played no real part in her life! Other people calculated, she made, therefore, a point of calculating, too; her conversation to Gregory was frequently full of calculations, and she quite enjoyed them; they meant nothing, for, in fact, she was quite incapable of reckoning. The cup was at her lips all the time, and all the time she was drinking. She had been born on Valentine's Day, with a little cloud of golden fluff on her head; and Anthony, with whom the birth synchronised with a piece of commercial good fortune, in vague recollections of Ovid, suggested the name of Danaë. And in gratitude for recollection of their existence in forgetful days, the Pagan gods had visited Danaë in some sort.

It is to her first lover, George's cousin, young Jolyon Forsyte — the only, and now-reinstated son of old Jolyon Forsyte — that we owe the recognition of this fact. The painter (his medium was watercolour) who now lived with his father, his second wife, and their two children in the house at Robin Hill, met his old flame again, for the first time twenty years after the rupture of their engagement.

"You are," he said, "the best Pagan I've ever seen, and your brother Solomon's the best Christian" — a diagnosis the truth of which suffers in reflecting that, as a matter of common knowledge, Solomon never went to church and held almost Socialistic views.

Danaë had turned her grey-green eyes on young Jolyon's lean figure, and lean, long face with its drooping moustache and grizzled hair, and answered:

"You always were nasty to me!" but, suddenly perceiving that he had intended a compliment, she gave him a slow, sweet, side-long smile; she attached, in fact, but hazy meanings to such words as 'Pagan.'

Young Jolyon raised his brows. "Was I? I had thought—"

She laughed her soft laugh, gave him another look, and dropped her eyes.

But young Jolyon had effected a permanent cure — he returned not to his first love; Danaë at sixteen and Danaë at thirty-six were not the same; the dew had dried off the petals of the rose, and it was the dew that had brought him fluttering to drink. He had inherited philosophy, had acquired the ironical eye. She was nothing now to him but a specimen of horticulture. The rose was full-blown; the lines too rounded, the perfume too intoxicating; nor did the love experiences of his life tend to encourage experiment. Yet like a connoisseur, inhaling the cigar of his own past, he came often to spend an hour in her society, praising Fortune gently that she had jilted him, and from her little daughter Thyme catching strange hints of the Danaë of his youth. The Danaë of his youth, before Vigil had known her, or Jaspar Bellew, or his cousin George! The girl with the unimaginably quick, gay eyes, and clear voice, insatiable by dance, song, or laughter, insatiable of the gaze of men; insatiable of life, as life itself. At fifteen she had plucked the hearts out of men by the score, not cruelly, but all in the day's work; had wished them all well when she did so, and would have rewarded them, no doubt, had it but been practicable. He remembered begging to be allowed to pay her little bills, remembered her gay refusal; and how, when by sheepish devices he managed to pay them after all, she had only threatened him with her finger and laughed again. The girl who, a fortnight after telling him in secrecy that she would be his wife, went out riding for a whole day with another man, and to his reproaches, returned the answer: "I said — some day, Jo. Don't you want me to enjoy myself?"

And, seeming to find that he did not, he had broken away with heart badly torn; besides himself, she was engaged at that time to one other man at least.

Occupied with the ill-advised marriage into which reaction at once plunged him, and the great passion for another woman which not unnaturally followed, he had but vaguely remarked Danaë's course. Her brother Solomon was the only one of his friends of those days with whom, after his elopement, he had kept up. He too would no doubt have gone by the board, for, though there had been no public scandal, young Jolyon had had a delicacy about old friends — had he not run across him one evening on his way back from the Temple.

Solomon was swinging his tall and bulky form along the Embankment, his head thrown well back, stick rotating, beaming at the world through the pince-nez on his short, straight, ingenuous nose — he had just left Oxford, and perhaps at no subsequent period of his career was he older than at this time. Unendowed with any elegance whatever, everyone accused him of being a gentleman; for, though his presence was conspicuous, he was never conscious of it; a simple bonhomie made him everywhere at home. Seeing young Jolyon, his senior by some six or seven years, and whom he knew to be in a scrape, he at once bore down upon him.

"Hullo, young Jo!" he said.

Young Jolyon, compressing his lips, looked up in Solomon's face, and answered defiantly between his teeth:

"Hullo, old Sol!"

But they continued their way together.

In no words could young Jolyon have done justice to the restfulness of that walk. It was the first time since his episode that he found himself in company with a human being who, knowing all the facts, neither ignored them nor made anything of them, nor seemed in the least conscious that there was anything to make. His stubborn will, which had never ceased painfully telling him that he was in the right, suddenly went to sleep. This was Solomon's charm; he was an anodyne whom people sought, as people seek in travel some sane landscape to soothe their strung-up nerves, on its large, cheerful, unconscious suavity. From time to time Solomon had supplied casual information concerning his sister. Danaë was married — a good enough match Bellew a very decent chap if you took him the right way; a desperate character — over this description Solomon would smile. He liked that about Bellew; it was attractive — he himself was not a desperate character. Two children were born—"jolly little beggars" — (no boy at Meryon's school could hold a candle to him for sheer, cool-blooded mischief). A bit of a row? — Yes — they thought it better to be each on their own — he expected it probably was! Money was — h'm — scarce — the poor old girl was always hard up. He had talked to Bellew; there was a good deal to be said for him. He'd been unlucky; a fellow like that was never quite tame. "I talked to him seriously."

Young Jolyon smiled.

"And what did you say?"

Solomon beamed slowly.

"I told him," he said, "not to be a silly ass. He doesn't mean any harm. It's his way."

"They talk at the Club about D. T."

Over Solomon's face came a certain gravity. "Yes," he said; "but very mild. I sat up with him."

"Did you tell your sister?"

Solomon's eyes widened behind their pince-nez; he looked surprised.

"No," he said, "no. It was quite a chance that I was there."

Young Jolyon browsed on the remark.

This was Solomon all over, who seemed to pass through life steeped in a sort of Arabian hospitality. In Solomon's place he too would have concealed the fact from Danaë; not from an instinct of hospitality but from a distrust of the lady, founded partly on experience and partly in the consciousness that he did not understand her. And, far more subtle than his cousin George, young Jolyon found his ignorance of her a fertile source of speculation.

To a man like Gregory Vigil, however, Danaë Bellew was as clear as the colour of her hair. She incarnated for him all that was adorable in woman, the more so that it had become a superstition with him that she was his good angel, keeping him from himself, and that he was hers, performing for her the same function. In his relations with her he kept this ever in view. It is doubtful in fact whether he could safely have had relations with a woman without the aid of this superstition. He had never married, because of her; it would have seemed to him a sacrilege....

And now that he was alone with her in this drawing-room, scented with the perfume of those lilies given by another man, he walked up and down like some caged animal, with his long, soft stride and his eyes sometimes far off, sometimes fixed upon her lustrously.

"I don't like him — I shall never like him. He's a man of the world, he's a gambler, he's a—"

He checked himself; the word sensualist was not fitted for her ears! "He lives to enjoy—"

Danaë laughed; her laugh had mellowed; it was soft, full, mechanical, the laugh of a woman who had found it useful, attractive, necessary.

"Poor George!" she murmured; "but he's going to help me."

Gregory halted as though the words had pierced him like an arrow; he passed his hand over his eyes, and his forehead flushed.

"It makes me sick," he said, "to think of you on the stage."

She shrugged her shoulders. "What would you have?" Then, with a sort of slow passion, as though the announcement were new, and strange, and terrible, she burst out:

"I'm in debt!"

He began his walk again. As a man of business, accustomed to deal shrewdly enough with the moneys of a Public Society, the announcement might well have startled him. It did not, however, for he had heard it any time these twenty years, and it was perhaps the fact that he was the only man she knew who had never met the announcement by lending her money, that inspired in Danaë the respect she undoubtedly had for him, the deeply rooted desire to keep him at her call. By instinct he had never lent her money, and also because the idea of it would have sullied his high conception of her.

Often in his rooms, in a Westminster side-street, clad in the underwear peculiar to him, going through the muscular exercises he had himself invented, he turned over and over anxiously that question: "Shall I lend her money?" It is not too much to say that he would have gone into the City, sold out the major portion of his stocks, and poured the proceeds into her lap without a sigh. But to what end? He would not have been in the position he was, Honorary Secretary of the S.P.B.S., had he not possessed both shrewdness and common sense, qualities almost invariably found in the British character, and especially among that large minority who do good to others. To what end? The money would go; her position would remain what it was — that position which was at the root of the evil; it would only weaken his own resources and his power of doing her good. And he would stand before the glass, staring with blank eyes at the muscles of his long figure, now going a little slack....

He gave her no answer, but asked:

"What is it he wants you to do on the 24th?"

Danaë made a soft movement of the arm. "Come, do sit down," she said, "here by me. You make me nervous."

Gregory took his seat on the sofa by her side. His high colour deepened, his eyes were lowered; a trembling had seized his limbs, the trembling of a man faint with hunger. And Danaë, soft, with her hair coiled like golden snakes down her gracious head to her gracious neck, her limbs stretched luxurious in their silken covering, looked at him sidelong, with a matter-of-fact compassion. If he had leaned forward and seized her in his arms she would not have resisted. Poor fellow, he deserved all he could get! But she did not want him to. She had no time to think about such things. Besides, there was George, poor old George, to whom, if to anyone — And she looked at Gregory and pitied him, woman-like, for taking things so hard, indulgent as to an angel. But Gregory had that other profoundly British quality; at the bottom of his heart there was a secret reserve of strength, a sort of permanent balance at his moral Bank. Things might hurt, things might go very hard — he could stand the racket. And he looked up at her, and asked again:

"What is it he wanted you to do on the 24th?"

"The 24th? Oh! there is a dance at some people's in Cambridgeshire. Will you come too? I will get you an invitation."

Gregory asked: "Will Forsyte be there?"

Danaë answered: "I believe he is going down for some shooting. You had better come, Gregory." She knew that he would not come. With a sigh he answered that his dancing days were over. In truth, he had never had any but with her — she knew this, too. In her large, easy heart she almost loved him for it.

And she said: "I don't know where I shall get the money for a dress!"

She said it from habit, and without intention; to her astonishment he answered:

"I will send you one."

She seized his hand: "Will you? That will be lovely. I will be sure and wear it in memory of you."

He took his hand gently from her, and got up to go.

"I will certainly send it," he said, and went away.

In the hall of the Mansions a man passed him, coming in, who nodded, and asked:

"Mrs. Bellew at home?"

Gregory turned sharply, like a dog that can suffer none to approach its mistress unchallenged.

"Oh! it's you," he said. "Yes, she's at home, but it's rather late."

Young Jolyon Forsyte smiled. "It's the children I'm after," he said. "Good night!" and he passed on into the lift. Gregory ran his hand through his fine grey hair, which was always a little long and bushy; he knew not what to make of this man who seemed to have the power of approaching the goddess with an impunity that he could not but suspect, and resent.

CHAPTER IV

Danaë, when he had gone, experienced a momentary sensation of discomfort. A dress? Such a funny thing to propose — but dear old Gregory was always funny. And her moral uneasiness passed — that sensation such as a cat must feel, turned for a moment out of some habitual nook, the sensation of ruffled fur, of what was not quite usual, against her back.

She had thought it unnecessary to tell him that the invitation had been procured by George, that the party was arranged for the Newmarket Autumn Meeting, at which George's horse 'The Ambler,' on whom she stood, in George's book, to win four hundred pounds to nothing, was running for the 'Rutlandshire.' What use to tell such things to a man of Gregory's known views? And rising from the sofa, she went to the door and called: "Thyme!"

A young girl, all cheeks and legs, but legs that showed the beginnings of beauty, came flying down the passage, to transfix her mother with the points of her elbows and chin and knees.

Danaë felt that her children were 'awful,' but she enjoyed them when she had time; and, if she scolded them it was in a voice so cheerful, so redolent of good red blood, that it could not but raise their spirits. "Where," she said, "is that awful boy?"

Thyme's grey eyes, niched in between brow-bones and the roundness of her cheeks, not large but deep-set and wide with candour, became like moons; her face, all apple-blossom, with its dimpled pointed chin, deepened to red; the pigtail of fair hair hanging over one thin shoulder, quivered.

"Oh! Mother — he's a pig!"

"Of course he's a pig; all boys are pigs. Now come — what's he doing?"

Thyme answered in a strangled voice: "He's melted Susan; he's sucking her with a straw."

"What Susan?"

"Uncle Solomon's."

Solomon had given her a doll, exquisitely made of French sugar by Buster's of Piccadilly. He had said: "There's apricot jam in the middle."

But Thyme, disregardful, had loved her as a child, had cherished and dressed her for weeks, giving her all those little advantages of clothing and underclothing which disguise from men's eyes the secret weaknesses and beauties of the women they love. She had married her to Mr. Tims, an old dandy in a red shirt, white trousers, and a Homburg at, a man admirably adapted (out of wood to protect her from the world.

"Oh! Mother, he *is* such a pig! I've kicked his shins, and he just goes on sucking. He's a beast!" The tragedy was too deep for tears.

Danaë laughed; checked herself and said: "The wretch! Let go, you bony child! Go and send that boy to me!"

When Meryon came she received him severely. He was a moon-faced boy with a sort of fresh, angelic innocence in his blue eyes and on his somewhat sticky mouth.

"Well, what can you expect, Mother?" he said. "The beastly thing annoyed me, always about, like that! She's such an idiot, that girl; doing her best to spoil it, dressing it up. I offered to let her suck, too; we might have had it ages ago; it's a wonder there's any flavour left!"

"Cannibal — can-ni-bal bo-oy!"

"You hear that?" said Meryon. "She's always at me! She gives me no peace. I tell you what it is, Mother; she's a cat! Is Grampus in?"

Danaë answered: "Grampus indeed? I'll grampus you! Go to your room and stay there till supper!" and, turning away, she sank down on the sofa and sighed.

"Ah!" she thought. "Lonely and miserable — no one to help me — the world against me — and nothing but debts — debts — debts!" Again she sighed.

And at this second sigh Meryon, knowing himself forgotten, stole out on tiptoe and entered the dining-room.

There, on a crimson damask sofa, sat Anthony asleep. Of Meryon's composition reverence had no part, but in the immovability of the old man something ever fascinated his grandson, and he stood still, to look.

No boy of thirteen is an artist, still less is he that species of analytical chemist who has lately taken the artist's place, and Meryon could not express, even to himself, the impression made by that old, round-limbed, short-necked figure, by the shining red of those cheeks, the shining silver of that forehead and beard, the peculiar sough of the air escaping between the white-fringed lips. This was a sight he could see any day of the week from six to seven, and it never failed to fascinate. Asleep or awake, Anthony produced in his grandson a state of inaction. And, ambushed from habit behind an armchair, he watched those slumbers, as in some old picture a young Faun watches Silenus asleep, red-faced and silver-haired, from behind a tree. Nor was the background unlike that of Pagan mythology, for Anthony had brought to this somewhat temporary perch much old English furniture, the relics of Squire Baldwin Thornworthy's ancestral mansion 'up to Bovey'; and with the old English furniture something of the atmosphere which belonged to the hard-riding, port-drinking, free-loving days of the Squire, when the country was orthodox and Christian to a man, in the loyal belief that the British temperament was the ideal, original soil for Christian seed, and good hard hitting in Commerce, camp, and Church, the first teaching of Christ. Comparatively few were left now, and those nearly all on the Stock Exchange, who, like Anthony — orthodox Churchmen — disputing nothing, passed the purely Pagan lives of that older and more Christian epoch. Comparatively few, now that the country laboured in the early — and as yet unconscious — throes of an attempt to disgorge a religion which had never suited it, but lain undigested, contributing little if any nourishment to the system, and against whose fundamental flavour every fibre of the national stomach had ever revolted.

Such reflections passed through the mind of young Jolyon Forsyte, who, ushered in five minutes before by a maid ignorant of Anthony's presence, sat cross-kneed and quiet in a dark corner. With his eyes on Meryon crouched behind a chair—"an amazing thing," he thought, "that we've never found out that this struggle to assimilate a religion that does not suit us is responsible for all our world-renowned hypocrisy."

Through the silence of the room rumbled the long-drawn sobbing breath, as of the soul returning to the body, which preceded Anthony's awakening. Jolyon saw the boy Meryon steal to the sideboard, make a hasty collection, and gain the door, paying with thumb and nose a cheerful tribute to some presiding genius. And he mused: "That boy is right. Instead of curling his tail and whining, when Fortune smiles, for fear she should change her mind (as we do, and call it gratitude), he cocks a snook. The boy is right."

The maid entered, and summoned him away.

He never approached Danaë without a mechanical shiver, reflex action, no doubt, from the emotions of long ago; and never without a slight but not unkindly smile.

She received him to-day with a look faintly arch, remotely, unconsciously mocking, as to a man who had loved her and not won her, and now loved her no longer.

On hearing from the maid that he was there her violent dejection had vanished; it was succeeded by a gentle sensation of self-pity, and that soft, sad enticement betrayed itself in the slow languor of her limbs, in the expression of the eyes she turned on him.

And young Jolyon, over whom she now had no power, amused himself with observing the unconscious actress within her; had she been aware of her manner, she could never have done it so well.

He was not of the sounder order of citizens who require the whole world to conform to their tastes; he had rather a tendency to impersonally observe himself and others, which, in conjunction with a peculiar point of view and the remains of an immoral reputation clinging to him, as camphor clings to clothes, caused many to look on him askance.

And Danaë, who by instinct felt that impartial eye upon her, was ever armoured, in his presence, in a silken melancholy.

"I have come begging," he said. "Let me take the children down to Robin Hill. Jolly and Holly are pining for them. There never were four youngsters with more dissimilar temperaments; they're bound to get on. And if you like to run down at any time yourself, my wife will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

A smile played in the folds of his cheeks, and he added:

"You'll have the Dad to—" the expression 'flirt with' seemed vulgar, and he stopped.

"Your father is a splendid man," she said; "if you had been he I should never—"

Young Jolyon interrupted her humbly: "Exactly: that I know!"

Danaë lay back in her chair, her face screened from him by the fire-fan in her hand.

"Do you ever see your Uncle Roger?" she asked.

"No," replied young Jolyon.

"Then you don't know your cousins, I suppose; one of them comes to see me. Do you know him — George?"

Young Jolyon answered: Yes — he had met George at Solomon's. And he watched her, slowly fanning her face. One or two hints, his old experience of her, and his insight into men of George's calibre, enabled him to read her like a book. He saw that she wanted to talk to him on this subject, but was afraid. 'How will she wrap it up?' he thought.

"I shall get Solomon to tell him he ought not to give me things. He gave me those lilies," and her eyes seemed to say: 'You never give me anything, now.' "He ought not to spend his money on me. He's not a rich man, is he?"

"Constitutionally, no."

"I don't know what you mean by that; I never know what you mean by things; you're so — so — shadowy."

Indeed, he had a shadowy look; like a man who, not content with living on the income, has dipped into the capital of his emotions; his eye was by turns introspective and enquiring; his cheeks hollow; his face a little ravaged, but withal amiable, and with its pinch of humour.

"George is *not*, at all events," he said. "He's a good fellow, I believe." He habitually spoke well of his individual neighbours, and in the bulk despised them, as those do who have been through trouble.

"He's not her lover, yet," he thought.

She said softly, as though to herself: "Well, I shan't let him come here and waste his time on me; my position is hopeless—"

"But he will be, soon," thought young Jolyon, and he made his request again. "Then you will let me take the children? I particularly want Thyme." Danaë murmured abstractedly: "They are perfectly awful. You say George is a good fellow (I call him George). He's not a bit like you. Gregory doesn't like him. Is he very — fast?" She laughed the laugh of a woman who asks such a question.

Young Jolyon thought: "If I say 'No' it will not please her any more than if I say 'Yes'."

Danaë went on: "I wonder what Jaspar would say. Gregory says I oughtn't to see so much of George — you see I tell you everything. Poor Gregory!"

She stopped, and shading her face, leaned forward, staring at the hearth; the rich gleams flamed round her glowing cheeks and ripe hair, suffused and made her shine with soft fire, like a ruby.

Bellew — George! It was all comedy; but this — Gregory — was very far from being comedy! He had never met the man Vigil without a queer sensation as if someone had put a hand at the back of his neck, and tried softly to push him forward. Fate had not been kind, indeed, bringing up at their first meeting, by unfortunate chance, a matrimonial incident then under treatment in the daily papers. Vigil had expressed his views to Solomon: People — he thought — were not entitled to take the law into their own hands.

This was precisely, of course, what young Jolyon had done. He listened with a doubtful smile, and said nothing. Never since had he felt at ease in Vigil's presence, possessed by a secret irritation that seemed to be fermenting in the base of his temperament. He felt, in fact, that if he saw too much of him, this man would want him to do and see things according to the Vigil way. And, fundamentally peaceful, but fundamentally perverse, young Jolyon could not bear this feeling, which threatened both his peace and his perversity. At times, it gave him quite an uncanny turn. Through his sensations he divined the essence of Vigil's nature, perceived that he was mysteriously, tragically bound from birth to death to see that others did and thought like himself.

And, looking at Danaë, quite a shiver of pity went through young Jolyon, for a man whom he really liked, but could not sit in the same room with. A quaint piece of irony, it seemed, that Vigil should have fixed his affections on this woman, of all others! And he looked at her with interest, with a faint aversion, as a man might look at a jewel full of soft light, that nothing can scratch or change.

It would have pleased him to paint her thus, glowing with colour, a smile on her lips. To an artist (though his medium was water-colour and Danaë's personality demanded oils) she could not fail to be interesting, a piece of Nature's prodigality; and now that the turn of the wheel had removed from young Jolyon the necessity of making money by his pictures, he found a ready market for them, and his devotion to the pursuit had increased by leaps and bounds.

"I met Vigil in the hall," he said. "He thought it a little late for me to be coming up; and so—"

He rose, and held out his hand.

Danaë did not move. "But you must stay to dinner," she said. "Solomon is coming."

At half-past seven they sat down to dinner. Solomon was in dress clothes and wore a white waistcoat; he maintained the usages of Society in the teeth of Radical principles, from a certain large habitual neglect of externals.

At the head of the table sat Anthony in his black velvet jacket.

It is ever from their manner of eating that one divines the true essence of souls; which is but just, seeing that without eating they would soon be past psychology. When Anthony ate, he employed great methods. One knew him at once for a man of courage, of stubborn tenacity, of a shrewd if not cynical judgment. As he was very feeble, he protected his chest with his napkin; but by negative signs, by the omission of certain trenchant tricks, such as the consumption of peas off the end of a knife, he was seen to be a man of breeding and fashion. He partook largely of every dish, even when, as often, fidelity to his sensations had caused him to pronounce them unfit to touch. Wine, sauces, cigars, and tea, he preferred them all with character. He found no pleasure in tea unless it was black; he favoured port, maintaining throughout life that it was the true after-wine to champagne, but he required from it the 'old boot' flavour. Sauces of fine but devastating temperament he took with everything — game-birds alone excepted, which he ate high and untamed, in their own juices. Cigars he smoked to their very end, sucking them slowly through a meerschaum holder. In entertainment he gave of the best, with Roman splendour causing creatures to be brought from long distances, and vegetable substances to be cooked in peculiar ways. To recoil before difficulty was foreign to his temperament; and strawberries grew for him in January. The longest and happiest hours of his old age were passed with a fork in his hand. In vain men spoke of his appetite, envied him his gourmetic tastes, his Norse-like stomach — it was all one to Anthony. Not for nothing was he a Stoic.

Opposite him Solomon, like many large young men, ate but delicately; his size did not seem to depend on sustenance, but rather on his charitable and airy optimism.

Facing young Jolyon sat Danaë, a smile on her face, and her shoulders gleaming through the openwork of her loose dinner jacket. And father, brother, and sister seemed to be giving a sort of show of large and solid red and white before the lean, shadowy young Jolyon with his thin, brownish face, and the straitness of his close black coat.

"A strange thing," he said, "this process of eating! Has it ever struck you, Solomon, what a weird business it is, this sticking our forks into portions of animals and plants and lifting them up, making a fissure in our heads and putting them in? I was dining with my wife at a restaurant the other day, and just as I was lifting up a piece of sweetbread it came on me so strongly that I put it down again."

Anthony's voice was heard. "Hope you got over it!"

Young Jolyon smiled:

"I maintain that it's the strangest thing in life — that we should have to cut off little bits of pigs and sheep, and absorb them, in order to enable us to contemplate God and the differential calculus." Danaë said with a laugh: "My dear boy, how do you manage to think of such things? I should never have thought of anything so ridiculous!"

Young Jolyon answered: "But we're not all such splendid Pagans as you."

She stretched herself, raised her glass, and said: "Well, I don't in the least know what you mean." Solomon chuckled.

"For instance," went on young Jolyon, "if you walk up and down in the evening, at a foreign watering-place, you see glass-fronted restaurants, a lot of little tables, with men, or a man and a woman sitting opposite each other, opening their mouths at intervals and popping little things in, talking all the time about love, or the nicest little shades of Art, or the most rarefied ethics and abstractions. It's too funny for anything."

Anthony stopped eating, and looked fixedly at young Jolyon with his shrewd little deep-set eyes, from which there was projected a sort of infinite understanding.

Solomon said smilingly: "What surprises me, Jo, about those places is, how brutal it must be for the poor starving devils in the streets."

Young Jolyon answered: "Yes, that's interesting, too; such a complete parade could only happen in a Christian country."

"How do you mean?"

Young Jolyon hesitated a moment, looked at Anthony, and said: "No one in this country, I suppose, would deny that the further West you go the more Christian is the country."

"Well?"

"Nor that the further East you go the less sense there is of social order, the less respect for property and distinctions founded on property—"

Again Solomon said: "Well?"

"Such parades are all of a piece with property." Above a piece of partridge Anthony shot a quizzical glance at his son.

Solomon seemed to reflect: "I should have thought, all the same," he said, "that, take us all round, we English were, at all events, very good Christians."

"The boys at our Public Schools," answered young Jolyon, "speak Latin with such an English accent that not a Roman can be found to understand them."

Solomon, throwing his large body back in his chair, and beaming still, said: "You're such a sceptic, Jo."

In the silence that followed, Danaë yawned. “Danaë is bored,” said young Jolyon, and in the midst of a second silence a prolonged sigh was heard, such as Nature will sometimes heave out of stillness, as though a strange satisfaction were escaping her — Anthony was drinking.

“How about our reforming spirit?”

Solomon answered: “Well, wasn’t Christ a reformer?”

“You know the story of Miss A, the district visitor, elderly and plain, who went to visit Miss B, Irish and red of hair. ‘And what can I do for you, Miss B?’

‘Sure, ye can write a letter for me, to me son.’

‘Your son, Miss B? — but I thought — I thought—’

‘Oh! I’d have ye to know, Miss B, that *Oï’ve* not been entoirely neglected!’ Miss B was neither offended, nor did she write the letter; she made up her mind at once to make a new woman of Miss B.”

Danaë laughed. “You oughtn’t to tell such naughty stories!”

Anthony’s whispering voice was heard from the end of the table: “That’s one for Vigil!”

Young Jolyon smiled: “Yes, sir; for a woman of her principles Miss A has been remarkably prolific.”

And Solomon, as though speaking to himself, murmured: —

“H’m! Christ would have written the letter.” Young Jolyon laid down his knife and fork, turned his face, with its parallel folds, towards Solomon, and, taking a drooping end of moustache in either hand, said:

“Do you really imagine, Sol, that we who never sit down under an affront, whose chief boast is that we can make our own and keep our own, and give as good as we get; whose clergy are the first to insist on the punishment of offenders, and on the conformity of all the world to this point of view — do you imagine we can seriously be considered Christians? No, my boy, we are peculiarly in the spiritual condition of the society at whom Christ preached, and if he appeared again amongst us we should crucify him, with of course those modern refinements that have resulted, not from his teaching, but from scientific inventions and discoveries. I ask you, who is more unpopular at the present day than the ‘peace at any price’ — never-say-a-word-for-himself — man? We’re not Christians a bit; we’re humbugs; and only humbugs in words. At heart we’re more Pagan than any other people but the Americans.”

He paused, his eyes on Danaë’s rich ripe figure. Her shoulders and bosom heaved lazily. She said: “You’re always calling me a Pagan. I haven’t the least idea what you mean!” And as she sighed, a delicious fragrance was wafted to young Jolyon. He turned to Anthony and said: “*You* don’t agree with me, sir, I suppose?”

But Anthony nodded at his son, as though to say: “Don’t mind me; crack that nut!”

Solomon no longer smiled. The seriousness of his face betrayed the unwonted seriousness of his meditation.

“I don’t altogether agree with you, Jo,” he said; “I’m always astonished at the number of people who are prepared to sacrifice everything to their convictions. What do you say to that?”

“Three things. First, the *proportionate* number is not large. Second, it is not so much an evidence of Christianity as of fanaticism, which of course is part but not the whole of Christianity. Third. It’s almost always coupled with the desire to force those sacrifices and convictions on other people.”

“I don’t feel that.”

Young Jolyon smiled: “That’s because you’re so solid.”

In the pause that followed was heard the clucking, guggling noise of Anthony savouring his first glass of port.

Danaë spoke first: “Well, when you two have quite done talking all that twaddle, perhaps you’ll tell me when you want me to come to Robin Hill?”

“Any time this month or next. Will you come too, Sol?”

Solomon hesitated, the colour deepening in his sturdy cheeks. He said, almost bashfully: “No, Jo; I shall be at the orchard.”

Young Jolyon smiled, and dropped the subject. To Solomon’s orchard there hung a tale.

Five years before, returning late one night from a theatre, Solomon was timidly accosted in the street by a quite young girl in a thin, shabby dress, with a face reddened by cold, a short upper lip, and large grey black-encircled eyes. She spoke with a Welsh accent, and seemed very tired.

Solomon, who was incapable of roughness, did not reject her with the scorn and horror that he ought to have shown; he gave her a smile, gently shook his head, and stood looking at her. She looked so cold and unhappy, and her eyes so unhappy, that he began to talk to her. He ended by taking her to his rooms. A week later he bought a cottage in the country, with two acres of old orchard; here he took the girl and installed her. And here he had maintained her in sin ever since. She was the daughter of a small Welsh hill-farmer, new to her profession, into which she had been forced in the usual way. She had not indeed had time to get over its first horrors, and when Solomon had spoken gently to her while she sat holding her wet-stockinged feet to the fire in his sitting-room, she had suddenly and without affectation broken into a violent fit of sobbing. Her name was Anna Lewis, but Solomon called her Tansy.

The two acres of ground which surrounded the cottage were now scientifically laid out for fruit; a large crop of excellent apples, cherries, and pears was produced every year; for Solomon had given himself and most of the time he could spare from London, to this pursuit, in which his heart was concerned as it certainly was not in his Directorships. Young Jolyon, who had stayed with him there, alone knew the story; but since that which is secret must necessarily be naughty, ‘Solomon’s orchard’ had become a by-word, and no one seriously believed that he grew fruit. The girl seldom showed herself beyond the precincts of that grove of trees; she wore her dark hair in a round knob on her pretty head, dressed in linen, worked in the orchard, made no pretences, sang and laughed all the time Solomon was with her, and went about dropping tears when he was not. She had a certain wild-raspberry refinement, and never jarred the nerves of Solomon, whose own mother had been Welsh. He had never thought of marrying her.

And so young Jolyon dropped the subject and said to Anthony: “Will you come too, sir? My father would be so delighted; he often says he never sees anything of you now.”

Anthony inclined his head; his lips moved, his eyes gleamed friendlily.

Young Jolyon turned to Danaë: “Shall I ask Vigil?”

"Oh, yes! Ask Gregory; it'll do him good."

She was thinking: 'George doesn't like Gregory — poor Gregory.' A smile curling her upper lip revealed the gleam of her teeth.

"But why don't *you* like him?" she asked suddenly.

Young Jolyon was taken aback. "Like him? But I — like him very much."

"Oh, no! You're afraid of him."

Young Jolyon bit his lip; habitually examining statements against himself, he did not at once reply.

"You're right," he said at last. "I'm afraid of him. I feel he might at any moment try to prevent my getting my own way." And catching again the infinitely quizzical look in Anthony's little eye, he felt ashamed of himself. "I don't mean that he would succeed, but he would try; he might put me to a lot of trouble to prevent his success."

Solomon said in his slow easy way: "I don't understand all that. Old Gregory's an excellent chap."

And, looking from his face to Danaë's, young Jolyon was conscious that he was talking Greek. Anthony alone had understood him. And young Jolyon, with the secret desire of delivering a counterthrust, asked: "How are you getting on at the Bhang and Sciatic, sir?"

With a frown, Anthony answered: "Capitally." Solomon said: "We're going to have a strike, Jo. What do you think about the Labour question?"

"I read two rather good things in the paper the other day. This was one: 'The loosening of the marriage tie and the decrease of the number of children per marriage is a certain sign of national decay.' That was by an Archdeacon. The other was a Conservative politician: 'Publicly defrayed Labour schemes for persons out of employment will merely accelerate the deterioration of the nation.' They reminded me of a man at the seaside, dragging dead herring about in a cart, and crying: 'All alive o!' Those conceptions of marriage and economy have been out of the sea too long; no amount of 'All alive o!' will keep the breath in them. The State doesn't grow in any other direction and leave marriage and economy behind. The same with the Labour question; you must level it up with the conditions all round it!"

Anthony, looking fixedly at him, replied: "I don't agree with you at all."

Young Jolyon smiled. "No, I don't suppose you do, sir. You believe in 'every man for himself'; you're an individualist. If you'll forgive my saying so, you're peculiarly national. But I think you capitalists forget that what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. There's no real Socialistic feeling in this country; the workman's every bit as much of an individualist as you are."

"That's our strength."

"Pardon me — your weakness. Each workman looks to his own future; his individualism, hopefulness, selfishness, obstinacy, idealism, call it what you like — to his mainspring — and, banded together as they now are and will be more and more, they constitute a far more intense and fearful force than if they were animated by any of the brotherhood business. Each man of them means getting his own, their Unions are means to an end, not the end itself; that makes for strength."

"You think so?"

"Certainly. Even those men like Simon Harnutt (Vigil, by the way, is one of that sort) who seem to be most wrapped up in advancing the good of others, are really only impelled by the itch of getting their own beliefs and views adopted by others; they're individualists to a man, just like yourself."

"You seem to have studied the question."

"I have. We lookers-on see most of the game. And by Jove, sir, the more you hold them off at arm's length, the more you capitalists jut out at the other end of the social tree, with your Trusts and Combinations and 'don't care a damn' attitude, the more terrific is the struggle that's coming. I believe," young Jolyon ended gloomily, "the struggle in England — which will come more slowly than abroad, because it means more — there's more 'tusk' and character behind it — will bang Gallagher." Anthony, fixing him with his little eye, said: "We shall see who will win."

With a contemptuous little curl of the lip young Jolyon remarked: "You prefer, in fact, sitting on the valve."

"I'm a good weight."

"And suppose, while you are sitting in deep thought on the valve, it occurs to you that you have made a mistake, will you go on sitting there?" Anthony's little eyes twinkled: "Till the Day of Judgment."

"Which," replied young Jolyon, "will surely come."

For answer Anthony pushed the decanter towards his guest. Danaë rose. "You can sit and talk your politics," she said, "I'm going in to the drawing-room."

She went out. At the piano she sat humming a Spanish song. She was thinking of George.

Solomon returned to the Labour question.

"Do you know Sim Harnutt?" he said.

"Yes; my governor had a strike in the Rhyndy Pandy Coalfields last year, and Harnutt came down to us at Robin Hill."

"What's he like?"

"An idealist; an individualist. Very able."

"But to look at?"

"Flat-cheeked, close-jawed, wiry, clean-shaven, medium height, wears his hair rather long, looks like an American — and he's got that peculiar kind of haunting eye that always goes with his type."

"Is he a humbug?"

"Not at all. He doesn't mean what he says, but that's not his fault."

"How?"

"He talks about men being equal. It's the outward sign of the ideal he believes that he believes in; what he really believes in is Sim Harnutt, which is of course as much as to say that he doesn't believe in other men; in other words, that other men are not his equal. Besides, he has an obvious contempt for University creatures and capitalists like us."

Solomon beamed. "I should like to meet him," he said.

In an armchair Anthony sat slowly absorbing a large dark cigar through a rectangular meerschaum holder; now and then he slowly turned his little eyes on his son and guest, but he thought of nothing, sunk in after-dinner beatitude.

It was late when Solomon and young Jolyon took their departure, and past midnight when a man rang the bell of the flat, and stood waiting outside. His hands were thrust deep into the pockets of a dark overcoat with silk facings, which was open and revealed dress clothes; he held his high shoulders hunched, his chin thrust forward; his thin, long legs, the legs of a horseman, were a little bowed at the knees. Round his long, narrow head, under an opera hat, showed close-cropped reddish hair; he had a white, thin-lipped, freckled face, a clipped red moustache, and little fiery brown eyes.

The door was opened, and Danaë, in a mauve wrapper, a candle in her hand, asked:

"Who's that? What do you want? Jaspar? You've been drinking."

The visitor frowned; his eyes burned like coals. "A little," he said in a clear voice. "Let me in!" Danaë opened the door; and the two stood confronting one another. A smile played round Bellew's lips.

"You look very pretty with your hair like that. I've come to sleep."

"At this time of night indeed! There's no room for you!"

"I'll sleep in the passage."

Over Danaë's round, fresh face, framed in golden brown locks, over the curves of her ripe lips, into her greenish eyes, there came a smile — a half-coquettish, half-motherly, wholly hospitable smile.

"Well, come along!" she said: "there's my room after all!"

He closed the door behind him; the light from the candle fell on that strange smile. She gave a soft laugh, and finished with a sigh. She was thinking: "If Gregory could see me now!"

1905-1906

THE MAN OF PROPERTY

PART I

CHAPTER 1

'AT HOME' AT OLD JOLYON'S

Those privileged to be present at a family festival of the Forsytes have seen that charming and instructive sight — an upper middle-class family in full plumage. But whosoever of these favoured persons has possessed the gift of psychological analysis (a talent without monetary value and properly ignored by the Forsytes), has witnessed a spectacle, not only delightful in itself, but illustrative of an obscure human problem. In plainer words, he has gleaned from a gathering of this family — no branch of which had a liking for the other, between no three members of whom existed anything worthy of the name of sympathy — evidence of that mysterious concrete tenacity which renders a family so formidable a unit of society, so clear a reproduction of society in miniature. He has been admitted to a vision of the dim roads of social progress, has understood something of patriarchal life, of the swarmings of savage hordes, of the rise and fall of nations. He is like one who, having watched a tree grow from its planting — a paragon of tenacity, insulation, and success, amidst the deaths of a hundred other plants less fibrous, sappy, and persistent — one day will see it flourishing with bland, full foliage, in an almost repugnant prosperity, at the summit of its efflorescence.

On June 15, eighteen eighty-six, about four of the afternoon, the observer who chanced to be present at the house of old Jolyon Forsyte in Stanhope Gate, might have seen the highest efflorescence of the Forsytes.

This was the occasion of an 'at home' to celebrate the engagement of Miss June Forsyte, old Jolyon's granddaughter, to Mr. Philip Bosinney. In the bravery of light gloves, buff waistcoats, feathers and frocks, the family were present, even Aunt Ann, who now but seldom left the corner of her brother Timothy's green drawing-room, where, under the aegis of a plume of dyed pampas grass in a light blue vase, she sat all day reading and knitting, surrounded by the effigies of three generations of Forsytes. Even Aunt Ann was there; her inflexible back, and the dignity of her calm old face personifying the rigid possessiveness of the family idea.

When a Forsyte was engaged, married, or born, the Forsytes were present; when a Forsyte died — but no Forsyte had as yet died; they did not die; death being contrary to their principles, they took precautions against it, the instinctive precautions of highly vitalized persons who resent encroachments on their property.

About the Forsytes mingling that day with the crowd of other guests, there was a more than ordinarily groomed look, an alert, inquisitive assurance, a brilliant respectability, as though they were attired in defiance of something. The habitual sniff on the face of Soames Forsyte had spread through their ranks; they were on their guard.

The subconscious offensiveness of their attitude has constituted old Jolyon's 'home' the psychological moment of the family history, made it the prelude of their drama.

The Forsytes were resentful of something, not individually, but as a family; this resentment expressed itself in an added perfection of raiment, an exuberance of family cordiality, an exaggeration of family importance, and — the sniff. Danger — so indispensable in bringing out the fundamental quality of any society, group, or individual — was what the Forsytes scented; the premonition of danger put a burnish on their armour. For the first time, as a family, they appeared to have an instinct of being in contact, with some strange and unsafe thing.

Over against the piano a man of bulk and stature was wearing two waistcoats on his wide chest, two waistcoats and a ruby pin, instead of the single satin waistcoat and diamond pin of more usual occasions, and his shaven, square, old face, the colour of pale leather, with pale eyes, had its most dignified look, above his satin stock. This was Swithin Forsyte. Close to the window, where he could get more than his fair share of fresh air, the other twin, James — the fat and the lean of it, old Jolyon called these brothers — like the bulky Swithin, over six feet in height, but very lean, as though destined from his birth to strike a balance and maintain an average, brooded over the scene with his permanent stoop; his grey eyes had an air of fixed absorption in some secret worry, broken at intervals by a rapid, shifting scrutiny of surrounding facts; his cheeks, thinned by two parallel folds, and a long, clean-shaven upper lip, were framed within Dundreary whiskers. In his hands he turned and turned a piece of china. Not far off, listening to a lady in brown, his only son Soames, pale and well-shaved, dark-haired, rather bald, had poked his chin up sideways, carrying his nose with that aforesaid appearance of 'sniff,' as though despising an egg which he knew he could not digest. Behind him his cousin, the tall George, son of the fifth Forsyte, Roger, had a Quilpish look on his fleshy face, pondering one of his sardonic jests. Something inherent to the occasion had affected them all.

Seated in a row close to one another were three ladies — Aunts Ann, Hester (the two Forsyte maids), and Juley (short for Julia), who not in first youth had so far forgotten herself as to marry Septimus Small, a man of poor constitution. She had survived him for many years. With her elder and younger sister she lived now in the house of Timothy, her sixth and youngest brother, on the Bayswater Road. Each of these ladies held fans in their hands, and each with some touch of colour, some emphatic feather or brooch, testified to the solemnity of the opportunity.

In the centre of the room, under the chandelier, as became a host, stood the head of the family, old Jolyon himself. Eighty years of age, with his fine, white hair, his dome-like forehead, his little, dark grey eyes, and an immense white moustache, which drooped and spread below the level of his strong jaw, he had a patriarchal look, and in spite of lean cheeks and hollows at his temples, seemed master of perennial youth. He held himself extremely upright, and his shrewd, steady eyes had lost none of their clear shining. Thus he gave an impression of superiority to the doubts and dislikes of smaller men. Having had his own way for innumerable years, he had earned a prescriptive right to it. It would never have occurred to old Jolyon that it was necessary to wear a look of doubt or of defiance.

Between him and the four other brothers who were present, James, Swithin, Nicholas, and Roger, there was much difference, much similarity. In turn, each of these four brothers was very different from the other, yet they, too, were alike.

Through the varying features and expression of those five faces could be marked a certain steadfastness of chin, underlying surface distinctions, marking a racial stamp, too prehistoric to trace, too remote and permanent to discuss — the very hall-mark and guarantee of the family fortunes.

Among the younger generation, in the tall, bull-like George, in pallid strenuous Archibald, in young Nicholas with his sweet and tentative obstinacy, in the grave and foppishly determined Eustace, there was this same stamp — less meaningful perhaps, but unmistakable — a sign of something ineradicable in the family soul. At one time or another during the afternoon, all these faces, so dissimilar and so alike, had worn an expression of distrust, the object of which was undoubtedly the man whose acquaintance they were thus assembled to make. Philip Bosinney was known to be a young man without fortune, but Forsyte girls had become engaged to such before, and had actually married them. It was not altogether for this reason, therefore, that the minds of the Forsytes misgave them. They could not have explained the origin of a misgiving obscured by the mist of family gossip. A story was undoubtedly told that he had paid his duty call to Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester, in a soft grey hat — a soft grey hat, not even a new one — a dusty thing with a shapeless crown. "So, extraordinary, my dear — so odd," Aunt Hester, passing through the little, dark hall (she was rather short-sighted), had tried to 'shoo' it off a chair, taking it for a strange, disreputable cat — Tommy had such disgraceful friends! She was disturbed when it did not move.

Like an artist for ever seeking to discover the significant trifle which embodies the whole character of a scene, or place, or person, so those unconscious artists — the Forsytes had fastened by intuition on this hat; it was their significant trifle, the detail in which was embedded the meaning of the whole matter; for each had asked himself: "Come, now, should I have paid that visit in that hat?" and each had answered "No!" and some, with more imagination than others, had added: "It would never have come into my head!"

George, on hearing the story, grinned. The hat had obviously been worn as a practical joke! He himself was a connoisseur of such. "Very haughty!" he said, "the wild Buccaneer."

And this mot, the 'Buccaneer,' was bandied from mouth to mouth, till it became the favourite mode of alluding to Bosinney.

Her aunts reproached June afterwards about the hat.

"We don't think you ought to let him, dear!" they had said.

June had answered in her imperious brisk way, like the little embodiment of will she was: "Oh! what does it matter? Phil never knows what he's got on!"

No one had credited an answer so outrageous. A man not to know what he had on? No, no! What indeed was this young man, who, in becoming engaged to June, old Jolyon's acknowledged heiress, had done so well for himself? He was an architect, not in itself a sufficient reason for wearing such a hat. None of the Forsytes happened to be architects, but one of them knew two architects who would never have worn such a hat upon a call of ceremony in the London season.

Dangerous — ah, dangerous! June, of course, had not seen this, but, though not yet nineteen, she was notorious. Had she not said to Mrs. Soames — who was always so beautifully dressed — that feathers were vulgar? Mrs. Soames had actually given up wearing feathers, so dreadfully downright was dear June!

These misgivings, this disapproval, and perfectly genuine distrust, did not prevent the Forsytes from gathering to old Jolyon's invitation. An 'At Home' at Stanhope Gate was a great rarity; none had been held for twelve years, not indeed, since old Mrs. Jolyon had died.

Never had there been so full an assembly, for, mysteriously united in spite of all their differences, they had taken arms against a common peril. Like cattle when a dog comes into the field, they stood head to head and shoulder to shoulder, prepared to run upon and trample the invader to death. They had come, too, no doubt, to get some notion of what sort of presents they would ultimately be expected to give; for though the question of wedding gifts was usually graduated in this way: 'What are you givin'? Nicholas is givin' spoons!'— so very much depended on the bridegroom. If he were sleek, well-brushed, prosperous-looking, it was more necessary to give him nice things; he would expect them. In the end each gave exactly what was right and proper, by a species of family adjustment arrived at as prices are arrived at on the Stock Exchange — the exact niceties being regulated at Timothy's commodious, red-brick residence in Bayswater, overlooking the Park, where dwelt Aunts Ann, Juley, and Hester.

The uneasiness of the Forsyte family has been justified by the simple mention of the hat. How impossible and wrong would it have been for any family, with the regard for appearances which should ever characterize the great upper middle-class, to feel otherwise than uneasy!

The author of the uneasiness stood talking to June by the further door; his curly hair had a rumpled appearance, as though he found what was going on around him unusual. He had an air, too, of having a joke all to himself. George, speaking aside to his brother, Eustace, said:

"Looks as if he might make a bolt of it — the dashing Buccaneer!"

This 'very singular-looking man,' as Mrs. Small afterwards called him, was of medium height and strong build, with a pale, brown face, a dust-coloured moustache, very prominent cheek-bones, and hollow checks. His forehead sloped back towards the crown of his head, and bulged out in bumps over the eyes, like foreheads seen in the Lion-house at the Zoo. He had sherry-coloured eyes, disconcertingly inattentive at times. Old Jolyon's coachman, after driving June and Bosinney to the theatre, had remarked to the butler:

"I dunno what to make of 'im. Looks to me for all the world like an 'alf-tame leopard." And every now and then a Forsyte would come up, sidle round, and take a look at him.

June stood in front, fending off this idle curiosity — a little bit of a thing, as somebody once said, 'all hair and spirit,' with fearless blue eyes, a firm jaw, and a bright colour, whose face and body seemed too slender for her crown of red-gold hair.

A tall woman, with a beautiful figure, which some member of the family had once compared to a heathen goddess, stood looking at these two with a shadowy smile.

Her hands, gloved in French grey, were crossed one over the other, her grave, charming face held to one side, and the eyes of all men near were fastened on it. Her figure swayed, so balanced that the very air seemed to set it moving. There was warmth, but little colour, in her cheeks; her large, dark eyes were soft.

But it was at her lips — asking a question, giving an answer, with that shadowy smile — that men looked; they were sensitive lips, sensuous and sweet, and through them seemed to come warmth and perfume like the warmth and perfume of a flower.

The engaged couple thus scrutinized were unconscious of this passive goddess. It was Bosinney who first noticed her, and asked her name.

June took her lover up to the woman with the beautiful figure.

"Irene is my greatest chum," she said: "Please be good friends, you two!"

At the little lady's command they all three smiled; and while they were smiling, Soames Forsyte, silently appearing from behind the woman with the beautiful figure, who was his wife, said:

“Ah! introduce me too!”

He was seldom, indeed, far from Irene’s side at public functions, and even when separated by the exigencies of social intercourse, could be seen following her about with his eyes, in which were strange expressions of watchfulness and longing.

At the window his father, James, was still scrutinizing the marks on the piece of china.

“I wonder at Jolyon’s allowing this engagement,” he said to Aunt Ann. “They tell me there’s no chance of their getting married for years. This young Bosinney” (he made the word a dactyl in opposition to general usage of a short o) “has got nothing. When Winifred married Dartie, I made him bring every penny into settlement — lucky thing, too — they’d ha’ had nothing by this time!”

Aunt Ann looked up from her velvet chair. Grey curls banded her forehead, curls that, unchanged for decades, had extinguished in the family all sense of time. She made no reply, for she rarely spoke, husbanding her aged voice; but to James, uneasy of conscience, her look was as good as an answer.

“Well,” he said, “I couldn’t help Irene’s having no money. Soames was in such a hurry; he got quite thin dancing attendance on her.”

Putting the bowl pettishly down on the piano, he let his eyes wander to the group by the door.

“It’s my opinion,” he said unexpectedly, “that it’s just as well as it is.”

Aunt Ann did not ask him to explain this strange utterance. She knew what he was thinking. If Irene had no money she would not be so foolish as to do anything wrong; for they said — they said — she had been asking for a separate room; but, of course, Soames had not. . . .

James interrupted her reverie:

“But where,” he asked, “was Timothy? Hadn’t he come with them?”

Through Aunt Ann’s compressed lips a tender smile forced its way:

“No, he didn’t think it wise, with so much of this diphtheria about; and he so liable to take things.”

James answered:

“Well, HE takes good care of himself. I can’t afford to take the care of myself that he does.”

Nor was it easy to say which, of admiration, envy, or contempt, was dominant in that remark.

Timothy, indeed, was seldom seen. The baby of the family, a publisher by profession, he had some years before, when business was at full tide, scented out the stagnation which, indeed, had not yet come, but which ultimately, as all agreed, was bound to set in, and, selling his share in a firm engaged mainly in the production of religious books, had invested the quite conspicuous proceeds in three per cent. consols. By this act he had at once assumed an isolated position, no other Forsyte being content with less than four per cent. for his money; and this isolation had slowly and surely undermined a spirit perhaps better than commonly endowed with caution. He had become almost a myth — a kind of incarnation of security haunting the background of the Forsyte universe. He had never committed the imprudence of marrying, or encumbering himself in any way with children.

James resumed, tapping the piece of china:

“This isn’t real old Worcester. I s’pose Jolyon’s told you something about the young man. From all I can learn, he’s got no business, no income, and no connection worth speaking of; but then, I know nothing — nobody tells me anything.”

Aunt Ann shook her head. Over her square-chinned, aquiline old face a trembling passed; the spidery fingers of her hands pressed against each other and interlaced, as though she were subtly recharging her will.

The eldest by some years of all the Forsytes, she held a peculiar position amongst them. Opportunists and egotists one and all — though not, indeed, more so than their neighbours — they quailed before her incorruptible figure, and, when opportunities were too strong, what could they do but avoid her!

Twisting his long, thin legs, James went on:

“Jolyon, he will have his own way. He’s got no children”— and stopped, recollecting the continued existence of old Jolyon’s son, young Jolyon, June’s father, who had made such a mess of it, and done for himself by deserting his wife and child and running away with that foreign governess. “Well,” he resumed hastily, “if he likes to do these things, I s’pose he can afford to. Now, what's he going to give her? I s'pose he'll give her a thousand a year; he's got nobody else to leave his money to."

He stretched out his hand to meet that of a dapper, clean-shaven man, with hardly a hair on his head, a long, broken nose, full lips, and cold grey eyes under rectangular brows.

"Well, Nick," he muttered, "how are you?"

Nicholas Forsyte, with his bird-like rapidity and the look of a preternaturally sage schoolboy (he had made a large fortune, quite legitimately, out of the companies of which he was a director), placed within that cold palm the tips of his still colder fingers and hastily withdrew them.

"I'm bad," he said, pouting —"been bad all the week; don't sleep at night. The doctor can't tell why. He's a clever fellow, or I shouldn't have him, but I get nothing out of him but bills."

"Doctors!" said James, coming down sharp on his words: "I've had all the doctors in London for one or another of us. There's no satisfaction to be got out of them; they'll tell you anything. There's Swithin, now. What good have they done him? There he is; he's bigger than ever; he's enormous; they can't get his weight down. Look at him!"

Swithin Forsyte, tall, square, and broad, with a chest like a pouter pigeon's in its plumage of bright waistcoats, came strutting towards them.

"Er — how are you?" he said in his dandified way, aspirating the 'h' strongly (this difficult letter was almost absolutely safe in his keeping)—"how are you?"

Each brother wore an air of aggravation as he looked at the other two, knowing by experience that they would try to eclipse his ailments.

"We were just saying," said James, "that you don't get any thinner."

Swithin protruded his pale round eyes with the effort of hearing.

"Thinner? I'm in good case," he said, leaning a little forward, "not one of your thread-papers like you!"

But, afraid of losing the expansion of his chest, he leaned back again into a state of immobility, for he prized nothing so highly as a distinguished appearance.

Aunt Ann turned her old eyes from one to the other. Indulgent and severe was her look. In turn the three brothers looked at Ann. She was getting shaky. Wonderful woman! Eighty-six if a day; might live another ten years, and had never been strong. Swithin and James, the twins, were only seventy-five, Nicholas a mere baby of seventy or so. All were strong, and the inference was comforting. Of all forms of property their respective healths naturally concerned them most.

"I'm very well in myself," proceeded James, "but my nerves are out of order. The least thing worries me to death. I shall have to go to Bath."

"Bath!" said Nicholas. "I've tried Harrogate. That's no good. What I want is sea air. There's nothing like Yarmouth. Now, when I go there I sleep. . . . "

"My liver's very bad," interrupted Swithin slowly. "Dreadful pain here;" and he placed his hand on his right side.

"Want of exercise," muttered James, his eyes on the china. He quickly added: "I get a pain there, too."

Swithin reddened, a resemblance to a turkey-cock coming upon his old face.

"Exercise!" he said. "I take plenty: I never use the lift at the Club."

"I didn't know," James hurried out. "I know nothing about anybody; nobody tells me anything. . . . "

Swithin fixed him with a stare:

"What do you do for a pain there?"

James brightened.

"I take a compound. . . . "

"How are you, uncle?"

June stood before him, her resolute small face raised from her little height to his great height, and her hand outheld.

The brightness faded from James's visage.

"How are you?" he said, brooding over her. "So you're going to Wales to-morrow to visit your young man's aunts? You'll have a lot of rain there. This isn't real old Worcester." He tapped the bowl. "Now, that set I gave your mother when she married was the genuine thing.”

June shook hands one by one with her three great-uncles, and turned to Aunt Ann. A very sweet look had come into the old lady’s face, she kissed the girl’s check with trembling fervour.

“Well, my dear,” she said, “and so you’re going for a whole month!”

The girl passed on, and Aunt Ann looked after her slim little figure. The old lady’s round, steel grey eyes, over which a film like a bird’s was beginning to come, followed her wistfully amongst the bustling crowd, for people were beginning to say good-bye; and her finger-tips, pressing and pressing against each other, were busy again with the recharging of her will against that inevitable ultimate departure of her own.

‘Yes,’ she thought, ‘everybody’s been most kind; quite a lot of people come to congratulate her. She ought to be very happy.’ Amongst the throng of people by the door, the well-dressed throng drawn from the families of lawyers and doctors, from the Stock Exchange, and all the innumerable avocations of the upper-middle class — there were only some twenty percent of Forsytes; but to Aunt Ann they seemed all Forsytes — and certainly there was not much difference — she saw only her own flesh and blood. It was her world, this family, and she knew no other, had never perhaps known any other. All their little secrets, illnesses, engagements, and marriages, how they were getting on, and whether they were making money — all this was her property, her delight, her life; beyond this only a vague, shadowy mist of facts and persons of no real significance. This it was that she would have to lay down when it came to her turn to die; this which gave to her that importance, that secret self-importance, without which none of us can bear to live; and to this she clung wistfully, with a greed that grew each day! If life were slipping away from her, this she would retain to the end.

She thought of June’s father, young Jolyon, who had run away with that foreign girl. And what a sad blow to his father and to them all. Such a promising young fellow! A sad blow, though there had been no public scandal, most fortunately, Jo’s wife seeking for no divorce! A long time ago! And when June’s mother died, six years ago, Jo had married that woman, and they had two children now, so she had heard. Still, he had forfeited his right to be there, had cheated her of the complete fulfilment of her family pride, deprived her of the rightful pleasure of seeing and kissing him of whom she had been so proud, such a promising young fellow! The thought rankled with the bitterness of a long-inflicted injury in her tenacious old heart. A little water stood in her eyes. With a handkerchief of the finest lawn she wiped them stealthily.

“Well, Aunt Ann?” said a voice behind.

Soames Forsyte, flat-shouldered, clean-shaven, flat-cheeked, flat-waisted, yet with something round and secret about his whole appearance, looked downwards and aslant at Aunt Ann, as though trying to see through the side of his own nose.

“And what do you think of the engagement?” he asked.

Aunt Ann’s eyes rested on him proudly; of all the nephews since young Jolyon’s departure from the family nest, he was now her favourite, for she recognised in him a sure trustee of the family soul that must so soon slip beyond her keeping.

“Very nice for the young man,” she said; “and he’s a good-looking young fellow; but I doubt if he’s quite the right lover for dear June.”

Soames touched the edge of a gold-lacquered lustre.

“She’ll tame him,” he said, stealthily wetting his finger and rubbing it on the knobby bulbs. “That’s genuine old lacquer; you can’t get it nowadays. It’d do well in a sale at Jobson’s.” He spoke with relish, as though he felt that he was cheering up his old aunt. It was seldom he was so confidential. “I wouldn’t mind having it myself,” he added; “you can always get your price for old lacquer.”

“You’re so clever with all those things,” said Aunt Ann. “And how is dear Irene?”

Soames’s smile died.

“Pretty well,” he said. “Complains she can’t sleep; she sleeps a great deal better than I do,” and he looked at his wife, who was talking to Bosinney by the door.

Aunt Ann sighed.

“Perhaps,” she said, “it will be just as well for her not to see so much of June. She’s such a decided character, dear June!”

Soames flushed; his flushes passed rapidly over his flat cheeks and centered between his eyes, where they remained, the stamp of disturbing thoughts.

"I don't know what she sees in that little flibbertigibbet," he burst out, but noticing that they were no longer alone, he turned and again began examining the lustre.

"They tell me Jolyon's bought another house," said his father's voice close by; "he must have a lot of money — he must have more money than he knows what to do with! Montpellier Square, they say; close to Soames! They never told me, Irene never tells me anything!"

"Capital position, not two minutes from me," said the voice of Swithin, "and from my rooms I can drive to the Club in eight."

The position of their houses was of vital importance to the Forsytes, nor was this remarkable, since the whole spirit of their success was embodied therein.

Their father, of farming stock, had come from Dorsetshire near the beginning of the century.

'Superior Dosset Forsyte, as he was called by his intimates, had been a stonemason by trade, and risen to the position of a master-builder.

Towards the end of his life he moved to London, where, building on until he died, he was buried at Highgate. He left over thirty thousand pounds between his ten children. Old Jolyon alluded to him, if at all, as 'A hard, thick sort of man; not much refinement about him.' The second generation of Forsytes felt indeed that he was not greatly to their credit. The only aristocratic trait they could find in his character was a habit of drinking Madeira.

Aunt Hester, an authority on family history, described him thus: "I don't recollect that he ever did anything; at least, not in my time. He was er — an owner of houses, my dear. His hair about your Uncle Swithin's colour; rather a square build. Tall? No — not very tall" (he had been five feet five, with a mottled face); "a fresh-coloured man. I remember he used to drink Madeira; but ask your Aunt Ann. What was his father? He — er — had to do with the land down in Dorsetshire, by the sea."

James once went down to see for himself what sort of place this was that they had come from. He found two old farms, with a cart track rutted into the pink earth, leading down to a mill by the beach; a little grey church with a buttressed outer wall, and a smaller and greyer chapel. The stream which worked the mill came bubbling down in a dozen rivulets, and pigs were hunting round that estuary. A haze hovered over the prospect. Down this hollow, with their feet deep in the mud and their faces towards the sea, it appeared that the primeval Forsytes had been content to walk Sunday after Sunday for hundreds of years.

Whether or no James had cherished hopes of an inheritance, or of something rather distinguished to be found down there, he came back to town in a poor way, and went about with a pathetic attempt at making the best of a bad job.

"There's very little to be had out of that," he said; "regular country little place, old as the hills. . . . "

Its age was felt to be a comfort. Old Jolyon, in whom a desperate honesty welled up at times, would allude to his ancestors as: "Yeomen — I suppose very small beer." Yet he would repeat the word 'yeomen' as if it afforded him consolation.

They had all done so well for themselves, these Forsytes, that they were all what is called 'of a certain position.' They had shares in all sorts of things, not as yet — with the exception of Timothy — in consols, for they had no dread in life like that of 3 per cent. for their money. They collected pictures, too, and were supporters of such charitable institutions as might be beneficial to their sick domestics. From their father, the builder, they inherited a talent for bricks and mortar. Originally, perhaps, members of some primitive sect, they were now in the natural course of things members of the Church of England, and caused their wives and children to attend with some regularity the more fashionable churches of the Metropolis. To have doubted their Christianity would have caused them both pain and surprise. Some of them paid for pews, thus expressing in the most practical form their sympathy with the teachings of Christ.

Their residences, placed at stated intervals round the park, watched like sentinels, lest the fair heart of this London, where their desires were fixed, should slip from their clutches, and leave them lower in their own estimations.

There was old Jolyon in Stanhope Place; the Jameses in Park Lane; Swithin in the lonely glory of orange and blue chambers in Hyde Park Mansions — he had never married, not he — the Soamses in their nest off Knightsbridge; the Rogers in Prince's Gardens (Roger was that remarkable Forsyte who had conceived and carried out the notion of bringing up his four sons to a new profession. "Collect house property, nothing like it," he would say; "I never did anything else").

The Haymans again — Mrs. Hayman was the one married Forsyte sister — in a house high up on Campden Hill, shaped like a giraffe, and so tall that it gave the observer a crick in the neck; the Nicholases in Ladbroke Grove, a spacious abode and a great bargain; and last, but not least, Timothy's on the Bayswater Road, where Ann, and Juley, and Hester, lived under his protection.

But all this time James was musing, and now he inquired of his host and brother what he had given for that house in Montpellier Square. He himself had had his eye on a house there for the last two years, but they wanted such a price.

Old Jolyon recounted the details of his purchase.

"Twenty-two years to run?" repeated James; "The very house I was after — you've given too much for it!"

Old Jolyon frowned.

"It's not that I want it," said James hastily; it wouldn't suit my purpose at that price. Soames knows the house, well — he'll tell you it's too dear — his opinion's worth having."

"I don't," said old Jolyon, "care a fig for his opinion."

"Well," murmured James, "you will have your own way — it's a good opinion. Good-bye! We're going to drive down to Hurlingham. They tell me June's going to Wales. You'll be lonely tomorrow. What'll you do with yourself? You'd better come and dine with us!"

Old Jolyon refused. He went down to the front door and saw them into their barouche, and twinkled at them, having already forgotten his spleen — Mrs. James facing the horses, tall and majestic with auburn hair; on her left, Irene — the two husbands, father and son, sitting forward, as though they expected something, opposite their wives. Bobbing and bounding upon the spring cushions, silent, swaying to each motion of their chariot, old Jolyon watched them drive away under the sunlight.

During the drive the silence was broken by Mrs. James.

"Did you ever see such a collection of rumty-too people?"

Soames, glancing at her beneath his eyelids, nodded, and he saw Irene steal at him one of her unfathomable looks. It is likely enough that each branch of the Forsyte family made that remark as they drove away from old Jolyon's 'At Home!'

Amongst the last of the departing guests the fourth and fifth brothers, Nicholas and Roger, walked away together, directing their steps alongside Hyde Park towards the Praed Street Station of the Underground. Like all other Forsytes of a certain age they kept carriages of their own, and never took cabs if by any means they could avoid it.

The day was bright, the trees of the Park in the full beauty of mid-June foliage; the brothers did not seem to notice phenomena, which contributed, nevertheless, to the jauntiness of promenade and conversation.

"Yes," said Roger, "she's a good-lookin' woman, that wife of Soames's. I'm told they don't get on."

This brother had a high forehead, and the freshest colour of any of the Forsytes; his light grey eyes measured the street frontage of the houses by the way, and now and then he would level his, umbrella and take a 'lunar,' as he expressed it, of the varying heights.

"She'd no money," replied Nicholas.

He himself had married a good deal of money, of which, it being then the golden age before the Married Women's Property Act, he had mercifully been enabled to make a successful use.

"What was her father?"

"Heron was his name, a Professor, so they tell me."

Roger shook his head.

"There's no money in that," he said.

"They say her mother's father was cement."

Roger's face brightened.

"But he went bankrupt," went on Nicholas.

"Ah!" exclaimed Roger, "Soames will have trouble with her; you mark my words, he'll have trouble — she's got a foreign look."

Nicholas licked his lips.

"She's a pretty woman," and he waved aside a crossing-sweeper.

“How did he get hold of her?” asked Roger presently. “She must cost him a pretty penny in dress!”

“Ann tells me,” replied Nicholas, “he was half-cracked about her. She refused him five times. James, he’s nervous about it, I can see.”

“Ah!” said Roger again; “I’m sorry for James; he had trouble with Dartie.” His pleasant colour was heightened by exercise, he swung his umbrella to the level of his eye more frequently than ever. Nicholas’s face also wore a pleasant look.

“Too pale for me,” he said, “but her figures capital!”

Roger made no reply.

“I call her distinguished-looking,” he said at last — it was the highest praise in the Forsyte vocabulary. “That young Bosinney will never do any good for himself. They say at Burkitt’s he’s one of these artistic chaps — got an idea of improving English architecture; there’s no money in that! I should like to hear what Timothy would say to it.”

They entered the station.

“What class are you going? I go second.”

“No second for me,” said Nicholas; —“you never know what you may catch.”

He took a first-class ticket to Notting Hill Gate; Roger a second to South Kensington. The train coming in a minute later, the two brothers parted and entered their respective compartments. Each felt aggrieved that the other had not modified his habits to secure his society a little longer; but as Roger voiced it in his thoughts:

‘Always a stubborn beggar, Nick!’

And as Nicholas expressed it to himself:

‘Cantankerous chap Roger — always was!’

There was little sentimentality about the Forsytes. In that great London, which they had conquered and become merged in, what time had they to be sentimental?

❦

Chapter 2

Old Jolyon Goes to the Opera

At five o'clock the following day old Jolyon sat alone, a cigar between his lips, and on a table by his side a cup of tea. He was tired, and before he had finished his cigar he fell asleep. A fly settled on his hair, his breathing sounded heavy in the drowsy silence, his upper lip under the white moustache puffed in and out. From between the fingers of his veined and wrinkled hand the cigar, dropping on the empty hearth, burned itself out.

The gloomy little study, with windows of stained glass to exclude the view, was full of dark green velvet and heavily-carved mahogany — a suite of which old Jolyon was wont to say: 'Shouldn't wonder if it made a big price some day!'

It was pleasant to think that in the after life he could get more for things than he had given.

In the rich brown atmosphere peculiar to back rooms in the mansion of a Forsyte, the Rembrandtesque effect of his great head, with its white hair, against the cushion of his high-backed seat, was spoiled by the moustache, which imparted a somewhat military look to his face. An old clock that had been with him since before his marriage forty years ago kept with its ticking a jealous record of the seconds slipping away forever from its old master.

He had never cared for this room, hardly going into it from one year's end to another, except to take cigars from the Japanese cabinet in the corner, and the room now had its revenge.

His temples, curving like thatches over the hollows beneath, his cheek-bones and chin, all were sharpened in his sleep, and there had come upon his face the confession that he was an old man.

He woke. June had gone! James had said he would be lonely. James had always been a poor thing. He recollected with satisfaction that he had bought that house over James's head.

Serve him right for sticking at the price; the only thing the fellow thought of was money. Had he given too much, though? It wanted a lot of doing to — He dared say he would want all his money before he had done with this affair of June's. He ought never to have allowed the engagement. She had met this Bosinney at the house of Baynes, Baynes and Bildeboy, the architects. He believed that Baynes, whom he knew — a bit of an old woman — was the young man's uncle by marriage. After that she'd been always running after him; and when she took a thing into her head there was no stopping her. She was continually taking up with 'lame ducks' of one sort or another. This fellow had no money, but she must needs become engaged to him — a harumscarum, unpractical chap, who would get himself into no end of difficulties.

She had come to him one day in her slap-dash way and told him; and, as if it were any consolation, she had added:

"He's so splendid; he's often lived on cocoa for a week!"

"And he wants you to live on cocoa too?"

"Oh no; he is getting into the swim now."

Old Jolyon had taken his cigar from under his white moustaches, stained by coffee at the edge, and looked at her, that little slip of a thing who had got such a grip of his heart. He knew more about 'swims' than his granddaughter. But she, having clasped her hands on his knees, rubbed her chin against him, making a sound like a purring cat. And, knocking the ash off his cigar, he had exploded in nervous desperation:

"You're all alike: you won't be satisfied till you've got what you want. If you must come to grief, you must; I wash my hands of it."

So, he had washed his hands of it, making the condition that they should not marry until Bosinney had at least four hundred a year.

"I shan't be able to give you very much," he had said, a formula to which June was not unaccustomed. "Perhaps this What's-his-name will provide the cocoa."

He had hardly seen anything of her since it began. A bad business! He had no notion of giving her a lot of money to enable a fellow he knew nothing about to live on in idleness. He had seen that sort of thing before; no good ever came of it. Worst of all, he had no hope of shaking her resolution; she was as obstinate as a mule, always had been from a child. He didn't see where it was to end. They must cut their coat according to their cloth. He would not give way till he saw young

Bosinney with an income of his own. That June would have trouble with the fellow was as plain as a pikestaff; he had no more idea of money than a cow. As to this rushing down to Wales to visit the young man's aunts, he fully expected they were old cats.

And, motionless, old Jolyon stared at the wall; but for his open eyes, he might have been asleep. . . . The idea of supposing that young cub Soames could give him advice! He had always been a cub, with his nose in the air! He would be setting up as a man of property next, with a place in the country! A man of property! H'mph! Like his father, he was always nosing out bargains, a cold-blooded young beggar!

He rose, and, going to the cabinet, began methodically stocking his cigar-case from a bundle fresh in. They were not bad at the price, but you couldn't get a good cigar, nowadays, nothing to hold a candle to those old Superfinos of Hanson and Bridger's. That was a cigar!

The thought, like some stealing perfume, carried him back to those wonderful nights at Richmond when after dinner he sat smoking on the terrace of the Crown and Sceptre with Nicholas Treffry and Traquair and Jack Herring and Anthony Thornworthy. How good his cigars were then! Poor old Nick! — dead, and Jack Herring — dead, and Traquair — dead of that wife of his, and Thornworthy — awfully shaky (no wonder, with his appetite).

Of all the company of those days he himself alone seemed left, except Swithin, of course, and he so outrageously big there was no doing anything with him.

Difficult to believe it was so long ago; he felt young still! Of all his thoughts, as he stood there counting his cigars, this was the most poignant, the most bitter. With his white head and his loneliness he had remained young and green at heart. And those Sunday afternoons on Hampstead Heath, when young Jolyon and he went for a stretch along the Spaniard's Road to Highgate, to Child's Hill, and back over the Heath again to dine at Jack Straw's Castle — how delicious his cigars were then! And such weather! There was no weather now.

When June was a toddler of five, and every other Sunday he took her to the Zoo, away from the society of those two good women, her mother and her grandmother, and at the top of the bear den baited his umbrella with buns for her favourite bears, how sweet his cigars were then!

Cigars! He had not even succeeded in out-living his palate — the famous palate that in the fifties men swore by, and speaking of him, said: "Forsyte's the best palate in London!" The palate that in a sense had made his fortune — the fortune of the celebrated tea men, Forsyte and Treffry, whose tea, like no other man's tea, had a romantic aroma, the charm of a quite singular genuineness. About the house of Forsyte and Treffry in the City had clung an air of enterprise and mystery, of special dealings in special ships, at special ports, with special Orientals.

He had worked at that business! Men did work in those days! these young pups hardly knew the meaning of the word. He had gone into every detail, known everything that went on, sometimes sat up all night over it. And he had always chosen his agents himself, prided himself on it. His eye for men, he used to say, had been the secret of his success, and the exercise of this masterful power of selection had been the only part of it all that he had really liked. Not a career for a man of his ability. Even now, when the business had been turned into a Limited Liability Company, and was declining (he had got out of his shares long ago), he felt a sharp chagrin in thinking of that time. How much better he might have done! He would have succeeded splendidly at the Bar! He had even thought of standing for Parliament. How often had not Nicholas Treffry said to him:

"You could do anything, Jo, if you weren't so d-damned careful of yourself!" Dear old Nick! Such a good fellow, but a racketty chap! The notorious Treffry! He had never taken any care of himself. So he was dead. Old Jolyon counted his cigars with a steady hand, and it came into his mind to wonder if perhaps he had been too careful of himself.

He put the cigar-case in the breast of his coat, buttoned it in, and walked up the long flights to his bedroom, leaning on one foot and the other, and helping himself by the bannister. The house was too big. After June was married, if she ever did marry this fellow, as he supposed she would, he would let it and go into rooms. What was the use of keeping half a dozen servants eating their heads off?

The butler came to the ring of his bell — a large man with a beard, a soft tread, and a peculiar capacity for silence. Old Jolyon told him to put his dress clothes out; he was going to dine at the Club.

How long had the carriage been back from taking Miss June to the station? Since two? Then let him come round at half-past six!

The Club which old Jolyon entered on the stroke of seven was one of those political institutions of the upper middle class which have seen better days. In spite of being talked about, perhaps in consequence of being talked about, it betrayed a disappointing vitality. People had grown tired of saying that the 'Disunion' was on its last legs. Old Jolyon would say it, too, yet disregarded the fact in a manner truly irritating to well-constituted Clubmen.

"Why do you keep your name on?" Swithin often asked him with profound vexation. "Why don't you join the 'Polyglot'? You can't get a wine like our Heidsieck under twenty shillin' a bottle anywhere in London;" and, dropping his voice, he added: "There's only five hundred dozen left. I drink it every night of my life."

"I'll think of it," old Jolyon would answer; but when he did think of it there was always the question of fifty guineas entrance fee, and it would take him four or five years to get in. He continued to think of it.

He was too old to be a Liberal, had long ceased to believe in the political doctrines of his Club, had even been known to allude to them as 'wretched stuff,' and it afforded him pleasure to continue a member in the teeth of principles so opposed to his own. He had always had a contempt for the place, having joined it many years ago when they refused to have him at the 'Hotch Potch' owing to his being 'in trade.' As if he were not as good as any of them! He naturally despised the Club that did take him. The members were a poor lot, many of them in the City — stockbrokers, solicitors, auctioneers — what not! Like most men of strong character but not too much originality, old Jolyon set small store by the class to which he belonged. Faithfully he followed their customs, social and otherwise, and secretly he thought them 'a common lot.'

Years and philosophy, of which he had his share, had dimmed the recollection of his defeat at the 'Hotch Potch'; and now in his thoughts it was enshrined as the Queen of Clubs. He would have been a member all these years himself, but, owing to the slipshod way his proposer, Jack Herring, had gone to work, they had not known what they were doing in keeping him out. Why! they had taken his son Jo at once, and he believed the boy was still a member; he had received a letter dated from there eight years ago.

He had not been near the 'Disunion' for months, and the house had undergone the piebald decoration which people bestow on old houses and old ships when anxious to sell them.

'Beastly colour, the smoking-room!' he thought. 'The dining-room is good!'

Its gloomy chocolate, picked out with light green, took his fancy.

He ordered dinner, and sat down in the very corner, at the very table perhaps! (things did not progress much at the 'Disunion,' a Club of almost Radical principles) at which he and young Jolyon used to sit twenty-five years ago, when he was taking the latter to Drury Lane, during his holidays.

The boy had loved the theatre, and old Jolyon recalled how he used to sit opposite, concealing his excitement under a careful but transparent nonchalance.

He ordered himself, too, the very dinner the boy had always chosen-soup, whitebait, cutlets, and a tart. Ah! if he were only opposite now!

The two had not met for fourteen years. And not for the first time during those fourteen years old Jolyon wondered whether he had been a little to blame in the matter of his son. An unfortunate love-affair with that precious flirt Danae Thornworthy (now Danae Pellew), Anthony Thornworthy's daughter, had thrown him on the rebound into the arms of June's mother. He ought perhaps to have put a spoke in the wheel of their marriage; they were too young; but after that experience of Jo's susceptibility he had been only too anxious to see him married. And in four years the crash had come! To have approved his son's conduct in that crash was, of course, impossible; reason and training — that combination of potent factors which stood for his principles — told him of this impossibility, and his heart cried out. The grim remorselessness of that business had no pity for hearts. There was June, the atom with flaming hair, who had climbed all over him, twined and twisted herself about him — about his heart that was made to be the plaything and beloved resort of tiny, helpless things. With characteristic insight he saw he must part with one or with the other; no half-measures could serve in such a situation. In that lay its tragedy. And the tiny, helpless thing prevailed. He would not run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, and so to his son he said good-bye.

That good-bye had lasted until now.

He had proposed to continue a reduced allowance to young Jolyon, but this had been refused, and perhaps that refusal had hurt him more than anything, for with it had gone the last outlet of his penned-in affection; and there had come such tangible and solid proof of rupture as only a transaction in property, a bestowal or refusal of such, could supply.

His dinner tasted flat. His pint of champagne was dry and bitter stuff, not like the Veuve Clicquots of old days.

Over his cup of coffee, he bethought him that he would go to the opera. In the Times, therefore — he had a distrust of other papers — he read the announcement for the evening. It was 'Fidelio.'

Mercifully not one of those new-fangled German pantomimes by that fellow Wagner.

Putting on his ancient opera hat, which, with its brim flattened by use, and huge capacity, looked like an emblem of greater days, and, pulling out an old pair of very thin lavender kid gloves smelling strongly of Russia leather, from habitual proximity to the cigar-case in the pocket of his overcoat, he stepped into a hansom.

The cab rattled gaily along the streets, and old Jolyon was struck by their unwonted animation.

'The hotels must be doing a tremendous business,' he thought. A few years ago there had been none of these big hotels. He made a satisfactory reflection on some property he had in the neighbourhood. It must be going up in value by leaps and bounds! What traffic!

But from that he began indulging in one of those strange impersonal speculations, so uncharacteristic of a Forsyte, wherein lay, in part, the secret of his supremacy amongst them. What atoms men were, and what a lot of them! And what would become of them all?

He stumbled as he got out of the cab, gave the man his exact fare, walked up to the ticket office to take his stall, and stood there with his purse in his hand — he always carried his money in a purse, never having approved of that habit of carrying it loosely in the pockets, as so many young men did nowadays. The official leaned out, like an old dog from a kennel.

"Why," he said in a surprised voice, "it's Mr. Jolyon Forsyte! So it is! Haven't seen you, sir, for years. Dear me! Times aren't what they were. Why! you and your brother, and that auctioneer — Mr. Traquair, and Mr. Nicholas Treffry — you used to have six or seven stalls here regular every season. And how are you, sir? We don't get younger!"

The colour in old Jolyon's eyes deepened; he paid his guinea. They had not forgotten him. He marched in, to the sounds of the overture, like an old war-horse to battle.

Folding his opera hat, he sat down, drew out his lavender gloves in the old way, and took up his glasses for a long look round the house. Dropping them at last on his folded hat, he fixed his eyes on the curtain. More poignantly than ever he felt that it was all over and done with him. Where were all the women, the pretty women, the house used to be so full of? Where was that old feeling in the heart as he waited for one of those great singers? Where that sensation of the intoxication of life and of his own power to enjoy it all?

The greatest opera-goer of his day! There was no opera now! That fellow Wagner had ruined everything; no melody left, nor any voices to sing it. Ah! the wonderful singers! Gone! He sat watching the old scenes acted, a numb feeling at his heart.

From the curl of silver over his ear to the pose of his foot in its elastic-sided patent boot, there was nothing clumsy or weak about old Jolyon. He was as upright — very nearly — as in those old times when he came every night; his sight was as good — almost as good. But what a feeling of weariness and disillusion!

He had been in the habit all his life of enjoying things, even imperfect things — and there had been many imperfect things — he had enjoyed them all with moderation, so as to keep himself young. But now he was deserted by his power of enjoyment, by his philosophy, and left with this dreadful feeling that it was all done with. Not even the Prisoners' Chorus, nor Florian's Song, had the power to dispel the gloom of his loneliness.

If Jo were only with him! The boy must be forty by now. He had wasted fourteen years out of the life of his only son. And Jo was no longer a social pariah. He was married. Old Jolyon had been unable to refrain from marking his appreciation of the action by enclosing his son a cheque for L500. The cheque had been returned in a letter from the 'Hotch Potch,' couched in these words.

'MY DEAREST FATHER,

'Your generous gift was welcome as a sign that you might think worse of me. I return it, but should you think fit to invest it for the benefit of the little chap (we call him Jolly), who bears our Christian and, by courtesy, our surname, I shall be very glad.

'I hope with all my heart that your health is as good as ever.

‘Your loving son,

‘Jo.’

The letter was like the boy. He had always been an amiable chap. Old Jolyon had sent this reply:

‘MY DEAR JO,

‘The sum (L500) stands in my books for the benefit of your boy, under the name of Jolyon Forsyte, and will be duly-credited with interest at 5 per cent. I hope that you are doing well. My health remains good at present.

‘With love, I am, ‘Your affectionate Father, ‘JOLYON FORSYTE.’

And every year on the 1st of January he had added a hundred and the interest. The sum was mounting up — next New Year’s Day it would be fifteen hundred and odd pounds! And it is difficult to say how much satisfaction he had got out of that yearly transaction. But the correspondence had ended.

In spite of his love for his son, in spite of an instinct, partly constitutional, partly the result, as in thousands of his class, of the continual handling and watching of affairs, prompting him to judge conduct by results rather than by principle, there was at the bottom of his heart a sort of uneasiness. His son ought, under the circumstances, to have gone to the dogs; that law was laid down in all the novels, sermons, and plays he had ever read, heard, or witnessed.

After receiving the cheque back there seemed to him to be something wrong somewhere. Why had his son not gone to the dogs? But, then, who could tell?

He had heard, of course — in fact, he had made it his business to find out — that Jo lived in St. John’s Wood, that he had a little house in Wistaria Avenue with a garden, and took his wife about with him into society — a queer sort of society, no doubt — and that they had two children — the little chap they called Jolly (considering the circumstances the name struck him as cynical, and old Jolyon both feared and disliked cynicism), and a girl called Holly, born since the marriage. Who could tell what his son’s circumstances really were? He had capitalized the income he had inherited from his mother’s father and joined Lloyd’s as an underwriter; he painted pictures, too — water-colours. Old Jolyon knew this, for he had surreptitiously bought them from time to time, after chancing to see his son’s name signed at the bottom of a representation of the river Thames in a dealer’s window. He thought them bad, and did not hang them because of the signature; he kept them locked up in a drawer.

In the great opera-house a terrible yearning came on him to see his son. He remembered the days when he had been wont to slide him, in a brown holland suit, to and fro under the arch of his legs; the times when he ran beside the boy’s pony, teaching him to ride; the day he first took him to school. He had been a loving, lovable little chap! After he went to Eton he had acquired, perhaps, a little too much of that desirable manner which old Jolyon knew was only to be obtained at such places and at great expense; but he had always been companionable. Always a companion, even after Cambridge — a little far off, perhaps, owing to the advantages he had received. Old Jolyon’s feeling towards our public schools and ‘Varsities never wavered, and he retained touchingly his attitude of admiration and mistrust towards a system appropriate to the highest in the land, of which he had not himself been privileged to partake. . . . Now that June had gone and left, or as good as left him, it would have been a comfort to see his son again. Guilty of this treason to his family, his principles, his class, old Jolyon fixed his eyes on the singer. A poor thing — a wretched poor thing! And the Florian a perfect stick!

It was over. They were easily pleased nowadays!

In the crowded street he snapped up a cab under the very nose of a stout and much younger gentleman, who had already assumed it to be his own. His route lay through Pall Mall, and at the corner, instead of going through the Green Park, the cabman turned to drive up St. James’s Street. Old Jolyon put his hand through the trap (he could not bear being taken out of his way); in turning, however, he found himself opposite the ‘Hotch Potch,’ and the yearning that had been secretly with him the whole evening prevailed. He called to the driver to stop. He would go in and ask if Jo still belonged there.

He went in. The hall looked exactly as it did when he used to dine there with Jack Herring, and they had the best cook in London; and he looked round with the shrewd, straight glance that had caused him all his life to be better served than most men.

“Mr. Jolyon Forsyte still a member here?”

“Yes, sir; in the Club now, sir. What name?”

Old Jolyon was taken aback.

“His father,” he said.

And having spoken, he took his stand, back to the fireplace.

Young Jolyon, on the point of leaving the Club, had put on his hat, and was in the act of crossing the hall, as the porter met him. He was no longer young, with hair going grey, and face — a narrower replica of his father’s, with the same large drooping moustache — decidedly worn. He turned pale. This meeting was terrible after all those years, for nothing in the world was so terrible as a scene. They met and crossed hands without a word. Then, with a quaver in his voice, the father said:

“How are you, my boy?”

The son answered:

“How are you, Dad?”

Old Jolyon’s hand trembled in its thin lavender glove.

“If you’re going my way,” he said, “I can give you a lift.”

And as though in the habit of taking each other home every night they went out and stepped into the cab.

To old Jolyon it seemed that his son had grown. ‘More of a man altogether,’ was his comment. Over the natural amiability of that son’s face had come a rather sardonic mask, as though he had found in the circumstances of his life the necessity for armour. The features were certainly those of a Forsyte, but the expression was more the introspective look of a student or philosopher. He had no doubt been obliged to look into himself a good deal in the course of those fifteen years.

To young Jolyon the first sight of his father was undoubtedly a shock — he looked so worn and old. But in the cab he seemed hardly to have changed, still having the calm look so well remembered, still being upright and keen-eyed.

“You look well, Dad.”

“Middling,” old Jolyon answered.

He was the prey of an anxiety that he found he must put into words. Having got his son back like this, he felt he must know what was his financial position.

“Jo,” he said, “I should like to hear what sort of water you’re in. I suppose you’re in debt?”

He put it this way that his son might find it easier to confess.

Young Jolyon answered in his ironical voice:

“No! I’m not in debt!”

Old Jolyon saw that he was angry, and touched his hand. He had run a risk. It was worth it, however, and Jo had never been sulky with him. They drove on, without speaking again, to Stanhope Gate. Old Jolyon invited him in, but young Jolyon shook his head.

“June’s not here,” said his father hastily: “went of to-day on a visit. I suppose you know that she’s engaged to be married?”

“Already?” murmured young Jolyon’.

Old Jolyon stepped out, and, in paying the cab fare, for the first time in his life gave the driver a sovereign in mistake for a shilling.

Placing the coin in his mouth, the cabman whipped his horse secretly on the underneath and hurried away.

Old Jolyon turned the key softly in the lock, pushed open the door, and beckoned. His son saw him gravely hanging up his coat, with an expression on his face like that of a boy who intends to steal cherries.

The door of the dining-room was open, the gas turned low; a spirit-urn hissed on a tea-tray, and close to it a cynical looking cat had fallen asleep on the dining-table. Old Jolyon ‘shoo’d’ her off at once. The incident was a relief to his feelings; he rattled his opera hat behind the animal.

“She’s got fleas,” he said, following her out of the room. Through the door in the hall leading to the basement he called “Hssst!” several times, as though assisting the cat’s departure, till by some strange coincidence the butler appeared below.

“You can go to bed, Parfitt,” said old Jolyon. “I will lock up and put out.”

When he again entered the dining-room the cat unfortunately preceded him, with her tail in the air, proclaiming that she had seen through this manouevre for suppressing the butler from the first. . . .

A fatality had dogged old Jolyon's domestic stratagems all his life.

Young Jolyon could not help smiling. He was very well versed in irony, and everything that evening seemed to him ironical. The episode of the cat; the announcement of his own daughter's engagement. So he had no more part or parcel in her than he had in the Puss! And the poetical justice of this appealed to him.

"What is June like now?" he asked.

"She's a little thing," returned old Jolyon; they say she's like me, but that's their folly. She's more like your mother — the same eyes and hair."

"Ah! and she is pretty?"

Old Jolyon was too much of a Forsyte to praise anything freely; especially anything for which he had a genuine admiration.

"Not bad looking — a regular Forsyte chin. It'll be lonely here when she's gone, Jo."

The look on his face again gave young Jolyon the shock he had felt on first seeing his father.

"What will you do with yourself, Dad? I suppose she's wrapped up in him?"

"Do with myself?" repeated old Jolyon with an angry break in his voice. "It'll be miserable work living here alone. I don't know how it's to end. I wish to goodness. . . . " He checked himself, and added: "The question is, what had I better do with this house?"

Young Jolyon looked round the room. It was peculiarly vast and dreary, decorated with the enormous pictures of still life that he remembered as a boy — sleeping dogs with their noses resting on bunches of carrots, together with onions and grapes lying side by side in mild surprise. The house was a white elephant, but he could not conceive of his father living in a smaller place; and all the more did it all seem ironical.

In his great chair with the book-rest sat old Jolyon, the figurehead of his family and class and creed, with his white head and dome-like forehead, the representative of moderation, and order, and love of property. As lonely an old man as there was in London.

There he sat in the gloomy comfort of the room, a puppet in the power of great forces that cared nothing for family or class or creed, but moved, machine-like, with dread processes to inscrutable ends. This was how it struck young Jolyon, who had the impersonal eye.

The poor old Dad! So this was the end, the purpose to which he had lived with such magnificent moderation! To be lonely, and grow older and older, yearning for a soul to speak to!

In his turn old Jolyon looked back at his son. He wanted to talk about many things that he had been unable to talk about all these years. It had been impossible to seriously confide in June his conviction that property in the Soho quarter would go up in value; his uneasiness about that tremendous silence of Pippin, the superintendent of the New Colliery Company, of which he had so long been chairman; his disgust at the steady fall in American Golgothas, or even to discuss how, by some sort of settlement, he could best avoid the payment of those death duties which would follow his decease. Under the influence, however, of a cup of tea, which he seemed to stir indefinitely, he began to speak at last. A new vista of life was thus opened up, a promised land of talk, where he could find a harbour against the waves of anticipation and regret; where he could soothe his soul with the opium of devising how to round off his property and make eternal the only part of him that was to remain alive.

Young Jolyon was a good listener; it was his great quality. He kept his eyes fixed on his father's face, putting a question now and then.

The clock struck one before old Jolyon had finished, and at the sound of its striking his principles came back. He took out his watch with a look of surprise:

"I must go to bed, Jo," he said.

Young Jolyon rose and held out his hand to help his father up. The old face looked worn and hollow again; the eyes were steadily averted.

"Good-bye, my boy; take care of yourself."

A moment passed, and young Jolyon, turning on his, heel, marched out at the door. He could hardly see; his smile quavered. Never in all the fifteen years since he had first found out that life was no simple business, had he found it so singularly complicated.

❦

Chapter 3

In Swithin's orange and light-blue dining-room, facing the Park, the round table was laid for twelve.

A cut-glass chandelier filled with lighted candles hung like a giant stalactite above its centre, radiating over large gilt-framed mirrors, slabs of marble on the tops of side-tables, and heavy gold chairs with crewel worked seats. Everything betokened that love of beauty so deeply implanted in each family which has had its own way to make into Society, out of the more vulgar heart of Nature. Swithin had indeed an impatience of simplicity, a love of ormolu, which had always stamped him amongst his associates as a man of great, if somewhat luxurious taste; and out of the knowledge that no one could possibly enter his rooms without perceiving him to be a man of wealth, he had derived a solid and prolonged happiness such as perhaps no other circumstance in life had afforded him.

Since his retirement from land agency, a profession deplorable in his estimation, especially as to its auctioneering department, he had abandoned himself to naturally aristocratic tastes.

The perfect luxury of his latter days had embedded him like a fly in sugar; and his mind, where very little took place from morning till night, was the junction of two curiously opposite emotions, a lingering and sturdy satisfaction that he had made his own way and his own fortune, and a sense that a man of his distinction should never have been allowed to soil his mind with work.

He stood at the sideboard in a white waistcoat with large gold and onyx buttons, watching his valet screw the necks of three champagne bottles deeper into ice-pails. Between the points of his stand-up collar, which — though it hurt him to move — he would on no account have had altered, the pale flesh of his under chin remained immovable. His eyes roved from bottle to bottle. He was debating, and he argued like this: Jolyon drinks a glass, perhaps two, he's so careful of himself. James, he can't take his wine nowadays. Nicholas — Fanny and he would swill water he shouldn't wonder! Soames didn't count; these young nephews — Soames was thirty-one — couldn't drink! But Bosinney?

Encountering in the name of this stranger something outside the range of his philosophy, Swithin paused. A misgiving arose within him! It was impossible to tell! June was only a girl, in love too! Emily (Mrs. James) liked a good glass of champagne. It was too dry for Juley, poor old soul, she had no palate. As to Hatty Chessman! The thought of this old friend caused a cloud of thought to obscure the perfect glassiness of his eyes: He shouldn't wonder if she drank half a bottle!

But in thinking of his remaining guest, an expression like that of a cat who is just going to purr stole over his old face: Mrs. Soames! She mightn't take much, but she would appreciate what she drank; it was a pleasure to give her good wine! A pretty woman — and sympathetic to him!

The thought of her was like champagne itself! A pleasure to give a good wine to a young woman who looked so well, who knew how to dress, with charming manners, quite distinguished — a pleasure to entertain her. Between the points of his collar he gave his head the first small, painful oscillation of the evening.

"Adolf!" he said. "Put in another bottle."

He himself might drink a good deal, for, thanks to that prescription of Blight's, he found himself extremely well, and he had been careful to take no lunch. He had not felt so well for weeks. Puffing out his lower lip, he gave his last instructions:

"Adolf, the least touch of the West India when you come to the ham."

Passing into the anteroom, he sat down on the edge of a chair, with his knees apart; and his tall, bulky form was wrapped at once in an expectant, strange, primeval immobility. He was ready to rise at a moment's notice. He had not given a dinner-party for months. This dinner in honour of June's engagement had seemed a bore at first (among Forsytes the custom of solemnizing engagements by feasts was religiously observed), but the labours of sending invitations and ordering the repast over, he felt pleasantly stimulated.

And thus sitting, a watch in his hand, fat, and smooth, and golden, like a flattened globe of butter, he thought of nothing.

A long man, with side whiskers, who had once been in Swithin's service, but was now a greengrocer, entered and proclaimed:

"Mrs. Chessman, Mrs. Septimus Small!"

Two ladies advanced. The one in front, habited entirely in red, had large, settled patches of the same colour in her cheeks, and a hard, dashing eye. She walked at Swithin, holding out a hand cased in a long, primrose-coloured glove:

"Well! Swithin," she said, "I haven't seen you for ages. How are you? Why, my dear boy, how stout you're getting!"

The fixity of Swithin's eye alone betrayed emotion. A dumb and grumbling anger swelled his bosom. It was vulgar to be stout, to talk of being stout; he had a chest, nothing more. Turning to his sister, he grasped her hand, and said in a tone of command:

"Well, Juley."

Mrs. Septimus Small was the tallest of the four sisters; her good, round old face had gone a little sour; an innumerable pout clung all over it, as if it had been encased in an iron wire mask up to that evening, which, being suddenly removed, left little rolls of mutinous flesh all over her countenance. Even her eyes were pouting. It was thus that she recorded her permanent resentment at the loss of Septimus Small.

She had quite a reputation for saying the wrong thing, and, tenacious like all her breed, she would hold to it when she had said it, and add to it another wrong thing, and so on. With the decease of her husband the family tenacity, the family matter-of-factness, had gone sterile within her. A great talker, when allowed, she would converse without the faintest animation for hours together, relating, with epic monotony, the innumerable occasions on which Fortune had misused her; nor did she ever perceive that her hearers sympathized with Fortune, for her heart was kind.

Having sat, poor soul, long by the bedside of Small (a man of poor constitution), she had acquired, the habit, and there were countless subsequent occasions when she had sat immense periods of time to amuse sick people, children, and other helpless persons, and she could never divest herself of the feeling that the world was the most ungrateful place anybody could live in. Sunday after Sunday she sat at the feet of that extremely witty preacher, the Rev. Thomas Scoles, who exercised a great influence over her; but she succeeded in convincing everybody that even this was a misfortune. She had passed into a proverb in the family, and when anybody was observed to be peculiarly distressing, he was known as a regular 'Juley.' The habit of her mind would have killed anybody but a Forsyte at forty; but she was seventy-two, and had never looked better. And one felt that there were capacities for enjoyment about her which might yet come out. She owned three canaries, the cat Tommy, and half a parrot — in common with her sister Hester; — and these poor creatures (kept carefully out of Timothy's way — he was nervous about animals), unlike human beings, recognising that she could not help being blighted, attached themselves to her passionately.

She was sombrely magnificent this evening in black bombazine, with a mauve front cut in a shy triangle, and crowned with a black velvet ribbon round the base of her thin throat; black and mauve for evening wear was esteemed very chaste by nearly every Forsyte.

Pouting at Swithin, she said:

"Ann has been asking for you. You haven't been near us for an age!"

Swithin put his thumbs within the armholes of his waistcoat, and replied:

"Ann's getting very shaky; she ought to have a doctor!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Forsyte!"

Nicholas Forsyte, cocking his rectangular eyebrows, wore a smile. He had succeeded during the day in bringing to fruition a scheme for the employment of a tribe from Upper India in the gold-mines of Ceylon. A pet plan, carried at last in the teeth of great difficulties — he was justly pleased. It would double the output of his mines, and, as he had often forcibly argued, all experience tended to show that a man must die; and whether he died of a miserable old age in his own country, or prematurely of damp in the bottom of a foreign mine, was surely of little consequence, provided that by a change in his mode of life he benefited the British Empire.

His ability was undoubted. Raising his broken nose towards his listener, he would add:

"For want of a few hundred of these fellows we haven't paid a dividend for years, and look at the price of the shares. I can't get ten shillings for them."

He had been at Yarmouth, too, and had come back feeling that he had added at least ten years to his own life. He grasped Swithin's hand, exclaiming in a jocular voice:

"Well, so here we are again!"

Mrs. Nicholas, an effete woman, smiled a smile of frightened jollity behind his back.

"Mr. and Mrs. James Forsyte! Mr. and Mrs. Soames Forsyte!"

Swithin drew his heels together, his deportment ever admirable.

"Well, James, well Emily! How are you, Soames? How do you do?"

His hand enclosed Irene's, and his eyes swelled. She was a pretty woman — a little too pale, but her figure, her eyes, her teeth! Too good for that chap Soames!

The gods had given Irene dark brown eyes and golden hair, that strange combination, provocative of men's glances, which is said to be the mark of a weak character. And the full, soft pallor of her neck and shoulders, above a gold-coloured frock, gave to her personality an alluring strangeness.

Soames stood behind, his eyes fastened on his wife's neck. The hands of Swithin's watch, which he still held open in his hand, had left eight behind; it was half an hour beyond his dinner-time — he had had no lunch — and a strange primeval impatience surged up within him.

"It's not like Jolyon to be late!" he said to Irene, with uncontrollable vexation. "I suppose it'll be June keeping him!"

"People in love are always late," she answered.

Swithin stared at her; a dusky orange dyed his cheeks.

"They've no business to be. Some fashionable nonsense!"

And behind this outburst the inarticulate violence of primitive generations seemed to mutter and grumble.

"Tell me what you think of my new star, Uncle Swithin," said Irene softly.

Among the lace in the bosom of her dress was shining a five-pointed star, made of eleven diamonds. Swithin looked at the star. He had a pretty taste in stones; no question could have been more sympathetically devised to distract his attention.

"Who gave you that?" he asked.

"Soames."

There was no change in her face, but Swithin's pale eyes bulged as though he might suddenly have been afflicted with insight.

"I dare say you're dull at home," he said. "Any day you like to come and dine with me, I'll give you as good a bottle of wine as you'll get in London."

"Miss June Forsyte — Mr. Jolyon Forsyte! . . . Mr. Boswainey! . . . "

Swithin moved his arm, and said in a rumbling voice:

"Dinner, now — dinner!"

He took in Irene, on the ground that he had not entertained her since she was a bride. June was the portion of Bosinney, who was placed between Irene and his fiancee. On the other side of June was James with Mrs. Nicholas, then old Jolyon with Mrs. James, Nicholas with Hatty Chessman, Soames with Mrs. Small, completing, the circle to Swithin again.

Family dinners of the Forsytes observe certain traditions. There are, for instance, no hors d'oeuvre. The reason for this is unknown. Theory among the younger members traces it to the disgraceful price of oysters; it is more probably due to a desire to come to the point, to a good practical sense deciding at once that hors d'oeuvre are but poor things. The Jameses alone, unable to withstand a custom almost universal in Park Lane, are now and then unfaithful.

A silent, almost morose, inattention to each other succeeds to the subsidence into their seats, lasting till well into the first entree, but interspersed with remarks such as, "Tom's bad again; I can't tell what's the matter with him!" "I suppose Ann doesn't come down in the mornings?"—"What's the name of your doctor, Fanny?" "Stubbs?" "He's a quack!"—"Winifred? She's got too many children. Four, isn't it? She's as thin as a lath!"—"What d'you give for this sherry, Swithin? Too dry for me!"

With the second glass of champagne, a kind of hum makes itself heard, which, when divested of casual accessories and resolved into its primal element, is found to be James telling a story, and this goes on for a long time, encroaching sometimes even upon what must universally be recognised as the crowning point of a Forsyte feast —'the saddle of mutton.'

No Forsyte has given a dinner without providing a saddle of mutton. There is something in its succulent solidity which makes it suitable to people 'of a certain position.' It is nourishing and tasty; the sort of thing a man remembers eating. It has a past and a future, like a deposit paid into a bank; and it is something that can be argued about.

Each branch of the family tenaciously held to a particular locality — old Jolyon swearing by Dartmoor, James by Welsh, Swithin by Southdown, Nicholas maintaining that people might sneer, but there was nothing like New Zealand! As for Roger, the 'original' of the brothers, he had been obliged to invent a locality of his own, and with an ingenuity worthy of a man who had devised a new profession for his sons, he had discovered a shop where they sold German; on being remonstrated with, he had proved his point by producing a butcher's bill, which showed that he paid more than any of the others. It was on this occasion that old Jolyon, turning to June, had said in one of his bursts of philosophy:

"You may depend upon it, they're a cranky lot, the Forsytes — and you'll find it out, as you grow older!"

Timothy alone held apart, for though he ate saddle of mutton heartily, he was, he said, afraid of it.

To anyone interested psychologically in Forsytes, this great saddle-of-mutton trait is of prime importance; not only does it illustrate their tenacity, both collectively and as individuals, but it marks them as belonging in fibre and instincts to that great class which believes in nourishment and flavour, and yields to no sentimental craving for beauty.

Younger members of the family indeed would have done without a joint altogether, preferring guinea-fowl, or lobster salad — something which appealed to the imagination, and had less nourishment — but these were females; or, if not, had been corrupted by their wives, or by mothers, who having been forced to eat saddle of mutton throughout their married lives, had passed a secret hostility towards it into the fibre of their sons.

The great saddle-of-mutton controversy at an end, a Tewkesbury ham commenced, together with the least touch of West Indian — Swithin was so long over this course that he caused a block in the progress of the dinner. To devote himself to it with better heart, he paused in his conversation.

From his seat by Mrs. Septimus Small Soames was watching. He had a reason of his own connected with a pet building scheme, for observing Bosinney. The architect might do for his purpose; he looked clever, as he sat leaning back in his chair, moodily making little ramparts with bread-crumbs. Soames noted his dress clothes to be well cut, but too small, as though made many years ago.

He saw him turn to Irene and say something and her face sparkle as he often saw it sparkle at other people — never at himself. He tried to catch what they were saying, but Aunt Juley was speaking.

Hadn't that always seemed very extraordinary to Soames? Only last Sunday dear Mr. Scole, had been so witty in his sermon, so sarcastic, "For what," he had said, "shall it profit a man if he gain his own soul, but lose all his property?" That, he had said, was the motto of the middle-class; now, what had he meant by that? Of course, it might be what middle-class people believed — she didn't know; what did Soames think?

He answered abstractedly: "How should I know? Scoles is a humbug, though, isn't he?" For Bosinney was looking round the table, as if pointing out the peculiarities of the guests, and Soames wondered what he was saying. By her smile Irene was evidently agreeing with his remarks. She seemed always to agree with other people.

Her eyes were turned on himself; Soames dropped his glance at once. The smile had died off her lips.

A humbug? But what did Soames mean? If Mr. Scoles was a humbug, a clergyman — then anybody might be — it was frightful!

"Well, and so they are!" said Soames.

During Aunt Juley's momentary and horrified silence he caught some words of Irene's that sounded like: 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!'

But Swithin had finished his ham.

"Where do you go for your mushrooms?" he was saying to Irene in a voice like a courtier's; "you ought to go to Smileybob's — he'll give 'em you fresh. These little men, they won't take the trouble!"

Irene turned to answer him, and Soames saw Bosinney watching her and smiling to himself. A curious smile the fellow had. A half-simple arrangement, like a child who smiles when he is pleased. As for George's nickname —'The Buccaneer'— he did not think much of that. And, seeing Bosinney turn to June, Soames smiled too, but sardonically — he did not like

June, who was not looking too pleased.

This was not surprising, for she had just held the following conversation with James:

"I stayed on the river on my way home, Uncle James, and saw a beautiful site for a house."

James, a slow and thorough eater, stopped the process of mastication.

"Eh?" he said. "Now, where was that?"

"Close to Pangbourne."

James placed a piece of ham in his mouth, and June waited.

"I suppose you wouldn't know whether the land about there was freehold?" he asked at last. "You wouldn't know anything about the price of land about there?"

"Yes," said June; "I made inquiries." Her little resolute face under its copper crown was suspiciously eager and aglow.

James regarded her with the air of an inquisitor.

"What? You're not thinking of buying land!" he ejaculated, dropping his fork.

June was greatly encouraged by his interest. It had long been her pet plan that her uncles should benefit themselves and Bosinney by building country-houses.

"Of course not," she said. "I thought it would be such a splendid place for — you or — someone to build a country-house!"

James looked at her sideways, and placed a second piece of ham in his mouth. . . .

"Land ought to be very dear about there," he said.

What June had taken for personal interest was only the impersonal excitement of every Forsyte who hears of something eligible in danger of passing into other hands. But she refused to see the disappearance of her chance, and continued to press her point.

"You ought to go into the country, Uncle James. I wish I had a lot of money, I wouldn't live another day in London."

James was stirred to the depths of his long thin figure; he had no idea his niece held such downright views.

"Why don't you go into the country?" repeated June; "it would do you a lot of good."

"Why?" began James in a fluster. "Buying land — what good d'you suppose I can do buying land, building houses? — I couldn't get four per cent. for my money!"

"What does that matter? You'd get fresh air."

"Fresh air!" exclaimed James; "what should I do with fresh air,"

"I should have thought anybody liked to have fresh air," said June scornfully.

James wiped his napkin all over his mouth.

"You don't know the value of money," he said, avoiding her eye.

"No! and I hope I never shall!" and, biting her lip with inexpressible mortification, poor June was silent.

Why were her own relations so rich, and Phil never knew where the money was coming from for to-morrow's tobacco. Why couldn't they do something for him? But they were so selfish. Why couldn't they build country-houses? She had all that naive dogmatism which is so pathetic, and sometimes achieves such great results. Bosinney, to whom she turned in her discomfiture, was talking to Irene, and a chill fell on June's spirit. Her eyes grew steady with anger, like old Jolyon's when his will was crossed.

James, too, was much disturbed. He felt as though someone had threatened his right to invest his money at five per cent. Jolyon had spoiled her. None of his girls would have said such a thing. James had always been exceedingly liberal to his children, and the consciousness of this made him feel it all the more deeply. He trifled moodily with his strawberries, then, deluging them with cream, he ate them quickly; they, at all events, should not escape him.

No wonder he was upset. Engaged for fifty-four years (he had been admitted a solicitor on the earliest day sanctioned by the law) in arranging mortgages, preserving investments at a dead level of high and safe interest, conducting negotiations on the principle of securing the utmost possible out of other people compatible with safety to his clients and himself, in calculations as to the exact pecuniary possibilities of all the relations of life, he had come at last to think purely in terms of money. Money was now his light, his medium for seeing, that without which he was really unable to see, really not cognisant of phenomena; and to have this thing, “I hope I shall never know the value of money!” said to his face, saddened and exasperated him. He knew it to be nonsense, or it would have frightened him. What was the world coming to! Suddenly recollecting the story of young Jolyon, however, he felt a little comforted, for what could you expect with a father like that! This turned his thoughts into a channel still less pleasant. What was all this talk about Soames and Irene?

As in all self-respecting families, an emporium had been established where family secrets were bartered, and family stock priced. It was known on Forsyte ‘Change that Irene regretted her marriage. Her regret was disapproved of. She ought to have known her own mind; no dependable woman made these mistakes.

James reflected sourly that they had a nice house (rather small) in an excellent position, no children, and no money troubles. Soames was reserved about his affairs, but he must be getting a very warm man. He had a capital income from the business — for Soames, like his father, was a member of that well-known firm of solicitors, Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte — and had always been very careful. He had done quite unusually well with some mortgages he had taken up, too — a little timely foreclosure — most lucky hits!

There was no reason why Irene should not be happy, yet they said she’d been asking for a separate room. He knew where that ended. It wasn’t as if Soames drank.

James looked at his daughter-in-law. That unseen glance of his was cold and dubious. Appeal and fear were in it, and a sense of personal grievance. Why should he be worried like this? It was very likely all nonsense; women were funny things! They exaggerated so, you didn’t know what to believe; and then, nobody told him anything, he had to find out everything for himself. Again he looked furtively at Irene, and across from her to Soames. The latter, listening to Aunt Juley, was looking up, under his brows in the direction of Bosinney.

‘He’s fond of her, I know,’ thought James. ‘Look at the way he’s always giving her things.’

And the extraordinary unreasonableness of her disaffection struck him with increased force.

It was a pity, too, she was a taking little thing, and he, James, would be really quite fond of her if she’d only let him. She had taken up lately with June; that was doing her no good, that was certainly doing her no good. She was getting to have opinions of her own. He didn’t know what she wanted with anything of the sort. She’d a good home, and everything she could wish for. He felt that her friends ought to be chosen for her. To go on like this was dangerous.

June, indeed, with her habit of championing the unfortunate, had dragged from Irene a confession, and, in return, had preached the necessity of facing the evil, by separation, if need be. But in the face of these exhortations, Irene had kept a brooding silence, as though she found terrible the thought of this struggle carried through in cold blood. He would never give her up, she had said to June.

“Who cares?” June cried; “let him do what he likes — you’ve only to stick to it!” And she had not scrupled to say something of this sort at Timothy’s; James, when he heard of it, had felt a natural indignation and horror.

What if Irene were to take it into her head to — he could hardly frame the thought — to leave Soames? But he felt this thought so unbearable that he at once put it away; the shady visions it conjured up, the sound of family tongues buzzing in his ears, the horror of the conspicuous happening so close to him, to one of his own children! Luckily, she had no money — a beggarly fifty pound a year! And he thought of the deceased Heron, who had had nothing to leave her, with contempt. Brooding over his glass, his long legs twisted under the table, he quite omitted to rise when the ladies left the room. He would have to speak to Soames — would have to put him on his guard; they could not go on like this, now that such a contingency had occurred to him. And he noticed with sour disfavour that June had left her wine-glasses full of wine.

‘That little, thing’s at the bottom of it all,’ he mused; ‘Irene’d never have thought of it herself.’ James was a man of imagination.

The voice of Swithin roused him from his reverie.

“I gave four hundred pounds for it,” he was saying. “Of course it’s a regular work of art.”

“Four hundred! H’m! that’s a lot of money!” chimed in Nicholas.

The object alluded to was an elaborate group of statuary in Italian marble, which, placed upon a lofty stand (also of marble), diffused an atmosphere of culture throughout the room. The subsidiary figures, of which there were six, female, nude, and of highly ornate workmanship, were all pointing towards the central figure, also nude, and female, who was pointing at herself; and all this gave the observer a very pleasant sense of her extreme value. Aunt Juley, nearly opposite, had had the greatest difficulty in not looking at it all the evening.

Old Jolyon spoke; it was he who had started the discussion.

"Four hundred fiddlesticks! Don't tell me you gave four hundred for that?"

Between the points of his collar Swithin's chin made the second painful oscillatory movement of the evening.

"Four-hundred-pounds, of English money; not a farthing less. I don't regret it. It's not common English — it's genuine modern Italian!"

Soames raised the corner of his lip in a smile, and looked across at Bosinney. The architect was grinning behind the fumes of his cigarette. Now, indeed, he looked more like a buccaneer.

"There's a lot of work about it," remarked James hastily, who was really moved by the size of the group. "It'd sell well at Jobson's."

"The poor foreign dey-vil that made it," went on Swithin, "asked me five hundred — I gave him four. It's worth eight. Looked half-starved, poor dey-vil!"

"Ah!" chimed in Nicholas suddenly, "poor, seedy-lookin' chaps, these artists; it's a wonder to me how they live. Now, there's young Flageoletti, that Fanny and the girls are always hav'in' in, to play the fiddle; if he makes a hundred a year it's as much as ever he does!"

James shook his head. "Ah!" he said, "I don't know how they live!"

Old Jolyon had risen, and, cigar in mouth, went to inspect the group at close quarters.

"Wouldn't have given two for it!" he pronounced at last.

Soames saw his father and Nicholas glance at each other anxiously; and, on the other side of Swithin, Bosinney, still shrouded in smoke.

'I wonder what he thinks of it?' thought Soames, who knew well enough that this group was hopelessly vieux jeu; hopelessly of the last generation. There was no longer any sale at Jobson's for such works of art.

Swithin's answer came at last. "You never knew anything about a statue. You've got your pictures, and that's all!"

Old Jolyon walked back to his seat, puffing his cigar. It was not likely that he was going to be drawn into an argument with an obstinate beggar like Swithin, pig-headed as a mule, who had never known a statue from a —-straw hat.

"Stucco!" was all he said.

It had long been physically impossible for Swithin to start; his fist came down on the table.

"Stucco! I should like to see anything you've got in your house half as good!"

And behind his speech seemed to sound again that rumbling violence of primitive generations.

It was James who saved the situation.

"Now, what do you say, Mr. Bosinney? You're an architect; you ought to know all about statues and things!"

Every eye was turned upon Bosinney; all waited with a strange, suspicious look for his answer.

And Soames, speaking for the first time, asked:

"Yes, Bosinney, what do you say?"

Bosinney replied coolly:

"The work is a remarkable one."

His words were addressed to Swithin, his eyes smiled slyly at old Jolyon; only Soames remained unsatisfied.

"Remarkable for what?"

"For its naivete"

The answer was followed by an impressive silence; Swithin alone was not sure whether a compliment was intended.

❦

Chapter 4

Projection of the House

Soames Forsyte walked out of his green-painted front door three days after the dinner at Swithin's, and looking back from across the Square, confirmed his impression that the house wanted painting.

He had left his wife sitting on the sofa in the drawing-room, her hands crossed in her lap, manifestly waiting for him to go out. This was not unusual. It happened, in fact, every day.

He could not understand what she found wrong with him. It was not as if he drank! Did he run into debt, or gamble, or swear; was he violent; were his friends rackety; did he stay out at night? On the contrary.

The profound, subdued aversion which he felt in his wife was a mystery to him, and a source of the most terrible irritation. That she had made a mistake, and did not love him, had tried to love him and could not love him, was obviously no reason.

He that could imagine so outlandish a cause for his wife's not getting on with him was certainly no Forsyte.

Soames was forced, therefore, to set the blame entirely down to his wife. He had never met a woman so capable of inspiring affection. They could not go anywhere without his seeing how all the men were attracted by her; their looks, manners, voices, betrayed it; her behaviour under this attention had been beyond reproach. That she was one of those women — not too common in the Anglo-Saxon race — born to be loved and to love, who when not loving are not living, had certainly never even occurred to him. Her power of attraction, he regarded as part of her value as his property; but it made him, indeed, suspect that she could give as well as receive; and she gave him nothing! 'Then why did she marry me?' was his continual thought. He had, forgotten his courtship; that year and a half when he had besieged and lain in wait for her, devising schemes for her entertainment, giving her presents, proposing to her periodically, and keeping her other admirers away with his perpetual presence. He had forgotten the day when, adroitly taking advantage of an acute phase of her dislike to her home surroundings, he crowned his labours with success. If he remembered anything, it was the dainty capriciousness with which the gold-haired, dark-eyed girl had treated him. He certainly did not remember the look on her face — strange, passive, appealing — when suddenly one day she had yielded, and said that she would marry him.

It had been one of those real devoted wooings which books and people praise, when the lover is at length rewarded for hammering the iron till it is malleable, and all must be happy ever after as the wedding bells.

Soames walked eastwards, mousing doggedly along on the shady side.

The house wanted doing, up, unless he decided to move into the country, and build.

For the hundredth time that month he turned over this problem. There was no use in rushing into things! He was very comfortably off, with an increasing income getting on for three thousand a year; but his invested capital was not perhaps so large as his father believed — James had a tendency to expect that his children should be better off than they were. 'I can manage eight thousand easily enough,' he thought, 'without calling in either Robertson's or Nicholl's.'

He had stopped to look in at a picture shop, for Soames was an 'amateur' of pictures, and had a little-room in No. 62, Montpellier Square, full of canvases, stacked against the wall, which he had no room to hang. He brought them home with him on his way back from the City, generally after dark, and would enter this room on Sunday afternoons, to spend hours turning the pictures to the light, examining the marks on their backs, and occasionally making notes.

They were nearly all landscapes with figures in the foreground, a sign of some mysterious revolt against London, its tall houses, its interminable streets, where his life and the lives of his breed and class were passed. Every now and then he would take one or two pictures away with him in a cab, and stop at Jobson's on his way into the City.

He rarely showed them to anyone; Irene, whose opinion he secretly respected and perhaps for that reason never solicited, had only been into the room on rare occasions, in discharge of some wifely duty. She was not asked to look at the pictures, and she never did. To Soames this was another grievance. He hated that pride of hers, and secretly dreaded it.

In the plate-glass window of the picture shop his image stood and looked at him.

His sleek hair under the brim of the tall hat had a sheen like the hat itself; his cheeks, pale and flat, the line of his clean-shaven lips, his firm chin with its greyish shaven tinge, and the buttoned strictness of his black cut-away coat, conveyed an appearance of reserve and secrecy, of imperturbable, enforced composure; but his eyes, cold — grey, strained — looking, with a line in the brow between them, examined him wistfully, as if they knew of a secret weakness.

He noted the subjects of the pictures, the names of the painters, made a calculation of their values, but without the satisfaction he usually derived from this inward appraisement, and walked on.

No. 62 would do well enough for another year, if he decided to build! The times were good for building, money had not been so dear for years; and the site he had seen at Robin Hill, when he had gone down there in the spring to inspect the Nicholl mortgage — what could be better! Within twelve miles of Hyde Park Corner, the value of the land certain to go up, would always fetch more than he gave for it; so that a house, if built in really good style, was a first-class investment.

The notion of being the one member of his family with a country house weighed but little with him; for to a true Forsyte, sentiment, even the sentiment of social position, was a luxury only to be indulged in after his appetite for more material pleasure had been satisfied.

To get Irene out of London, away from opportunities of going about and seeing people, away from her friends and those who put ideas into her head! That was the thing! She was too thick with June! June disliked him. He returned the sentiment. They were of the same blood.

It would be everything to get Irene out of town. The house would please her she would enjoy messing about with the decoration, she was very artistic!

The house must be in good style, something that would always be certain to command a price, something unique, like that last house of Parkes, which had a tower; but Parkes had himself said that his architect was ruinous. You never knew where you were with those fellows; if they had a name they ran you into no end of expense and were conceited into the bargain.

And a common architect was no good — the memory of Parkes' tower precluded the employment of a common architect:

This was why he had thought of Bosinney. Since the dinner at Swithin's he had made enquiries, the result of which had been meagre, but encouraging: "One of the new school."

"Clever?"

"As clever as you like — a bit — a bit up in the air!"

He had not been able to discover what houses Bosinney had built, nor what his charges were. The impression he gathered was that he would be able to make his own terms. The more he reflected on the idea, the more he liked it. It would be keeping the thing in the family, with Forsytes almost an instinct; and he would be able to get 'favoured-nation,' if not nominal terms — only fair, considering the chance to Bosinney of displaying his talents, for this house must be no common edifice.

Soames reflected complacently on the work it would be sure to bring the young man; for, like every Forsyte, he could be a thorough optimist when there was anything to be had out of it.

Bosinney's office was in Sloane Street, close at, hand, so that he would be able to keep his eye continually on the plans.

Again, Irene would not be to likely to object to leave London if her greatest friend's lover were given the job. June's marriage might depend on it. Irene could not decently stand in the way of June's marriage; she would never do that, he knew her too well. And June would be pleased; of this he saw the advantage.

Bosinney looked clever, but he had also — and — it was one of his great attractions — an air as if he did not quite know on which side his bread were buttered; he should be easy to deal with in money matters. Soames made this reflection in no defrauding spirit; it was the natural attitude of his mind — of the mind of any good business man — of all those thousands of good business men through whom he was threading his way up Ludgate Hill.

Thus he fulfilled the inscrutable laws of his great class — of human nature itself — when he reflected, with a sense of comfort, that Bosinney would be easy to deal with in money matters.

While he elbowed his way on, his eyes, which he usually kept fixed on the ground before his feet, were attracted upwards by the dome of St. Paul's. It had a peculiar fascination for him, that old dome, and not once, but twice or three times a week, would he halt in his daily pilgrimage to enter beneath and stop in the side aisles for five or ten minutes, scrutinizing the names and epitaphs on the monuments. The attraction for him of this great church was inexplicable, unless it enabled him to concentrate his thoughts on the business of the day. If any affair of particular moment, or demanding peculiar acuteness, was weighing on his mind, he invariably went in, to wander with mouse-like attention from epitaph to epitaph. Then retiring in the same noiseless way, he would hold steadily on up Cheapside, a thought more of dogged purpose in his gait, as though he had seen something which he had made up his mind to buy.

He went in this morning, but, instead of stealing from monument to monument, turned his eyes upwards to the columns and spacings of the walls, and remained motionless.

His uplifted face, with the awed and wistful look which faces take on themselves in church, was whitened to a chalky hue in the vast building. His gloved hands were clasped in front over the handle of his umbrella. He lifted them. Some sacred inspiration perhaps had come to him.

‘Yes,’ he thought, ‘I must have room to hang my pictures.

That evening, on his return from the City, he called at Bosinney’s office. He found the architect in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a pipe, and ruling off lines on a plan. Soames refused a drink, and came at once to the point.

“If you’ve nothing better to do on Sunday, come down with me to Robin Hill, and give me your opinion on a building site.”

“Are you going to build?”

“Perhaps,” said Soames; “but don’t speak of it. I just want your opinion.”

“Quite so,” said the architect.

Soames peered about the room.

“You’re rather high up here,” he remarked.

Any information he could gather about the nature and scope of Bosinney’s business would be all to the good.

“It does well enough for me so far,” answered the architect. “You’re accustomed to the swells.”

He knocked out his pipe, but replaced it empty between his teeth; it assisted him perhaps to carry on the conversation. Soames noted a hollow in each cheek, made as it were by suction.

“What do you pay for an office like this?” said he.

“Fifty too much,” replied Bosinney.

This answer impressed Soames favourably.

“I suppose it is dear,” he said. “I’ll call for you — on Sunday about eleven.”

The following Sunday therefore he called for Bosinney in a hansom, and drove him to the station. On arriving at Robin Hill, they found no cab, and started to walk the mile and a half to the site.

It was the 1st of August — a perfect day, with a burning sun and cloudless sky — and in the straight, narrow road leading up the hill their feet kicked up a yellow dust.

“Gravel soil,” remarked Soames, and sideways he glanced at the coat Bosinney wore. Into the side-pockets of this coat were thrust bundles of papers, and under one arm was carried a queer-looking stick. Soames noted these and other peculiarities.

No one but a clever man, or, indeed, a buccaneer, would have taken such liberties with his appearance; and though these eccentricities were revolting to Soames, he derived a certain satisfaction from them, as evidence of qualities by which he must inevitably profit. If the fellow could build houses, what did his clothes matter?

“I told you,” he said, “that I want this house to be a surprise, so don’t say anything about it. I never talk of my affairs until they’re carried through.”

Bosinney nodded.

“Let women into your plans,” pursued Soames, “and you never know where it’ll end.”

“Ah!” Said Bosinney, “women are the devil!”

This feeling had long been at the — bottom of Soames’s heart; he had never, however, put it into words.

“Oh!” he Muttered, “so you’re beginning to. . . . ” He stopped, but added, with an uncontrollable burst of spite: “June’s got a temper of her own — always had.”

“A temper’s not a bad thing in an angel.”

Soames had never called Irene an angel. He could not so have violated his best instincts, letting other people into the secret of her value, and giving himself away. He made no reply.

They had struck into a half-made road across a warren. A cart-track led at right-angles to a gravel pit, beyond which the chimneys of a cottage rose amongst a clump of trees at the border of a thick wood. Tussocks of feathery grass covered the rough surface of the ground, and out of these the larks soared into the hate of sunshine. On the far horizon, over a countless succession of fields and hedges, rose a line of downs.

Soames led till they had crossed to the far side, and there he stopped. It was the chosen site; but now that he was about to divulge the spot to another he had become uneasy.

“The agent lives in that cottage,” he said; “he’ll give us some lunch — we’d better have lunch before we go into this matter.”

He again took the lead to the cottage, where the agent, a tall man named Oliver, with a heavy face and grizzled beard, welcomed them. During lunch, which Soames hardly touched, he kept looking at Bosinney, and once or twice passed his silk handkerchief stealthily over his forehead. The meal came to an end at last, and Bosinney rose.

“I dare say you’ve got business to talk over,” he said; “I’ll just go and nose about a bit.” Without waiting for a reply he strolled out.

Soames was solicitor to this estate, and he spent nearly an hour in the agent’s company, looking at ground-plans and discussing the Nicholl and other mortgages; it was as it were by an afterthought that he brought up the question of the building site.

“Your people,” he said, “ought to come down in their price to me, considering that I shall be the first to build.”

Oliver shook his head.

The site you’ve fixed on, Sir, he said, “is the cheapest we’ve got. Sites at the top of the slope are dearer by a good bit.”

“Mind,” said Soames, “I’ve not decided; it’s quite possible I shan’t build at all. The ground rent’s very high.”

“Well, Mr. Forsyte, I shall be sorry if you go off, and I think you’ll make a mistake, Sir. There’s not a bit of land near London with such a view as this, nor one that’s cheaper, all things considered; we’ve only to advertise, to get a mob of people after it.”

They looked at each other. Their faces said very plainly: ‘I respect you as a man of business; and you can’t expect me to believe a word you say.’

Well, repeated Soames, “I haven’t made up my mind; the thing will very likely go off!” With these words, taking up his umbrella, he put his chilly hand into the agent’s, withdrew it without the faintest pressure, and went out into the sun.

He walked slowly back towards the site in deep thought. His instinct told him that what the agent had said was true. A cheap site. And the beauty of it was, that he knew the agent did not really think it cheap; so that his own intuitive knowledge was a victory over the agent’s.

‘Cheap or not, I mean to have it,’ he thought.

The larks sprang up in front of his feet, the air was full of butterflies, a sweet fragrance rose from the wild grasses. The sappy scent of the bracken stole forth from the wood, where, hidden in the depths, pigeons were cooing, and from afar on the warm breeze, came the rhythmic chiming of church bells.

Soames walked with his eyes on the ground, his lips opening and closing as though in anticipation of a delicious morsel. But when he arrived at the site, Bosinney was nowhere to be seen. After waiting some little time, he crossed the warren in the direction of the slope. He would have shouted, but dreaded the sound of his voice.

The warren was as lonely as a prairie, its silence only broken by the rustle of rabbits bolting to their holes, and the song of the larks.

Soames, the pioneer-leader of the great Forsyte army advancing to the civilization of this wilderness, felt his spirit daunted by the loneliness, by the invisible singing, and the hot, sweet air. He had begun to retrace his steps when he at last caught sight of Bosinney.

The architect was sprawling under a large oak tree, whose trunk, with a huge spread of bough and foliage, ragged with age, stood on the verge of the rise.

Soames had to touch him on the shoulder before he looked up.

“Hallo! Forsyte,” he said, “I’ve found the very place for your house! Look here!”

Soames stood and looked, then he said, coldly:

“You may be very clever, but this site will cost me half as much again.”

“Hang the cost, man. Look at the view!”

Almost from their feet stretched ripe corn, dipping to a small dark copse beyond. A plain of fields and hedges spread to the distant grey-bluedowns. In a silver streak to the right could be seen the line of the river.

The sky was so blue, and the sun so bright, that an eternal summer seemed to reign over this prospect. Thistledown floated round them, enraptured by the serenity, of the ether. The heat danced over the corn, and, pervading all, was a soft, insensible hum, like the murmur of bright minutes holding revel between earth and heaven.

Soames looked. In spite of himself, something swelled in his breast. To live here in sight of all this, to be able to point it out to his friends, to talk of it, to possess it! His cheeks flushed. The warmth, the radiance, the glow, were sinking into his senses as, four years before, Irene’s beauty had sunk into his senses and made him long for her. He stole a glance at Bosinney, whose eyes, the eyes of the coachman’s ‘half-tame leopard,’ seemed running wild over the landscape. The sunlight had caught the promontories of the fellow’s face, the bumpy cheekbones, the point of his chin, the vertical ridges above his brow; and Soames watched this rugged, enthusiastic, careless face with an unpleasant feeling.

A long, soft ripple of wind flowed over the corn, and brought a puff of warm air into their faces.

“I could build you a teaser here,” said Bosinney, breaking the silence at last.

“I dare say,” replied Soames, drily. “You haven’t got to pay for it.”

“For about eight thousand I could build you a palace.”

Soames had become very pale — a struggle was going on within him. He dropped his eyes, and said stubbornly:

“I can’t afford it.”

And slowly, with his mousing walk, he led the way back to the first site.

They spent some time there going into particulars of the projected house, and then Soames returned to the agent’s cottage.

He came out in about half an hour, and, joining Bosinney, started for the station.

“Well,” he said, hardly opening his lips, “I’ve taken that site of yours, after all.”

And again he was silent, confusedly debating how it was that this fellow, whom by habit he despised, should have overborne his own decision.

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CHAPTER 5

A FORSYTE MENAGE

Like the enlightened thousands of his class and generation in this great city of London, who no longer believe in red velvet chairs, and know that groups of modern Italian marble are 'vieux jeu,' Soames Forsyte inhabited a house which did what it could. It owned a copper door knocker of individual design, windows which had been altered to open outwards, hanging flower boxes filled with fuchsias, and at the back (a great feature) a little court tiled with jade-green tiles, and surrounded by pink hydrangeas in peacock-blue tubs. Here, under a parchment-coloured Japanese sunshade covering the whole end, inhabitants or visitors could be screened from the eyes of the curious while they drank tea and examined at their leisure the latest of Soames's little silver boxes.

The inner decoration favoured the First Empire and William Morris. For its size, the house was commodious; there were countless nooks resembling birds' nests, and little things made of silver were deposited like eggs.

In this general perfection two kinds of fastidiousness were at war. There lived here a mistress who would have dwelt daintily on a desert island; a master whose daintiness was, as it were, an investment, cultivated by the owner for his advancement, in accordance with the laws of competition. This competitive daintiness had caused Soames in his Marlborough days to be the first boy into white waistcoats in summer, and corduroy waistcoats in winter, had prevented him from ever appearing in public with his tie climbing up his collar, and induced him to dust his patent leather boots before a great multitude assembled on Speech Day to hear him recite Moliere.

Skin-like immaculateness had grown over Soames, as over many Londoners; impossible to conceive of him with a hair out of place, a tie deviating one-eighth of an inch from the perpendicular, a collar unglossed! He would not have gone without a bath for worlds — it was the fashion to take baths; and how bitter was his scorn of people who omitted them!

But Irene could be imagined, like some nymph, bathing in wayside streams, for the joy of the freshness and of seeing her own fair body.

In this conflict throughout the house the woman had gone to the wall. As in the struggle between Saxon and Celt still going on within the nation, the more impressionable and receptive temperament had had forced on it a conventional superstructure.

Thus the house had acquired a close resemblance to hundreds of other houses with the same high aspirations, having become: 'That very charming little house of the Soames Forsytes, quite individual, my dear — really elegant.'

For Soames Forsyte — read James Peabody, Thomas Atkins, or Emmanuel Spagnoletti, the name in fact of any upper-middle class Englishman in London with any pretensions to taste; and though the decoration be different, the phrase is just.

On the evening of August 8, a week after the expedition to Robin Hill, in the dining-room of this house —'quite individual, my dear — really elegant'— Soames and Irene were seated at dinner. A hot dinner on Sundays was a little distinguishing elegance common to this house and many others. Early in married life Soames had laid down the rule: 'The servants must give us hot dinner on Sundays — they've nothing to do but play the concertina.'

The custom had produced no revolution. For — to Soames a rather deplorable sign — servants were devoted to Irene, who, in defiance of all safe tradition, appeared to recognise their right to a share in the weaknesses of human nature.

The happy pair were seated, not opposite each other, but rectangularly, at the handsome rosewood table; they dined without a cloth — a distinguishing elegance — and so far had not spoken a word.

Soames liked to talk during dinner about business, or what he had been buying, and so long as he talked Irene's silence did not distress him. This evening he had found it impossible to talk. The decision to build had been weighing on his mind all the week, and he had made up his mind to tell her.

His nervousness about this disclosure irritated him profoundly; she had no business to make him feel like that — a wife and a husband being one person. She had not looked at him once since they sat down; and he wondered what on earth she had been thinking about all the time. It was hard, when a man worked as he did, making money for her — yes, and with an ache in his heart — that she should sit there, looking — looking as if she saw the walls of the room closing in. It was enough to make a man get up and leave the table.

The light from the rose-shaded lamp fell on her neck and arms — Soames liked her to dine in a low dress, it gave him an inexpressible feeling of superiority to the majority of his acquaintance, whose wives were contented with their best high frocks or with tea-gowns, when they dined at home. Under that rosy light her amber-coloured hair and fair skin made strange contrast with her dark brown eyes.

Could a man own anything prettier than this dining-table with its deep tints, the starry, soft-petalled roses, the ruby-coloured glass, and quaint silver furnishing; could a man own anything prettier than the woman who sat at it? Gratitude was no virtue among Forsytes, who, competitive, and full of common-sense, had no occasion for it; and Soames only experienced a sense of exasperation amounting to pain, that he did not own her as it was his right to own her, that he could not, as by stretching out his hand to that rose, pluck her and sniff the very secrets of her heart.

Out of his other property, out of all the things he had collected, his silver, his pictures, his houses, his investments, he got a secret and intimate feeling; out of her he got none.

In this house of his there was writing on every wall. His business-like temperament protested against a mysterious warning that she was not made for him. He had married this woman, conquered her, made her his own, and it seemed to him contrary to the most fundamental of all laws, the law of possession, that he could do no more than own her body — if indeed he could do that, which he was beginning to doubt. If any one had asked him if he wanted to own her soul, the question would have seemed to him both ridiculous and sentimental. But he did so want, and the writing said he never would.

She was ever silent, passive, gracefully averse; as though terrified lest by word, motion, or sign she might lead him to believe that she was fond of him; and he asked himself: Must I always go on like this?

Like most novel readers of his generation (and Soames was a great novel reader), literature coloured his view of life; and he had imbibed the belief that it was only a question of time.

In the end the husband always gained the affection of his wife. Even in those cases — a class of book he was not very fond of — which ended in tragedy, the wife always died with poignant regrets on her lips, or if it were the husband who died — unpleasant thought — threw herself on his body in an agony of remorse.

He often took Irene to the theatre, instinctively choosing the modern Society Plays with the modern Society conjugal problem, so fortunately different from any conjugal problem in real life. He found that they too always ended in the same way, even when there was a lover in the case. While he was watching the play Soames often sympathized with the lover; but before he reached home again, driving with Irene in a hansom, he saw that this would not do, and he was glad the play had ended as it had. There was one class of husband that had just then come into fashion, the strong, rather rough, but extremely sound man, who was peculiarly successful at the end of the play; with this person Soames was really not in sympathy, and had it not been for his own position, would have expressed his disgust with the fellow. But he was so conscious of how vital to himself was the necessity for being a successful, even a ‘strong,’ husband, that he never spoke of a distaste born perhaps by the perverse processes of Nature out of a secret fund of brutality in himself.

But Irene’s silence this evening was exceptional. He had never before seen such an expression on her face. And since it is always the unusual which alarms, Soames was alarmed. He ate his savoury, and hurried the maid as she swept off the crumbs with the silver sweeper. When she had left the room, he filled his glass with wine and said:

“Anybody been here this afternoon?”

“June.”

“What did she want?” It was an axiom with the Forsytes that people did not go anywhere unless they wanted something. “Came to talk about her lover, I suppose?”

Irene made no reply.

“It looks to me,” continued Soames, “as if she were sweeter on him than he is on her. She’s always following him about.”

Irene’s eyes made him feel uncomfortable.

“You’ve no business to say such a thing!” she exclaimed.

“Why not? Anybody can see it.”

“They cannot. And if they could, it’s disgraceful to say so.”

Soames’s composure gave way.

“You’re a pretty wife!” he said. But secretly he wondered at the heat of her reply; it was unlike her. “You’re cracked about June! I can tell you one thing: now that she has the Buccaneer in tow, she doesn’t care twopence about you, and, you’ll find it out. But you won’t see so much of her in future; we’re going to live in the country.”

He had been glad to get his news out under cover of this burst of irritation. He had expected a cry of dismay; the silence with which his pronouncement was received alarmed him.

“You don’t seem interested,” he was obliged to add.

“I knew it already.”

He looked at her sharply.

“Who told you?”

“June.”

“How did she know?”

Irene did not answer. Baffled and uncomfortable, he said:

“It’s a fine thing for Bosinney, it’ll be the making of him. I suppose she’s told you all about it?”

“Yes.”

There was another pause, and then Soames said:

“I suppose you don’t want to, go?”

Irene made no reply.

“Well, I can’t tell what you want. You never seem contented here.”

“Have my wishes anything to do with it?”

She took the vase of roses and left the room. Soames remained seated. Was it for this that he had signed that contract? Was it for this that he was going to spend some ten thousand pounds? Bosinney’s phrase came back to him: “Women are the devil!”

But presently he grew calmer. It might have, been worse. She might have flared up. He had expected something more than this. It was lucky, after all, that June had broken the ice for him. She must have wormed it out of Bosinney; he might have known she would.

He lighted his cigarette. After all, Irene had not made a scene! She would come round — that was the best of her; she was cold, but not sulky. And, puffing the cigarette smoke at a lady-bird on the shining table, he plunged into a reverie about the house. It was no good worrying; he would go and make it up presently. She would be sitting out there in the dark, under the Japanese sunshade, knitting. A beautiful, warm night. . . .

In truth, June had come in that afternoon with shining eyes, and the words: “Soames is a brick! It’s splendid for Phil — the very thing for him!”

Irene’s face remaining dark and puzzled, she went on:

“Your new house at Robin Hill, of course. What? Don’t you know?”

Irene did not know.

“Oh! then, I suppose I oughtn’t to have told you!” Looking impatiently at her friend, she cried: “You look as if you didn’t care. Don’t you see, it’s what I’ve’ been praying for — the very chance he’s been wanting all this time. Now you’ll see what he can do;” and thereupon she poured out the whole story.

Since her own engagement she had not seemed much interested in her friend’s position; the hours she spent with Irene were given to confidences of her own; and at times, for all her affectionate pity, it was impossible to keep out of her smile a trace of compassionate contempt for the woman who had made such a mistake in her life — such a vast, ridiculous mistake.

“He’s to have all the decorations as well — a free hand. It’s perfect —” June broke into laughter, her little figure quivered gleefully; she raised her hand, and struck a blow at a muslin curtain. “Do you, know I even asked Uncle James. . . . ” But, with a sudden dislike to mentioning that incident, she stopped; and presently, finding her friend so unresponsive, went away. She looked back from the pavement, and Irene was still standing in the doorway. In response to her farewell wave, Irene put her hand to her brow, and, turning slowly, shut the door. . . .

Soames went to the drawing-room presently, and peered at her through the window.

Out in the shadow of the Japanese sunshade she was sitting very still, the lace on her white shoulders stirring with the soft rise and fall of her bosom.

But about this silent creature sitting there so motionless, in the dark, there seemed a warmth, a hidden fervour of feeling, as if the whole of her being had been stirred, and some change were taking place in its very depths.

He stole back to the dining-room unnoticed.

❦

Chapter 6

James at Large

It was not long before Soames's determination to build went the round of the family, and created the flutter that any decision connected with property should make among Forsytes.

It was not his fault, for he had been determined that no one should know. June, in the fulness of her heart, had told Mrs. Small, giving her leave only to tell Aunt Ann — she thought it would cheer her, the poor old sweet! for Aunt Ann had kept her room now for many days.

Mrs. Small told Aunt Ann at once, who, smiling as she lay back on her pillows, said in her distinct, trembling old voice:

"It's very nice for dear June; but I hope they will be careful — it's rather dangerous!"

When she was left alone again, a frown, like a cloud presaging a rainy morrow, crossed her face.

While she was lying there so many days the process of recharging her will went on all the time; it spread to her face, too, and tightening movements were always in action at the corners of her lips.

The maid Smither, who had been in her service since girlhood, and was spoken of as "Smither — a good girl — but so slow!"— the maid Smither performed every morning with extreme punctiliousness the crowning ceremony of that ancient toilet. Taking from the recesses of their pure white band-box those flat, grey curls, the insignia of personal dignity, she placed them securely in her mistress's hands, and turned her back.

And every day Aunts Juley and Hester were required to come and report on Timothy; what news there was of Nicholas; whether dear June had succeeded in getting Jolyon to shorten the engagement, now that Mr. Bosinney was building Soames a house; whether young Roger's wife was really — expecting; how the operation on Archie had succeeded; and what Swithin had done about that empty house in Wigmore Street, where the tenant had lost all his money and treated him so badly; above all, about Soames; was Irene still — still asking for a separate room? And every morning Smither was told: "I shall be coming down this afternoon, Smither, about two o'clock. I shall want your arm, after all these days in bed!"

After telling Aunt Ann, Mrs. Small had spoken of the house in the strictest confidence to Mrs. Nicholas, who in her turn had asked Winifred Dartie for confirmation, supposing, of course, that, being Soames's sister, she would know all about it. Through her it had in due course come round to the ears of James. He had been a good deal agitated.

"Nobody," he said, "told him anything." And, rather than go direct to Soames himself, of whose taciturnity he was afraid, he took his umbrella and went round to Timothy's.

He found Mrs. Septimus and Hester (who had been told — she was so safe, she found it tiring to talk) ready, and indeed eager, to discuss the news. It was very good of dear Soames, they thought, to employ Mr. Bosinney, but rather risky. What had George named him? 'The Buccaneer' How droll! But George was always droll! However, it would be all in the family they supposed they must really look upon Mr. Bosinney as belonging to the family, though it seemed strange.

James here broke in:

"Nobody knows anything about him. I don't see what Soames wants with a young man like that. I shouldn't be surprised if Irene had put her oar in. I shall speak to. . . . "

"Soames," interposed Aunt Juley, "told Mr. Bosinney that he didn't wish it mentioned. He wouldn't like it to be talked about, I'm sure, and if Timothy knew he would be very vexed, I. . . . "

James put his hand behind his ear:

"What?" he said. "I'm getting very deaf. I suppose I don't hear people. Emily's got a bad toe. We shan't be able to start for Wales till the end of the month. There' s always something!" And, having got what he wanted, he took his hat and went away.

It was a fine afternoon, and he walked across the Park towards Soames's, where he intended to dine, for Emily's toe kept her in bed, and Rachel and Cicely were on a visit to the country. He took the slanting path from the Bayswater side of the Row to the Knightsbridge Gate, across a pasture of short, burnt grass, dotted with blackened sheep, strewn with seated couples and strange waifs; lying prone on their faces, like corpses on a field over which the wave of battle has rolled.

He walked rapidly, his head bent, looking neither to right nor, left. The appearance of this park, the centre of his own battle-field, where he had all his life been fighting, excited no thought or speculation in his mind. These corpses flung down, there, from out the press and turmoil of the struggle, these pairs of lovers sitting cheek by jowl for an hour of idle Elysium snatched from the monotony of their treadmill, awakened no fancies in his mind; he had outlived that kind of imagination; his nose, like the nose of a sheep, was fastened to the pastures on which he browsed.

One of his tenants had lately shown a disposition to be behind-hand in his rent, and it had become a grave question whether he had not better turn him out at once, and so run the risk of not re-letting before Christmas. Swithin had just been let in very badly, but it had served him right — he had held on too long.

He pondered this as he walked steadily, holding his umbrella carefully by the wood, just below the crook of the handle, so as to keep the ferule off the ground, and not fray the silk in the middle. And, with his thin, high shoulders stooped, his long legs moving with swift mechanical precision, this passage through the Park, where the sun shone with a clear flame on so much idleness — on so many human evidences of the remorseless battle of Property, raging beyond its ring — was like the flight of some land bird across the sea.

He felt a — touch on the arm as he came out at Albert Gate.

It was Soames, who, crossing from the shady side of Piccadilly, where he had been walking home from the office, had suddenly appeared alongside.

“Your mother’s in bed,” said James; “I was, just coming to you, but I suppose I shall be in the way.”

The outward relations between James and his son were marked by a lack of sentiment peculiarly Forsytean, but for all that the two were by no means unattached. Perhaps they regarded one another as an investment; certainly they were solicitous of each other’s welfare, glad of each other’s company. They had never exchanged two words upon the more intimate problems of life, or revealed in each other’s presence the existence of any deep feeling.

Something beyond the power of word-analysis bound them together, something hidden deep in the fibre of nations and families — for blood, they say, is thicker than water — and neither of them was a cold-blooded man. Indeed, in James love of his children was now the prime motive of his existence. To have creatures who were parts of himself, to whom he might transmit the money he saved, was at the root of his saving; and, at seventy-five, what was left that could give him pleasure, but — saving? The kernel of life was in this saving for his children.

Than James Forsyte, notwithstanding all his ‘Jonah-isms,’ there was no saner man (if the leading symptom of sanity, as we are told, is self-preservation, though without doubt Timothy went too far) in all this London, of which he owned so much, and loved with such a dumb love, as the centre of his opportunities. He had the marvellous instinctive sanity of the middle class. In him — more than in Jolyon, with his masterful will and his moments of tenderness and philosophy — more than in Swithin, the martyr to crankiness — Nicholas, the sufferer from ability — and Roger, the victim of enterprise — beat the true pulse of compromise; of all the brothers he was least remarkable in mind and person, and for that reason more likely to live for ever.

To James, more than to any of the others, was “the family” significant and dear. There had always been something primitive and cosy in his attitude towards life; he loved the family hearth, he loved gossip, and he loved grumbling. All his decisions were formed of a cream which he skimmed off the family mind; and, through that family, off the minds of thousands of other families of similar fibre. Year after year, week after week, he went to Timothy’s, and in his brother’s front drawing-room — his legs twisted, his long white whiskers framing his clean-shaven mouth — would sit watching the family pot simmer, the cream rising to the top; and he would go away sheltered, refreshed, comforted, with an indefinable sense of comfort.

Beneath the adamant of his self-preserving instinct there was much real softness in James; a visit to Timothy’s was like an hour spent in the lap of a mother; and the deep craving he himself had for the protection of the family wing reacted in turn on his feelings towards his own children; it was a nightmare to him to think of them exposed to the treatment of the world, in money, health, or reputation. When his old friend John Street’s son volunteered for special service, he shook his head querulously, and wondered what John Street was about to allow it; and when young Street was assagaied, he took it so much to heart that he made a point of calling everywhere with the special object of saying: He knew how it would be — he’d no patience with them!

When his son-in-law Dartie had that financial crisis, due to speculation in Oil Shares, James made himself ill worrying over it; the knell of all prosperity seemed to have sounded. It took him three months and a visit to Baden-Baden to get better; there was something terrible in the idea that but for his, James's, money, Dartie's name might have appeared in the Bankruptcy List.

Composed of a physiological mixture so sound that if he had an earache he thought he was dying, he regarded the occasional ailments of his wife and children as in the nature of personal grievances, special interventions of Providence for the purpose of destroying his peace of mind; but he did not believe at all in the ailments of people outside his own immediate family, affirming them in every case to be due to neglected liver.

His universal comment was: "What can they expect? I have it myself, if I'm not careful!"

When he went to Soames's that evening he felt that life was hard on him: There was Emily with a bad toe, and Rachel gadding about in the country; he got no sympathy from anybody; and Ann, she was ill — he did not believe she would last through the summer; he had called there three times now without her being able to see him! And this idea of Soames's, building a house, that would have to be looked into. As to the trouble with Irene, he didn't know what was to come of that — anything might come of it!

He entered 62, Montpellier Square with the fullest intentions of being miserable. It was already half-past seven, and Irene, dressed for dinner, was seated in the drawing-room. She was wearing her gold-coloured frock — for, having been displayed at a dinner-party, a soiree, and a dance, it was now to be worn at home — and she had adorned the bosom with a cascade of lace, on which James's eyes riveted themselves at once.

"Where do you get your things?" he said in an aggravated voice. "I never see Rachel and Cicely looking half so well. That rose-point, now — that's not real!"

Irene came close, to prove to him that he was in error.

And, in spite of himself, James felt the influence of her deference, of the faint seductive perfume exhaling from her. No self-respecting Forsyte surrendered at a blow; so he merely said: He didn't know — he expected she was spending a pretty penny on dress.

The gong sounded, and, putting her white arm within his, Irene took him into the dining-room. She seated him in Soames's usual place, round the corner on her left. The light fell softly there, so that he would not be worried by the gradual dying of the day; and she began to talk to him about himself.

Presently, over James came a change, like the mellowing that steals upon a fruit in the, sun; a sense of being caressed, and praised, and petted, and all without the bestowal of a single caress or word of praise. He felt that what he was eating was agreeing with him; he could not get that feeling at home; he did not know when he had enjoyed a glass of champagne so much, and, on inquiring the brand and price, was surprised to find that it was one of which he had a large stock himself, but could never drink; he instantly formed the resolution to let his wine merchant know that he had been swindled.

Looking up from his food, he remarked:

"You've a lot of nice things about the place. Now, what did you give for that sugar-sifter? Shouldn't wonder if it was worth money!"

He was particularly pleased with the appearance of a picture, on the wall opposite, which he himself had given them:

"I'd no idea it was so good!" he said.

They rose to go into the drawing-room, and James followed Irene closely.

"That's what I call a capital little dinner," he murmured, breathing pleasantly down on her shoulder; "nothing heavy — and not too Frenchified. But I can't get it at home. I pay my cook sixty pounds a year, but she can't give me a dinner like that!"

He had as yet made no allusion to the building of the house, nor did he when Soames, pleading the excuse of business, betook himself to the room at the top, where he kept his pictures.

James was left alone with his daughter-in-law. The glow of the wine, and of an excellent liqueur, was still within him. He felt quite warm towards her. She was really a taking little thing; she listened to you, and seemed to understand what you were saying; and, while talking, he kept examining her figure, from her bronze-coloured shoes to the waved gold of her hair. She was leaning back in an Empire chair, her shoulders poised against the top — her body, flexibly straight and unsupported from the hips, swaying when she moved, as though giving to the arms of a lover. Her lips were smiling, her eyes half-closed.

It may have been a recognition of danger in the very charm of her attitude, or a twang of digestion, that caused a sudden dumbness to fall on James. He did not remember ever having been quite alone with Irene before. And, as he looked at her, an odd feeling crept over him, as though he had come across something strange and foreign.

Now what was she thinking about — sitting back like that?

Thus when he spoke it was in a sharper voice, as if he had been awakened from a pleasant dream.

"What d'you do with yourself all day?" he said. "You never come round to Park Lane!"

She seemed to be making very lame excuses, and James did not look at her. He did not want to believe that she was really avoiding them — it would mean too much.

"I expect the fact is, you haven't time," he said; "You're always about with June. I expect you're useful to her with her young man, chaperoning, and one thing and another. They tell me she's never at home now; your Uncle Jolyon he doesn't like it, I fancy, being left so much alone as he is. They tell me she's always hanging about for this young Bosinney; I suppose he comes here every day. Now, what do you think of him? D'you think he knows his own mind? He seems to me a poor thing. I should say the grey mare was the better horse!"

The colour deepened in Irene's face; and James watched her suspiciously.

"Perhaps you don't quite understand Mr. Bosinney," she said.

"Don't understand him!" James hummed out: "Why not? — you can see he's one of these artistic chaps. They say he's clever — they all think they're clever. You know more about him than I do," he added; and again his suspicious glance rested on her.

"He is designing a house for Soames," she said softly, evidently trying to smooth things over.

"That brings me to what I was going to say," continued James; "I don't know what Soames wants with a young man like that; why doesn't he go to a first-rate man?"

"Perhaps Mr. Bosinney is first-rate!"

James rose, and took a turn with bent head.

"That's it'," he said, "you young people, you all stick together; you all think you know best!"

Halting his tall, lank figure before her, he raised a finger, and levelled it at her bosom, as though bringing an indictment against her beauty:

"All I can say is, these artistic people, or whatever they call themselves, they're as unreliable as they can be; and my advice to you is, don't you have too much to do with him!"

Irene smiled; and in the curve of her lips was a strange provocation. She seemed to have lost her deference. Her breast rose and fell as though with secret anger; she drew her hands inwards from their rest on the arms of her chair until the tips of her fingers met, and her dark eyes looked unfathomably at James.

The latter gloomily scrutinized the floor.

"I tell you my opinion," he said, "it's a pity you haven't got a child to think about, and occupy you!"

A brooding look came instantly on Irene's face, and even James became conscious of the rigidity that took possession of her whole figure beneath the softness of its silk and lace clothing.

He was frightened by the effect he had produced, and like most men with but little courage, he sought at once to justify himself by bullying.

"You don't seem to care about going about. Why don't you drive down to Hurlingham with us? And go to the theatre now and then. At your time of life you ought to take an interest in things. You're a young woman!"

The brooding look darkened on her face; he grew nervous.

"Well, I know nothing about it," he said; "nobody tells me anything. Soames ought to be able to take care of himself. If he can't take care of himself he mustn't look to me — that's all."

Biting the corner of his forefinger he stole a cold, sharp look at his daughter-in-law.

He encountered her eyes fixed on his own, so dark and deep, that he stopped, and broke into a gentle perspiration.

"Well, I must be going," he said after a short pause, and a minute later rose, with a slight appearance of surprise, as though he had expected to be asked to stop. Giving his hand to Irene, he allowed himself to be conducted to the door, and let out into the street. He would not have a cab, he would walk, Irene was to say good-night to Soames for him, and if she wanted a little gaiety, well, he would drive her down to Richmond any day.

He walked home, and going upstairs, woke Emily out of the first sleep she had had for four and twenty hours, to tell her that it was his impression things were in a bad way at Soames's; on this theme he descanted for half an hour, until at last, saying that he would not sleep a wink, he turned on his side and instantly began to snore.

In Montpellier Square Soames, who had come from the picture room, stood invisible at the top of the stairs, watching Irene sort the letters brought by the last post. She turned back into the drawing-room; but in a minute came out, and stood as if listening. Then she came stealing up the stairs, with a kitten in her arms. He could see her face bent over the little beast, which was purring against her neck. Why couldn't she look at him like that?

Suddenly she saw him, and her face changed.

"Any letters for me?" he said.

"Three."

He stood aside, and without another word she passed on into the bedroom.

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CHAPTER 7

OLD JOLYON'S PECCADILLO

Old Jolyon came out of Lord's cricket ground that same afternoon with the intention of going home. He had not reached Hamilton Terrace before he changed his mind, and hailing a cab, gave the driver an address in Wistaria Avenue. He had taken a resolution.

June had hardly been at home at all that week; she had given him nothing of her company for a long time past, not, in fact, since she had become engaged to Bosinney. He never asked her for her company. It was not his habit to ask people for things! She had just that one idea now — Bosinney and his affairs — and she left him stranded in his great house, with a parcel of servants, and not a soul to speak to from morning to night. His Club was closed for cleaning; his Boards in recess; there was nothing, therefore, to take him into the City. June had wanted him to go away; she would not go herself, because Bosinney was in London.

But where was he to go by himself? He could not go abroad alone; the sea upset his liver; he hated hotels. Roger went to a hydropathic — he was not going to begin that at his time of life, those new-fangled places we're all humbug!

With such formulas he clothed to himself the desolation of his spirit; the lines down his face deepening, his eyes day by day looking forth with the melancholy which sat so strangely on a face wont to be strong and serene.

And so that afternoon he took this journey through St. John's Wood, in the golden-light that sprinkled the rounded green bushes of the acacia's before the little houses, in the summer sunshine that seemed holding a revel over the little gardens; and he looked about him with interest; for this was a district which no Forsyte entered without open disapproval and secret curiosity.

His cab stopped in front of a small house of that peculiar buff colour which implies a long immunity from paint. It had an outer gate, and a rustic approach.

He stepped out, his bearing extremely composed; his massive head, with its drooping moustache and wings of white hair, very upright, under an excessively large top hat; his glance firm, a little angry. He had been driven into this!

"Mrs. Jolyon Forsyte at home?"

"Oh, yes sir! — what name shall I say, if you please, sir?"

Old Jolyon could not help twinkling at the little maid as he gave his name. She seemed to him such a funny little toad!

And he followed her through the dark hall, into a small double, drawing-room, where the furniture was covered in chintz, and the little maid placed him in a chair.

"They're all in the garden, sir; if you'll kindly take a seat, I'll tell them."

Old Jolyon sat down in the chintz-covered chair, and looked around him. The whole place seemed to him, as he would have expressed it, pokey; there was a certain — he could not tell exactly what — air of shabbiness, or rather of making two ends meet, about everything. As far as he could see, not a single piece of furniture was worth a five-pound note. The walls, distempered rather a long time ago, were decorated with water-colour sketches; across the ceiling meandered a long crack.

These little houses were all old, second-rate concerns; he should hope the rent was under a hundred a year; it hurt him more than he could have said, to think of a Forsyte — his own son living in such a place.

The little maid came back. Would he please to go down into the garden?

Old Jolyon marched out through the French windows. In descending the steps he noticed that they wanted painting.

Young Jolyon, his wife, his two children, and his dog Balthasar, were all out there under a pear-tree.

This walk towards them was the most courageous act of old Jolyon's life; but no muscle of his face moved, no nervous gesture betrayed him. He kept his deep-set eyes steadily on the enemy.

In those two minutes he demonstrated to perfection all that unconscious soundness, balance, and vitality of fibre that made, of him and so many others of his class the core of the nation. In the unostentatious conduct of their own affairs, to the neglect of everything else, they typified the essential individualism, born in the Briton from the natural isolation of his country's life.

The dog Balthasar sniffed round the edges of his trousers; this friendly and cynical mongrel — offspring of a liaison between a Russian poodle and a fox-terrier — had a nose for the unusual.

The strange greetings over, old Jolyon seated himself in a wicker chair, and his two grandchildren, one on each side of his knees, looked at him silently, never having seen so old a man.

They were unlike, as though recognising the difference set between them by the circumstances of their births. Jolly, the child of sin, pudgy-faced, with his tow-coloured hair brushed off his forehead, and a dimple in his chin, had an air of stubborn amiability, and the eyes of a Forsyte; little Holly, the child of wedlock, was a dark-skinned, solemn soul, with her mother's, grey and wistful eyes.

The dog Balthasar, having walked round the three small flower-beds, to show his extreme contempt for things at large, had also taken a seat in front of old Jolyon, and, oscillating a tail curled by Nature tightly over his back, was staring up with eyes that did not blink.

Even in the garden, that sense of things being pokey haunted old Jolyon; the wicker chair creaked under his weight; the garden-beds looked 'daverdy'; on the far side, under the smut-stained wall, cats had made a path.

While he and his grandchildren thus regarded each other with the peculiar scrutiny, curious yet trustful, that passes between the very young and the very old, young Jolyon watched his wife.

The colour had deepened in her thin, oval face, with its straight brows, and large, grey eyes. Her hair, brushed in fine, high curves back from her forehead, was going grey, like his own, and this greyness made the sudden vivid colour in her cheeks painfully pathetic.

The look on her face, such as he had never seen there before, such as she had always hidden from him, was full of secret resentments, and longings, and fears. Her eyes, under their twitching brows, stared painfully. And she was silent.

Jolly alone sustained the conversation; he had many possessions, and was anxious that his unknown friend with extremely large moustaches, and hands all covered with blue veins, who sat with legs crossed like his own father (a habit he was himself trying to acquire), should know it; but being a Forsyte, though not yet quite eight years old, he made no mention of the thing at the moment dearest to his heart — a camp of soldiers in a shop-window, which his father had promised to buy. No doubt it seemed to him too precious; a tempting of Providence to mention it yet.

And the sunlight played through the leaves on that little party of the three generations grouped tranquilly under the pear-tree, which had long borne no fruit.

Old Jolyon's furrowed face was reddening patchily, as old men's faces redden in the sun. He took one of Jolly's hands in his own; the boy climbed on to his knee; and little Holly, mesmerized by this sight, crept up to them; the sound of the dog Balthasar's scratching arose rhythmically.

Suddenly young Mrs. Jolyon got up and hurried indoors. A minute later her husband muttered an excuse, and followed. Old Jolyon was left alone with his grandchildren.

And Nature with her quaint irony began working in him one of her strange revolutions, following her cyclic laws into the depths of his heart. And that tenderness for little children, that passion for the beginnings of life which had once made him forsake his son and follow June, now worked in him to forsake June and follow these littler things. Youth, like a flame, burned ever in his breast, and to youth he turned, to the round little limbs, so reckless, that wanted care, to the small round faces so unreasonably solemn or bright, to the treble tongues, and the shrill, chuckling laughter, to the insistent tugging hands, and the feel of small bodies against his legs, to all that was young and young, and once more young. And his eyes grew soft, his voice, and thin-veined hands soft, and soft his heart within him. And to those small creatures he became at once a place of pleasure, a place where they were secure, and could talk and laugh and play; till, like sunshine, there radiated from old Jolyon's wicker chair the perfect gaiety of three hearts.

But with young Jolyon following to his wife's room it was different.

He found her seated on a chair before her dressing-glass, with her hands before her face.

Her shoulders were shaking with sobs. This passion of hers for suffering was mysterious to him. He had been through a hundred of these moods; how he had survived them he never knew, for he could never believe they were moods, and that the last hour of his partnership had not struck.

In the night she would be sure to throw her arms round his neck and say: "Oh! Jo, how I make you suffer!" as she had done a hundred times before.

He reached out his hand, and, unseen, slipped his razor-case into his pocket. ‘I cannot stay here,’ he thought, ‘I must go down!’ Without a word he left the room, and went back to the lawn.

Old Jolyon had little Holly on his knee; she had taken possession of his watch; Jolly, very red in the face, was trying to show that he could stand on his head. The dog Balthasar, as close as he might be to the tea-table, had fixed his eyes on the cake.

Young Jolyon felt a malicious desire to cut their enjoyment short.

What business had his father to come and upset his wife like this? It was a shock, after all these years! He ought to have known; he ought to have given them warning; but when did a Forsyte ever imagine that his conduct could upset anybody! And in his thoughts he did old Jolyon wrong.

He spoke sharply to the children, and told them to go in to their tea. Greatly surprised, for they had never heard their father speak sharply before, they went off, hand in hand, little Holly looking back over her shoulder.

Young Jolyon poured out the tea.

“My wife’s not the thing today,” he said, but he knew well enough that his father had penetrated the cause of that sudden withdrawal, and almost hated the old man for sitting there so calmly.

“You’ve got a nice little house here,” said old Jolyon with a shrewd look; “I suppose you’ve taken a lease of it!”

Young Jolyon nodded.

“I don’t like the neighbourhood,” said old Jolyon; “a ramshackle lot.”

Young Jolyon replied: “Yes, we’re a ramshackle lot.”’

The silence was now only broken by the sound of the dog Balthasar’s scratching.

Old Jolyon said simply: “I suppose I oughtn’t to have come here, Jo; but I get so lonely!”

At these words young Jolyon got up and put his hand on his father’s shoulder.

In the next house someone was playing over and over again: ‘La Donna mobile’ on an untuned piano; and the little garden had fallen into shade, the sun now only reached the wall at the end, whereon basked a crouching cat, her yellow eyes turned sleepily down on the dog Balthasar. There was a drowsy hum of very distant traffic; the creepered trellis round the garden shut out everything but sky, and house, and pear-tree, with its top branches still gilded by the sun.

For some time they sat there, talking but little. Then old Jolyon rose to go, and not a word was said about his coming again.

He walked away very sadly. What a poor miserable place; and he thought of the great, empty house in Stanhope Gate, fit residence for a Forsyte, with its huge billiard-room and drawing-room that no one entered from one week’s end to another.

That woman, whose face he had rather liked, was too thin-skinned by half; she gave Jo a bad time he knew! And those sweet children! Ah! what a piece of awful folly!

He walked towards the Edgware Road, between rows of little houses, all suggesting to him (erroneously no doubt, but the prejudices of a Forsyte are sacred) shady histories of some sort or kind.

Society, forsooth, the chattering hags and jackanapes — had set themselves up to pass judgment on his flesh and blood! A parcel of old women! He stumped his umbrella on the ground, as though to drive it into the heart of that unfortunate body, which had dared to ostracize his son and his son’s son, in whom he could have lived again!

He stumped his umbrella fiercely; yet he himself had followed Society’s behaviour for fifteen years — had only today been false to it!

He thought of June, and her dead mother, and the whole story, with all his old bitterness. A wretched business!

He was a long time reaching Stanhope Gate, for, with native perversity, being extremely tired, he walked the whole way.

After washing his hands in the lavatory downstairs, he went to the dining-room to wait for dinner, the only room he used when June was out — it was less lonely so. The evening paper had not yet come; he had finished the Times, there was therefore nothing to do.

The room faced the backwater of traffic, and was very silent. He disliked dogs, but a dog even would have been company. His gaze, travelling round the walls, rested on a picture entitled: 'Group of Dutch fishing boats at sunset'; the chef d'oeuvre of his collection. It gave him no pleasure. He closed his eyes. He was lonely! He oughtn't to complain, he knew, but he couldn't help it: He was a poor thing — had always been a poor thing — no pluck! Such was his thought.

The butler came to lay the table for dinner, and seeing his master apparently asleep, exercised extreme caution in his movements. This bearded man also wore a moustache, which had given rise to grave doubts in the minds of many members — of the family — especially those who, like Soames, had been to public schools, and were accustomed to niceness in such matters. Could he really be considered a butler? Playful spirits alluded to him as: 'Uncle Jolyon's Nonconformist'; George, the acknowledged wag, had named him: 'Sankey.'

He moved to and fro between the great polished sideboard and the great polished table inimitably sleek and soft.

Old Jolyon watched him, feigning sleep. The fellow was a sneak — he had always thought so — who cared about nothing but rattling through his work, and getting out to his betting or his woman or goodness knew what! A slug! Fat too! And didn't care a pin about his master!

But then against his will, came one of those moments of philosophy which made old Jolyon different from other Forsytes:

After all why should the man care? He wasn't paid to care, and why expect it? In this world people couldn't look for affection unless they paid for it. It might be different in the next — he didn't know — couldn't tell! And again he shut his eyes.

Relentless and stealthy, the butler pursued his labours, taking things from the various compartments of the sideboard. His back seemed always turned to old Jolyon; thus, he robbed his operations of the unseemliness of being carried on in his master's presence; now and then he furtively breathed on the silver, and wiped it with a piece of chamois leather. He appeared to pore over the quantities of wine in the decanters, which he carried carefully and rather high, letting his heard droop over them protectingly. When he had finished, he stood for over a minute watching his master, and in his greenish eyes there was a look of contempt:

After all, this master of his was an old buffer, who hadn't much left in him!

Soft as a tom-cat, he crossed the room to press the bell. His orders were 'dinner at seven.' What if his master were asleep; he would soon have him out of that; there was the night to sleep in! He had himself to think of, for he was due at his Club at half-past eight!

In answer to the ring, appeared a page boy with a silver soup tureen. The butler took it from his hands and placed it on the table, then, standing by the open door, as though about to usher company into the room, he said in a solemn voice:

"Dinner is on the table, sir!"

Slowly old Jolyon got up out of his chair, and sat down at the table to eat his dinner.

❦

Chapter 8

Plans of the House

Forsytes, as is generally admitted, have shells, like that extremely useful little animal which is made into Turkish delight, in other words, they are never seen, or if seen would not be recognised, without habitats, composed of circumstance, property, acquaintances, and wives, which seem to move along with them in their passage through a world composed of thousands of other Forsytes with their habitats. Without a habitat a Forsyte is inconceivable — he would be like a novel without a plot, which is well-known to be an anomaly.

To Forsyte eyes Bosinney appeared to have no habitat, he seemed one of those rare and unfortunate men who go through life surrounded by circumstance, property, acquaintances, and wives that do not belong to them.

His rooms in Sloane Street, on the top floor, outside which, on a plate, was his name, 'Philip Baynes Bosinney, Architect,' were not those of a Forsyte. — He had no sitting-room apart from his office, but a large recess had been screened off to conceal the necessaries of life — a couch, an easy chair, his pipes, spirit case, novels and slippers. The business part of the room had the usual furniture; an open cupboard with pigeon-holes, a round oak table, a folding wash-stand, some hard chairs, a standing desk of large dimensions covered with drawings and designs. June had twice been to tea there under the chaperonage of his aunt.

He was believed to have a bedroom at the back.

As far as the family had been able to ascertain his income, it consisted of two consulting appointments at twenty pounds a year, together with an odd fee once in a way, and — more worthy item — a private annuity under his father's will of one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

What had transpired concerning that father was not so reassuring. It appeared that he had been a Lincolnshire country doctor of Cornish extraction, striking appearance, and Byronic tendencies — a well-known figure, in fact, in his county. Bosinney's uncle by marriage, Baynes, of Baynes and Bildeboy, a Forsyte in instincts if not in name, had but little that was worthy to relate of his brother-in-law.

"An odd fellow!' he would say: 'always spoke of his three eldest boys as 'good creatures, but so dull'; they're all doing capitally in the Indian Civil! Philip was the only one he liked. I've heard him talk in the queerest way; he once said to me: 'My dear fellow, never let your poor wife know what you're thinking of! But I didn't follow his advice; not I! An eccentric man! He would say to Phil: 'Whether you live like a gentleman or not, my boy, be sure you die like one! and he had himself embalmed in a frock coat suit, with a satin cravat and a diamond pin. Oh, quite an original, I can assure you!"

Of Bosinney himself Baynes would speak warmly, with a certain compassion: "He's got a streak of his father's Byronism. Why, look at the way he threw up his chances when he left my office; going off like that for six months with a knapsack, and all for what? — to study foreign architecture — foreign! What could he expect? And there he is — a clever young fellow — doesn't make his hundred a year! Now this engagement is the best thing that could have happened — keep him steady; he's one of those that go to bed all day and stay up all night, simply because they've no method; but no vice about him — not an ounce of vice. Old Forsyte's a rich man!"

Mr. Baynes made himself extremely pleasant to June, who frequently visited his house in Lowndes Square at this period.

"This house of your cousin's — what a capital man of business — is the very thing for Philip," he would say to her; "you mustn't expect to see too much of him just now, my dear young lady. The good cause — the good cause! The young man must make his way. When I was his age I was at work day and night. My dear wife used to say to me, 'Bobby, don't work too hard, think of your health'; but I never spared myself!"

June had complained that her lover found no time to come to Stanhope Gate.

The first time he came again they had not been together a quarter of an hour before, by one of those coincidences of which she was a mistress, Mrs. Septimus Small arrived. Thereon Bosinney rose and hid himself, according to previous arrangement, in the little study, to wait for her departure.

"My dear," said Aunt Juley, "how thin he is! I've often noticed it with engaged people; but you mustn't let it get worse.

There's Barlow's extract of veal; it did your Uncle Swithin a lot of good."

June, her little figure erect before the hearth, her small face quivering grimly, for she regarded her aunt's untimely visit in the light of a personal injury, replied with scorn:

"It's because he's busy; people who can do anything worth doing are never fat!"

Aunt Juley pouted; she herself had always been thin, but the only pleasure she derived from the fact was the opportunity of longing to be stouter.

"I don't think," she said mournfully, "that you ought to let them call him 'The Buccaneer'; people might think it odd, now that he's going to build a house for Soames. I do hope he will be careful; it's so important for him. Soames has such good taste!"

"Taste!" cried June, flaring up at once; "wouldn't give that for his taste, or any of the family's!"

Mrs. Small was taken aback.

"Your Uncle Swithin," she said, "always had beautiful taste! And Soames's little house is lovely; you don't mean to say you don't think so!"

"H'mph!" said June, "that's only because Irene's there!"

Aunt Juley tried to say something pleasant:

"And how will dear Irene like living in the country?"

June gazed at her intently, with a look in her eyes as if her conscience had suddenly leaped up into them; it passed; and an even more intent look took its place, as if she had stared that conscience out of countenance. She replied imperiously:

"Of course she'll like it; why shouldn't she?"

Mrs. Small grew nervous.

"I didn't know," she said; "I thought she mightn't like to leave her friends. Your Uncle James says she doesn't take enough interest in life. We think — I mean Timothy thinks — she ought to go out more. I expect you'll miss her very much!"

June clasped her hands behind her neck.

"I do wish," she cried, "Uncle Timothy wouldn't talk about what doesn't concern him!"

Aunt Juley rose to the full height of her tall figure.

"He never talks about what doesn't concern him," she said.

June was instantly compunctious; she ran to her aunt and kissed her.

"I'm very sorry, auntie; but I wish they'd let Irene alone."

Aunt Juley, unable to think of anything further on the subject that would be suitable, was silent; she prepared for departure, hooking her black silk cape across her chest, and, taking up her green reticule:

"And how is your dear grandfather?" she asked in the hall, "I expect he's very lonely now that all your time is taken up with Mr. Bosinney."

She bent and kissed her niece hungrily, and with little, mincing steps passed away.

The tears sprang up in June's eyes; running into the little study, where Bosinney was sitting at the table drawing birds on the back of an envelope, she sank down by his side and cried:

"Oh, Phil! it's all so horrid!" Her heart was as warm as the colour of her hair.

On the following Sunday morning, while Soames was shaving, a message was brought him to the effect that Mr. Bosinney was below, and would be glad to see him. Opening the door into his wife's room, he said:

"Bosinney's downstairs. Just go and entertain him while I finish shaving. I'll be down in a minute. It's about the plans, I expect."

Irene looked at him, without reply, put the finishing touch to her dress and went downstairs. He could not make her out about this house. She had said nothing against it, and, as far as Bosinney was concerned, seemed friendly enough.

From the window of his dressing-room he could see them talking together in the little court below. He hurried on with his shaving, cutting his chin twice. He heard them laugh, and thought to himself: "Well, they get on all right, anyway!"

As he expected, Bosinney had come round to fetch him to look at the plans.

He took his hat and went over.

The plans were spread on the oak table in the architect's room; and pale, imperturbable, inquiring, Soames bent over them for a long time without speaking.

He said at last in a puzzled voice:

"It's an odd sort of house!"

A rectangular house of two stories was designed in a quadrangle round a covered-in court. This court, encircled by a gallery on the upper floor, was roofed with a glass roof, supported by eight columns running up from the ground.

It was indeed, to Forsyte eyes, an odd house.

"There's a lot of room cut to waste," pursued Soames.

Bosinney began to walk about, and Soames did not like the expression on his face.

"The principle of this house," said the architect, "was that you should have room to breathe — like a gentleman!"

Soames extended his finger and thumb, as if measuring the extent of the distinction he should acquire; and replied:

"Oh! yes; I see."

The peculiar look came into Bosinney's face which marked all his enthusiasms.

"I've tried to plan you a house here with some self-respect of its own. If you don't like it, you'd better say so. It's certainly the last thing to be considered — who wants self-respect in a house, when you can squeeze in an extra lavatory?" He put his finger suddenly down on the left division of the centre oblong: "You can swing a cat here. This is for your pictures, divided from this court by curtains; draw them back and you'll have a space of fifty-one by twenty-three six. This double-faced stove in the centre, here, looks one way towards the court, one way towards the picture room; this end wall is all window; You've a southeast light from that, a north light from the court. The rest of your pictures you can hang round the gallery upstairs, or in the other rooms." "In architecture," he went on — and though looking at Soames he did not seem to see him, which gave Soames an unpleasant feeling —"as in life, you'll get no self-respect without regularity. Fellows tell you that's old fashioned. It appears to be peculiar any way; it never occurs to us to embody the main principle of life in our buildings; we load our houses with decoration, gimcracks, corners, anything to distract the eye. On the contrary the eye should rest; get your effects with a few strong lines. The whole thing is regularity there's no self-respect without it."

Soames, the unconscious ironist, fixed his gaze on Bosinney's tie, which was far from being in the perpendicular; he was unshaven too, and his dress not remarkable for order. Architecture appeared to have exhausted his regularity.

"Won't it look like a barrack?" he inquired.

He did not at once receive a reply.

"I can see what it is," said Bosinney, "you want one of Littlemaster's houses — one of the pretty and commodious sort, where the servants will live in garrets, and the front door be sunk so that you may come up again. By all means try Littlemaster, you'll find him a capital fellow, I've known him all my life!"

Soames was alarmed. He had really been struck by the plans, and the concealment of his satisfaction had been merely instinctive. It was difficult for him to pay a compliment. He despised people who were lavish with their praises.

He found himself now in the embarrassing position of one who must pay a compliment or run the risk of losing a good thing. Bosinney was just the fellow who might tear up the plans and refuse to act for him; a kind of grown-up child!

This grown-up childishness, to which he felt so superior, exercised a peculiar and almost mesmeric effect on Soames, for he had never felt anything like it in himself.

"Well," he stammered at last, "it's — it's, certainly original."

He had such a private distrust and even dislike of the word 'original' that he felt he had not really given himself away by this remark.

Bosinney seemed pleased. It was the sort of thing that would please a fellow like that! And his success encouraged Soames.

"It's — a big place," he said.

"Space, air, light," he heard Bosinney murmur, "you can't live like a gentleman in one of Littlemaster's — he builds for manufacturers."

Soames made a deprecating movement; he had been identified with a gentleman; not for a good deal of money now would he be classed with manufacturers. But his innate distrust of general principles revived. What the deuce was the good of talking about regularity and self-respect? It looked to him as if the house would be cold.

"Irene can't stand the cold!" he said.

"Ah!" said Bosinney sarcastically. "Your wife? She doesn't like the cold? I'll see to that; she shan't be cold. Look here!" he pointed, to four marks at regular intervals on the walls of the court. "I've given you hot-water pipes in aluminium casings; you can get them with very good designs."

Soames looked suspiciously at these marks.

"It's all very well, all this," he said, "but what's it going to cost?"

The architect took a sheet of paper from his pocket:

"The house, of course, should be built entirely of stone, but, as I thought you wouldn't stand that, I've compromised for a facing. It ought to have a copper roof, but I've made it green slate. As it is, including metal work, it'll cost you eight thousand five hundred."

"Eight thousand five hundred?" said Soames. "Why, I gave you an outside limit of eight!"

"Can't be done for a penny less," replied Bosinney coolly.

"You must take it or leave it!"

It was the only way, probably, that such a proposition could have been made to Soames. He was nonplussed. Conscience told him to throw the whole thing up. But the design was good, and he knew it — there was completeness about it, and dignity; the servants' apartments were excellent too. He would gain credit by living in a house like that — with such individual features, yet perfectly well-arranged.

He continued poring over the plans, while Bosinney went into his bedroom to shave and dress.

The two walked back to Montpellier Square in silence, Soames watching him out of the corner of his eye.

The Buccaneer was rather a good-looking fellow — so he thought — when he was properly got up.

Irene was bending over her flowers when the two men came in.

She spoke of sending across the Park to fetch June.

"No, no," said Soames, "we've still got business to talk over!"

At lunch he was almost cordial, and kept pressing Bosinney to eat. He was pleased to see the architect in such high spirits, and left him to spend the afternoon with Irene, while he stole off to his pictures, after his Sunday habit. At tea-time he came down to the drawing-room, and found them talking, as he expressed it, nineteen to the dozen.

Unobserved in the doorway, he congratulated himself that things were taking the right turn. It was lucky she and Bosinney got on; she seemed to be falling into line with the idea of the new house.

Quiet meditation among his pictures had decided him to spring the five hundred if necessary; but he hoped that the afternoon might have softened Bosinney's estimates. It was so purely a matter which Bosinney could remedy if he liked; there must be a dozen ways in which he could cheapen the production of a house without spoiling the effect.

He awaited, therefore, his opportunity till Irene was handing the architect his first cup of tea. A chink of sunshine through the lace of the blinds warmed her cheek, shone in the gold of her hair, and in her soft eyes. Possibly the same gleam deepened Bosinney's colour, gave the rather startled look to his face.

Soames hated sunshine, and he at once got up, to draw the blind. Then he took his own cup of tea from his wife, and said, more coldly than he had intended:

"Can't you see your way to do it for eight thousand after all? There must be a lot of little things you could alter."

Bosinney drank off his tea at a gulp, put down his cup, and answered:

"Not one!"

Soames saw that his suggestion had touched some unintelligible point of personal vanity.

"Well," he agreed, with sulky resignation; "you must have it your own way, I suppose."

A few minutes later Bosinney rose to go, and Soames rose too, to see him off the premises. The architect seemed in absurdly high spirits. After watching him walk away at a swinging pace, Soames returned moodily to the drawing-room, where Irene was putting away the music, and, moved by an uncontrollable spasm of curiosity, he asked:

“Well, what do you think of ‘The Buccaneer’?”

He looked at the carpet while waiting for her answer, and he had to wait some time.

“I don’t know,” she said at last.

“Do you think he’s good-looking?”

Irene smiled. And it seemed to Soames that she was mocking him.

“Yes,” she answered; “very.”

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CHAPTER 9

DEATH OF AUNT ANN

There came a morning at the end of September when Aunt Ann was unable to take from Smither's hands the insignia of personal dignity. After one look at the old face, the doctor, hurriedly sent for, announced that Miss Forsyte had passed away in her sleep.

Aunts Juley and Hester were overwhelmed by the shock. They had never imagined such an ending. Indeed, it is doubtful whether they had ever realized that an ending was bound to come. Secretly they felt it unreasonable of Ann to have left them like this without a word, without even a struggle. It was unlike her.

Perhaps what really affected them so profoundly was the thought that a Forsyte should have let go her grasp on life. If one, then why not all!

It was a full hour before they could make up their minds to tell Timothy. If only it could be kept from him! If only it could be broken to him by degrees!

And long they stood outside his door whispering together. And when it was over they whispered together again.

He would feel it more, they were afraid, as time went on. Still, he had taken it better than could have been expected. He would keep his bed, of course!

They separated, crying quietly.

Aunt Juley stayed in her room, prostrated by the blow. Her face, discoloured by tears, was divided into compartments by the little ridges of pouting flesh which had swollen with emotion. It was impossible to conceive of life without Ann, who had lived with her for seventy-three years, broken only by the short interregnum of her married life, which seemed now so unreal. At fixed intervals she went to her drawer, and took from beneath the lavender bags a fresh pocket-handkerchief. Her warm heart could not bear the thought that Ann was lying there so cold.

Aunt Hester, the silent, the patient, that backwater of the family energy, sat in the drawing-room, where the blinds were drawn; and she, too, had wept at first, but quietly, without visible effect. Her guiding principle, the conservation of energy, did not abandon her in sorrow. She sat, slim, motionless, studying the grate, her hands idle in the lap of her black silk dress. They would want to rouse her into doing something, no doubt. As if there were any good in that! Doing something would not bring back Ann! Why worry her?

Five o'clock brought three of the brothers, Jolyon and James and Swithin; Nicholas was at Yarmouth, and Roger had a bad attack of gout. Mrs. Hayman had been by herself earlier in the day, and, after seeing Ann, had gone away, leaving a message for Timothy — which was kept from him — that she ought to have been told sooner. In fact, there was a feeling amongst them all that they ought to have been told sooner, as though they had missed something; and James said:

"I knew how it'd be; I told you she wouldn't last through the summer."

Aunt Hester made no reply; it was nearly October, but what was the good of arguing; some people were never satisfied.

She sent up to tell her sister that the brothers were there. Mrs. Small came down at once. She had bathed her face, which was still swollen, and though she looked severely at Swithin's trousers, for they were of light blue — he had come straight from the club, where the news had reached him — she wore a more cheerful expression than usual, the instinct for doing the wrong thing being even now too strong for her.

Presently all five went up to look at the body. Under the pure white sheet a quilted counter-pane had been placed, for now, more than ever, Aunt Ann had need of warmth; and, the pillows removed, her spine and head rested flat, with the semblance of their life-long inflexibility; the coif banding the top of her brow was drawn on either side to the level of the ears, and between it and the sheet her face, almost as white, was turned with closed eyes to the faces of her brothers and sisters. In its extraordinary peace the face was stronger than ever, nearly all bone now under the scarce-wrinkled parchment of skin — square jaw and chin, cheekbones, forehead with hollow temples, chiselled nose — the fortress of an unconquerable spirit that had yielded to death, and in its upward sightlessness seemed trying to regain that spirit, to regain the guardianship it had just laid down.

Swithin took but one look at the face, and left the room; the sight, he said afterwards, made him very queer. He went downstairs shaking the whole house, and, seizing his hat, clambered into his brougham, without giving any directions to the coachman. He was driven home, and all the evening sat in his chair without moving.

He could take nothing for dinner but a partridge, with an imperial pint of champagne. . . .

Old Jolyon stood at the bottom of the bed, his hands folded in front of him. He alone of those in the room remembered the death of his mother, and though he looked at Ann, it was of that he was thinking. Ann was an old woman, but death had come to her at last — death came to all! His face did not move, his gaze seemed travelling from very far.

Aunt Hester stood beside him. She did not cry now, tears were exhausted — her nature refused to permit a further escape of force; she twisted her hands, looking not at Ann, but from side to side, seeking some way of escaping the effort of realization.

Of all the brothers and sisters James manifested the most emotion. Tears rolled down the parallel furrows of his thin face; where he should go now to tell his troubles he did not know; Juley was no good, Hester worse than useless! He felt Ann's death more than he had ever thought he should; this would upset him for weeks!

Presently Aunt Hester stole out, and Aunt Juley began moving about, doing 'what was necessary,' so that twice she knocked against something. Old Jolyon, roused from his reverie, that reverie of the long, long past, looked sternly at her, and went away. James alone was left by the bedside; glancing stealthily round, to see that he was not observed, he twisted his long body down, placed a kiss on the dead forehead, then he, too, hastily left the room. Encountering Smither in the hall, he began to ask her about the funeral, and, finding that she knew nothing, complained bitterly that, if they didn't take care, everything would go wrong. She had better send for Mr. Soames — he knew all about that sort of thing; her master was very much upset, he supposed — he would want looking after; as for her mistresses, they were no good — they had no gumption! They would be ill too, he shouldn't wonder. She had better send for the doctor; it was best to take things in time. He didn't think his sister Ann had had the best opinion; if she'd had Blank she would have been alive now. Smither might send to Park Lane any time she wanted advice. Of course, his carriage was at their service for the funeral. He supposed she hadn't such a thing as a glass of claret and a biscuit — he had had no lunch!

The days before the funeral passed quietly. It had long been known, of course, that Aunt Ann had left her little property to Timothy. There was, therefore, no reason for the slightest agitation. Soames, who was sole executor, took charge of all arrangements, and in due course sent out the following invitation to every male member of the family:

To. . . . .

Your presence is requested at the funeral of Miss Ann Forsyte, in Highgate Cemetery, at noon of Oct. 1st. Carriages will meet at "The Bower," Bayswater Road, at 10.45. No flowers by request. 'R.S.V.P.'

The morning came, cold, with a high, grey, London sky, and at half-past ten the first carriage, that of James, drove up. It contained James and his son-in-law Dartie, a fine man, with a square chest, buttoned very tightly into a frock coat, and a sallow, fattish face adorned with dark, well-curled moustaches, and that incorrigible commencement of whisker which, eluding the strictest attempts at shaving, seems the mark of something deeply ingrained in the personality of the shaver, being especially noticeable in men who speculate.

Soames, in his capacity of executor, received the guests, for Timothy still kept his bed; he would get up after the funeral; and Aunts Juley and Hester would not be coming down till all was over, when it was understood there would be lunch for anyone who cared to come back. The next to arrive was Roger, still limping from the gout, and encircled by three of his sons — young Roger, Eustace, and Thomas. George, the remaining son, arrived almost immediately afterwards in a hansom, and paused in the hall to ask Soames how he found undertaking pay.

They disliked each other.

Then came two Haymans — Giles and Jesse perfectly silent, and very well dressed, with special creases down their evening trousers. Then old Jolyon alone. Next, Nicholas, with a healthy colour in his face, and a carefully veiled sprightliness in every movement of his head and body. One of his sons followed him, meek and subdued. Swithin Forsyte, and Bosinney arrived at the same moment — and stood — bowing precedence to each other — but on the door opening they tried to enter together; they renewed their apologies in the hall, and, Swithin, settling his stock, which had become disarranged in the struggle, very slowly mounted the stairs. The other Hayman; two married sons of Nicholas, together with Tweetyman, Spender, and Warry, the husbands of married Forsyte and Hayman daughters. The company was then complete, twenty-one in all, not a male member of the family being absent but Timothy and young Jolyon.

Entering the scarlet and green drawing-room, whose apparel made so vivid a setting for their unaccustomed costumes, each tried nervously to find a seat, desirous of hiding the emphatic blackness of his trousers. There seemed a sort of indecency in that blackness and in the colour of their gloves — a sort of exaggeration of the feelings; and many cast shocked looks of secret envy at 'the Buccaneer,' who had no gloves, and was wearing grey trousers. A subdued hum of conversation rose, no one speaking of the departed, but each asking after the other, as though thereby casting an indirect libation to this event, which they had come to honour.

And presently James said:

"Well, I think we ought to be starting."

They went downstairs, and, two and two, as they had been told off in strict precedence, mounted the carriages.

The hearse started at a foot's pace; the carriages moved slowly after. In the first went old Jolyon with Nicholas; in the second, the twins, Swithin and James; in the third, Roger and young Roger; Soames, young Nicholas, George, and Bosinney followed in the fourth. Each of the other carriages, eight in all, held three or four of the family; behind them came the doctor's brougham; then, at a decent interval, cabs containing family clerks and servants; and at the very end, one containing nobody at all, but bringing the total cortege up to the number of thirteen.

So long as the procession kept to the highway of the Bayswater Road, it retained the foot's-pace, but, turning into less important thorough-fares, it soon broke into a trot, and so proceeded, with intervals of walking in the more fashionable streets, until it arrived. In the first carriage old Jolyon and Nicholas were talking of their wills. In the second the twins, after a single attempt, had lapsed into complete silence; both were rather deaf, and the exertion of making themselves heard was too great. Only once James broke this silence:

"I shall have to be looking about for some ground somewhere. What arrangements have you made, Swithin?"

And Swithin, fixing him with a dreadful stare, answered:

"Don't talk to me about such things!"

In the third carriage a disjointed conversation was carried on in the intervals of looking out to see how far they had got, George remarking, "Well, it was really time that the poor old lady went." He didn't believe in people living beyond seventy, Young Nicholas replied mildly that the rule didn't seem to apply to the Forsytes. George said he himself intended to commit suicide at sixty. Young Nicholas, smiling and stroking a long chin, didn't think his father would like that theory; he had made a lot of money since he was sixty. Well, seventy was the outside limit; it was then time, George said, for them to go and leave their money to their children. Soames, hitherto silent, here joined in; he had not forgotten the remark about the 'undertaking,' and, lifting his eyelids almost imperceptibly, said it was all very well for people who never made money to talk. He himself intended to live as long as he could. This was a hit at George, who was notoriously hard up. Bosinney muttered abstractedly "Hear, hear!" and, George yawning, the conversation dropped.

Upon arriving, the coffin was borne into the chapel, and, two by two, the mourners filed in behind it. This guard of men, all attached to the dead by the bond of kinship, was an impressive and singular sight in the great city of London, with its overwhelming diversity of life, its innumerable vocations, pleasures, duties, its terrible hardness, its terrible call to individualism.

The family had gathered to triumph over all this, to give a show of tenacious unity, to illustrate gloriously that law of property underlying the growth of their tree, by which it had thriven and spread, trunk and branches, the sap flowing through all, the full growth reached at the appointed time. The spirit of the old woman lying in her last sleep had called them to this demonstration. It was her final appeal to that unity which had been their strength — it was her final triumph that she had died while the tree was yet whole.

She was spared the watching of the branches jut out beyond the point of balance. She could not look into the hearts of her followers. The same law that had worked in her, bringing her up from a tall, straight-backed slip of a girl to a woman strong and grown, from a woman grown to a woman old, angular, feeble, almost witchlike, with individuality all sharpened and sharpened, as all rounding from the world's contact fell off from her — that same law would work, was working, in the family she had watched like a mother.

She had seen it young, and growing, she had seen it strong and grown, and before her old eyes had time or strength to see any more, she died. She would have tried, and who knows but she might have kept it young and strong, with her old fingers, her trembling kisses — a little longer; alas! not even Aunt Ann could fight with Nature.

'Pride comes before a fall!' In accordance with this, the greatest of Nature's ironies, the Forsyte family had gathered for a last proud pageant before they fell. Their faces to right and left, in single lines, were turned for the most part impassively toward the ground, guardians of their thoughts; but here and there, one looking upward, with a line between his brows, searched to see some sight on the chapel walls too much for him, to be listening to something that appalled. And the responses, low-muttered, in voices through which rose the same tone, the same unseizable family ring, sounded weird, as though murmured in hurried duplication by a single person.

The service in the chapel over, the mourners filed up again to guard the body to the tomb. The vault stood open, and, round it, men in black were waiting.

From that high and sacred field, where thousands of the upper middle class lay in their last sleep, the eyes of the Forsytes travelled down across the flocks of graves. There — spreading to the distance, lay London, with no sun over it, mourning the loss of its daughter, mourning with this family, so dear, the loss of her who was mother and guardian. A hundred thousand spires and houses, blurred in the great grey web of property, lay there like prostrate worshippers before the grave of this, the oldest Forsyte of them all.

A few words, a sprinkle of earth, the thrusting of the coffin home, and Aunt Ann had passed to her last rest.

Round the vault, trustees of that passing, the five brothers stood, with white heads bowed; they would see that Ann was comfortable where she was going. Her little property must stay behind, but otherwise, all that could be should be done. . . .

Then severally, each stood aside, and putting on his hat, turned back to inspect the new inscription on the marble of the family vault:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF ANN FORSYTE, THE DAUGHTER OF THE ABOVE JOLYON AND ANN FORSYTE, WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE THE 27TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 1886, AGED EIGHTY-SEVEN YEARS AND FOUR DAYS

Soon perhaps, someone else would be wanting an inscription. It was strange and intolerable, for they had not thought somehow, that Forsytes could die. And one and all they had a longing to get away from this painfulness, this ceremony which had reminded them of things they could not bear to think about — to get away quickly and go about their business and forget.

It was cold, too; the wind, like some slow, disintegrating force, blowing up the hill over the graves, struck them with its chilly breath; they began to split into groups, and as quickly as possible to fill the waiting carriages.

Swithin said he should go back to lunch at Timothy's, and he offered to take anybody with him in his brougham. It was considered a doubtful privilege to drive with Swithin in his brougham, which was not a large one; nobody accepted, and he went off alone. James and Roger followed immediately after; they also would drop in to lunch. The others gradually melted away, Old Jolyon taking three nephews to fill up his carriage; he had a want of those young faces.

Soames, who had to arrange some details in the cemetery office, walked away with Bosinney. He had much to talk over with him, and, having finished his business, they strolled to Hampstead, lunched together at the Spaniard's Inn, and spent a long time in going into practical details connected with the building of the house; they then proceeded to the tram-line, and came as far as the Marble Arch, where Bosinney went off to Stanhope Gate to see June.

Soames felt in excellent spirits when he arrived home, and confided to Irene at dinner that he had had a good talk with Bosinney, who really seemed a sensible fellow; they had had a capital walk too, which had done his liver good — he had been short of exercise for a long time — and altogether a very satisfactory day. If only it hadn't been for poor Aunt Ann, he would have taken her to the theatre; as it was, they must make the best of an evening at home.

"The Buccaneer asked after you more than once," he said suddenly. And moved by some inexplicable desire to assert his proprietorship, he rose from his chair and planted a kiss on his wife's shoulder.

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PART II

CHAPTER 10

PROGRESS OF THE HOUSE

The winter had been an open one. Things in the trade were slack; and as Soames had reflected before making up his mind, it had been a good time for building. The shell of the house at Robin Hill was thus completed by the end of April.

Now that there was something to be seen for his money, he had been coming down once, twice, even three times a week, and would mouse about among the debris for hours, careful never to soil his clothes, moving silently through the unfinished brickwork of doorways, or circling round the columns in the central court.

And he would stand before them for minutes' together, as though peering into the real quality of their substance.

On April 30 he had an appointment with Bosinney to go over the accounts, and five minutes before the proper time he entered the tent which the architect had pitched for himself close to the old oak tree.

The accounts were already prepared on a folding table, and with a nod Soames sat down to study them. It was some time before he raised his head.

"I can't make them out," he said at last; "they come to nearly seven hundred more than they ought"

After a glance at Bosinney's face he went on quickly:

"If you only make a firm stand against these builder chaps you'll get them down. They stick you with everything if you don't look sharp. . . . Take ten per cent. off all round. I shan't mind it's coming out a hundred or so over the mark!"

Bosinney shook his head:

"I've taken off every farthing I can!"

Soames pushed back the table with a movement of anger, which sent the account sheets fluttering to the ground.

"Then all I can say is," he flustered out, "you've made a pretty mess of it!"

"I've told you a dozen times," Bosinney answered sharply, "that there'd be extras. I've pointed them out to you over and over again!"

"I know that," growled Soames: "I shouldn't have objected to a ten pound note here and there. How was I to know that by 'extras' you meant seven hundred pounds?"

The qualities of both men had contributed to this not-inconsiderable discrepancy. On the one hand, the architect's devotion to his idea, to the image of a house which he had created and believed in — had made him nervous of being stopped, or forced to the use of makeshifts; on the other, Soames' not less true and wholehearted devotion to the very best article that could be obtained for the money, had rendered him averse to believing that things worth thirteen shillings could not be bought with twelve.

"I wish I'd never undertaken your house," said Bosinney suddenly. "You come down here worrying me out of my life. You want double the value for your money anybody else would, and now that you've got a house that for its size is not to be beaten in the county, you don't want to pay for it. If you're anxious to be off your bargain, I daresay I can find the balance above the estimates myself, but I'm d —— d if I do another stroke of work for you!"

Soames regained his composure. Knowing that Bosinney had no capital, he regarded this as a wild suggestion. He saw, too, that he would be kept indefinitely out of this house on which he had set his heart, and just at the crucial point when the architect's personal care made all the difference. In the meantime there was Irene to be thought of! She had been very queer lately. He really believed it was only because she had taken to Bosinney that she tolerated the idea of the house at all. It would not do to make an open breach with her.

"You needn't get into a rage," he said. "If I'm willing to put up with it, I suppose you needn't cry out. All I meant was that when you tell me a thing is going to cost so much, I like to — well, in fact, I— like to know where I am."

"Look here!" said Bosinney, and Soames was both annoyed and surprised by the shrewdness of his glance. "You've got my services dirt cheap. For the kind of work I've put into this house, and the amount of time I've given to it, you'd have had to pay Littlemaster or some other fool four times as much. What you want, in fact, is a first-rate man for a fourth-rate fee, and that's exactly what you've got!"

Soames saw that he really meant what he said, and, angry though he was, the consequences of a row rose before him too vividly. He saw his house unfinished, his wife rebellious, himself a laughingstock.

"Let's go over it," he said sulkily, "and see how the money's gone."

"Very well," assented Bosinney. "But we'll hurry up, if you don't mind. I have to get back in time to take June to the theatre."

Soames cast a stealthy look at him, and said: "Coming to our place, I suppose to meet her?" He was always coming to their place!

There had been rain the night before-a spring rain, and the earth smelt of sap and wild grasses. The warm, soft breeze swung the leaves and the golden buds of the old oak tree, and in the sunshine the blackbirds were whistling their hearts out.

It was such a spring day as breathes into a man an ineffable yearning, a painful sweetness, a longing that makes him stand motionless, looking at the leaves or grass, and fling out his arms to embrace he knows not what. The earth gave forth a fainting warmth, stealing up through the chilly garment in which winter had wrapped her. It was her long caress of invitation, to draw men down to lie within her arms, to roll their bodies on her, and put their lips to her breast.

On just such a day as this Soames had got from Irene the promise he had asked her for so often. Seated on the fallen trunk of a tree, he had promised for the twentieth time that if their marriage were not a success, she should be as free as if she had never married him!

"Do you swear it?" she had said. A few days back she had reminded him of that oath. He had answered: "Nonsense! I couldn't have sworn any such thing!" By some awkward fatality he remembered it now. What queer things men would swear for the sake of women! He would have sworn it at any time to gain her! He would swear it now, if thereby he could touch her — but nobody could touch her, she was cold-hearted!

And memories crowded on him with the fresh, sweet savour of the spring wind-memories of his courtship.

In the spring of the year 1881 he was visiting his old school-fellow and client, George Liversedge, of Branksome, who, with the view of developing his pine-woods in the neighbourhood of Bournemouth, had placed the formation of the company necessary to the scheme in Soames's hands. Mrs. Liversedge, with a sense of the fitness of things, had given a musical tea in his honour. Later in the course of this function, which Soames, no musician, had regarded as an unmitigated bore, his eye had been caught by the face of a girl dressed in mourning, standing by herself. The lines of her tall, as yet rather thin figure, showed through the wispy, clinging stuff of her black dress, her black-gloved hands were crossed in front of her, her lips slightly parted, and her large, dark eyes wandered from face to face. Her hair, done low on her neck, seemed to gleam above her black collar like coils of shining metal. And as Soames stood looking at her, the sensation that most men have felt at one time or another went stealing through him — a peculiar satisfaction of the senses, a peculiar certainty, which novelists and old ladies call love at first sight. Still stealthily watching her, he at once made his way to his hostess, and stood doggedly waiting for the music to cease.

"Who is that girl with yellow hair and dark eyes?" he asked.

"That — oh! Irene Heron. Her father, Professor Heron, died this year. She lives with her stepmother. She's a nice girl, a pretty girl, but no money!"

"Introduce me, please," said Soames.

It was very little that he found to say, nor did he find her responsive to that little. But he went away with the resolution to see her again. He effected his object by chance, meeting her on the pier with her stepmother, who had the habit of walking there from twelve to one of a forenoon. Soames made this lady's acquaintance with alacrity, nor was it long before he perceived in her the ally he was looking for. His keen scent for the commercial side of family life soon told him that Irene cost her stepmother more than the fifty pounds a year she brought her; it also told him that Mrs. Heron, a woman yet in the prime of life, desired to be married again. The strange ripening beauty of her stepdaughter stood in the way of this desirable consummation. And Soames, in his stealthy tenacity, laid his plans.

He left Bournemouth without having given himself away, but in a month's time came back, and this time he spoke, not to the girl, but to her stepmother. He had made up his mind, he said; he would wait any time. And he had long to wait, watching Irene bloom, the lines of her young figure softening, the stronger blood deepening the gleam of her eyes, and warming her face to a creamy glow; and at each visit he proposed to her, and when that visit was at an end, took her refusal away with him, back to London, sore at heart, but steadfast and silent as the grave. He tried to come at the secret springs of her resistance; only once had he a gleam of light. It was at one of those assembly dances, which afford the only outlet to the passions of the population of seaside watering-places. He was sitting with her in an embrasure, his senses tingling with the contact of the waltz. She had looked at him over her, slowly waving fan; and he had lost his head. Seizing that moving wrist, he pressed his lips to the flesh of her arm. And she had shuddered — to this day he had not forgotten that shudder — nor the look so passionately averse she had given him.

A year after that she had yielded. What had made her yield he could never make out; and from Mrs. Heron, a woman of some diplomatic talent, he learnt nothing. Once after they were married he asked her, “What made you refuse me so often?” She had answered by a strange silence. An enigma to him from the day that he first saw her, she was an enigma to him still. . . .

Bosinney was waiting for him at the door; and on his rugged, good-looking, face was a queer, yearning, yet happy look, as though he too saw a promise of bliss in the spring sky, sniffed a coming happiness in the spring air. Soames looked at him waiting there. What was the matter with the fellow that he looked so happy? What was he waiting for with that smile on his lips and in his eyes? Soames could not see that for which Bosinney was waiting as he stood there drinking in the flower-scented wind. And once more he felt baffled in the presence of this man whom by habit he despised. He hastened on to the house.

“The only colour for those tiles,” he heard Bosinney say — “is ruby with a grey tint in the stuff, to give a transparent effect. I should like Irene’s opinion. I’m ordering the purple leather curtains for the doorway of this court; and if you distemper the drawing-room ivory cream over paper, you’ll get an illusive look. You want to aim all through the decorations at what I call charm.”

Soames said: “You mean that my wife has charm!”

Bosinney evaded the question.

“You should have a clump of iris plants in the centre of that court.”

Soames smiled superciliously.

“I’ll look into Beech’s some time,” he said, “and see what’s appropriate!”

They found little else to say to each other, but on the way to the Station Soames asked:

“I suppose you find Irene very artistic.”

“Yes.” The abrupt answer was as distinct a snub as saying: “If you want to discuss her you can do it with someone else!”

And the slow, sulky anger Soames had felt all the afternoon burned the brighter within him.

Neither spoke again till they were close to the Station, then Soames asked:

“When do you expect to have finished?”

“By the end of June, if you really wish me to decorate as well.”

Soames nodded. “But you quite understand,” he said, “that the house is costing me a lot beyond what I contemplated. I may as well tell you that I should have thrown it up, only I’m not in the habit of giving up what I’ve set my mind on.”

Bosinney made no reply. And Soames gave him askance a look of dogged dislike — for in spite of his fastidious air and that supercilious, dandified taciturnity, Soames, with his set lips and squared chin, was not unlike a bulldog. . . .

When, at seven o’clock that evening, June arrived at 62, Montpellier Square, the maid Bilson told her that Mr. Bosinney was in the drawing-room; the mistress — she said — was dressing, and would be down in a minute. She would tell her that Miss June was here.

June stopped her at once.

“All right, Bilson,” she said, “I’ll just go in. You, needn’t hurry Mrs. Soames.”

She took off her cloak, and Bilson, with an understanding look, did not even open the drawing-room door for her, but ran downstairs.

June paused for a moment to look at herself in the little old-fashioned silver mirror above the oaken rug chest — a slim, imperious young figure, with a small resolute face, in a white frock, cut moon-shaped at the base of a neck too slender for her crown of twisted red-gold hair.

She opened the drawing-room door softly, meaning to take him by surprise. The room was filled with a sweet hot scent of flowering azaleas.

She took a long breath of the perfume, and heard Bosinney's voice, not in the room, but quite close, saying.

"Ah! there were such heaps of things I wanted to talk about, and now we shan't have time!"

Irene's voice answered: "Why not at dinner?"

"How can one talk. . . . "

June's first thought was to go away, but instead she crossed to the long window opening on the little court. It was from there that the scent of the azaleas came, and, standing with their backs to her, their faces buried in the golden-pink blossoms, stood her lover and Irene.

Silent but unashamed, with flaming cheeks and angry eyes, the girl watched.

"Come on Sunday by yourself — We can go over the house together."

June saw Irene look up at him through her screen of blossoms. It was not the look of a coquette, but — far worse to the watching girl — of a woman fearful lest that look should say too much.

"I've promised to go for a drive with Uncle. . . . "

"The big one! Make him bring you; it's only ten miles — the very thing for his horses."

"Poor old Uncle Swithin!"

A wave of the azalea scent drifted into June's face; she felt sick and dizzy.

"Do! ah! do!"

"But why?"

"I must see you there — I thought you'd like to help me. . . . "

The answer seemed to the girl to come softly with a tremble from amongst the blossoms: "So I do!"

And she stepped into the open space of the window.

"How stuffy it is here!" she said; "I can't bear this scent!"

Her eyes, so angry and direct, swept both their faces.

"Were you talking about the house? I haven't seen it yet, you know — shall we all go on Sunday?"'

From Irene's face the colour had flown.

"I am going for a drive that day with Uncle Swithin," she answered.

"Uncle Swithin! What does he matter? You can throw him over!"

"I am not in the habit of throwing people over!"

There was a sound of footsteps and June saw Soames standing just behind her.

"Well! if you are all ready," said Irene, looking from one to the other with a strange smile, "dinner is too!"

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CHAPTER 11

JUNE'S TREAT

Dinner began in silence; the women facing one another, and the men.

In silence the soup was finished — excellent, if a little thick; and fish was brought. In silence it was handed.

Bosinney ventured: "It's the first spring day."

Irene echoed softly: "Yes — the first spring day."

"Spring!" said June: "there isn't a breath of air!" No one replied.

The fish was taken away, a fine fresh sole from Dover. And Bilson brought champagne, a bottle swathed around the neck with white. . . .

Soames said: "You'll find it dry."

Cutlets were handed, each pink-frilled about the legs. They were refused by June, and silence fell.

Soames said: "You'd better take a cutlet, June; there's nothing coming."

But June again refused, so they were borne away. And then Irene asked: "Phil, have you heard my blackbird?"

Bosinney answered: "Rather — he's got a hunting-song. As I came round I heard him in the Square."

"He's such a darling!"

"Salad, sir?" Spring chicken was removed.

But Soames was speaking: "The asparagus is very poor. Bosinney, glass of sherry with your sweet? June, you're drinking nothing!"

June said: "You know I never do. Wine's such horrid stuff!"

An apple charlotte came upon a silver dish, and smilingly Irene said: "The azaleas are so wonderful this year!"

To this Bosinney murmured: "Wonderful! The scent's extraordinary!"

June said: "How can you like the scent? Sugar, please, Bilson."

Sugar was handed her, and Soames remarked: "This charlottes good!"

The charlotte was removed. Long silence followed. Irene, beckoning, said: "Take out the azalea, Bilson. Miss June can't bear the scent."

"No; let it stay," said June.

Olives from France, with Russian caviare, were placed on little plates. And Soames remarked: "Why can't we have the Spanish?" But no one answered.

The olives were removed. Lifting her tumbler June demanded: "Give me some water, please." Water was given her. A silver tray was brought, with German plums. There was a lengthy pause. In perfect harmony all were eating them.

Bosinney counted up the stones: "This year — next year — some time."

Irene finished softly: "Never! There was such a glorious sunset. The sky's all ruby still — so beautiful!"

He answered: "Underneath the dark."

Their eyes had met, and June cried scornfully: "A London sunset!"

Egyptian cigarettes were handed in a silver box. Soames, taking one, remarked: "What time's your play begin?"

No one replied, and Turkish coffee followed in enamelled cups.

Irene, smiling quietly, said: "If only. . . . "

"Only what?" said June.

"If only it could always be the spring!"

Brandy was handed; it was pale and old.

Soames said: "Bosinney, better take some brandy."

Bosinney took a glass; they all arose.

“You want a cab?” asked Soames.

June answered: “No! My cloaks please, Bilson.” Her cloak was brought.

Irene, from the window, murmured: “Such a lovely night! The stars are coming out!”

Soames added: “Well, I hope you’ll both enjoy yourselves.”

From the door June answered: “Thanks. Come, Phil.”

Bosinney cried: “I’m coming.”

Soames smiled a sneering smile, and said: “I wish you luck!”

And at the door Irene watched them go.

Bosinney called: “Good night!”

“Good night!” she answered softly. . . .

June made her lover take her on the top of a ‘bus, saying she wanted air, and there sat silent, with her face to the breeze.

The driver turned once or twice, with the intention of venturing a remark, but thought better of it. They were a lively couple! The spring had got into his blood, too; he felt the need for letting steam escape, and clucked his tongue, flourishing his whip, wheeling his horses, and even they, poor things, had smelled the spring, and for a brief half-hour spurned the pavement with happy hoofs.

The whole town was alive; the boughs, curled upward with their decking of young leaves, awaited some gift the breeze could bring. New-lighted lamps were gaining mastery, and the faces of the crowd showed pale under that glare, while on high the great white clouds slid swiftly, softly, over the purple sky.

Men in, evening dress had thrown back overcoats, stepping jauntily up the steps of Clubs; working folk loitered; and women — those women who at that time of night are solitary — solitary and moving eastward in a stream — swung slowly along, with expectation in their gait, dreaming of good wine and a good supper, or — for an unwonted minute, of kisses given for love.

Those countless figures, going their ways under the lamps and the moving-sky, had one and all received some restless blessing from the stir of spring. And one and all, like those clubmen with their opened coats, had shed something of caste, and creed, and custom, and by the cock of their hats, the pace of their walk, their laughter, or their silence, revealed their common kinship under the passionate heavens.

Bosinney and June entered the theatre in silence, and mounted to their seats in the upper boxes. The piece had just begun, and the half-darkened house, with its rows of creatures peering all one way, resembled a great garden of flowers turning their faces to the sun.

June had never before been in the upper boxes. From the age of fifteen she had habitually accompanied her grandfather to the stalls, and not common stalls, but the best seats in the house, towards the centre of the third row, booked by old Jolyon, at Grogan and Boyne’s, on his way home from the City, long before the day; carried in his overcoat pocket, together with his cigar-case and his old kid gloves, and handed to June to keep till the appointed night. And in those stalls — an erect old figure with a serene white head, a little figure, strenuous and eager, with a red-gold head — they would sit through every kind of play, and on the way home old Jolyon would say of the principal actor: “Oh, he’s a poor stick! You should have seen little Bobson!”

She had looked forward to this evening with keen delight; it was stolen, chaperone-less, undreamed of at Stanhope Gate, where she was supposed to be at Soames’. She had expected reward for her subterfuge, planned for her lover’s sake; she had expected it to break up the thick, chilly cloud, and make the relations between them which of late had been so puzzling, so tormenting — sunny and simple again as they had been before the winter. She had come with the intention of saying something definite; and she looked at the stage with a furrow between her brows, seeing nothing, her hands squeezed together in her lap. A swarm of jealous suspicions stung and stung her.

If Bosinney was conscious of her trouble he made no sign.

The curtain dropped. The first act had come to an end.

“It’s awfully hot here!” said the girl; “I should like to go out.”

She was very white, and she knew — for with her nerves thus sharpened she saw everything — that he was both uneasy and compunctious.

At the back of the theatre an open balcony hung over the street; she took possession of this, and stood leaning there without a word, waiting for him to begin.

At last she could bear it no longer.

"I want to say something to you, Phil," she said.

"Yes?"

The defensive tone of his voice brought the colour flying to her cheek, the words flying to her lips: "You don't give me a chance to be nice to you; you haven't for ages now!"

Bosinney stared down at the street. He made no answer. . . .

June cried passionately: "You know I want to do everything for you — that I want to be everything to you. . . . "

A hum rose from the street, and, piercing it with a sharp 'ping,' the bell sounded for the raising of the curtain. June did not stir. A desperate struggle was going on within her. Should she put everything to the proof? Should she challenge directly that influence, that attraction which was driving him away from her? It was her nature to challenge, and she said: "Phil, take me to see the house on Sunday!"

With a smile quivering and breaking on her lips, and trying, how hard, not to show that she was watching, she searched his face, saw it waver and hesitate, saw a troubled line come between his brows, the blood rush into his face. He answered: "Not Sunday, dear; some other day!"

"Why not Sunday? I shouldn't be in the way on Sunday."

He made an evident effort, and said: "I have an engagement."

"You are going to take. . . . "

His eyes grew angry; he shrugged his shoulders, and answered: "An engagement that will prevent my taking you to see the house!"

June bit her lip till the blood came, and walked back to her seat without another word, but she could not help the tears of rage rolling down her face. The house had been mercifully darkened for a crisis, and no one could see her trouble.

Yet in this world of Forsytes let no man think himself immune from observation.

In the third row behind, Euphemia, Nicholas's youngest daughter, with her married-sister, Mrs. Tweetyman, were watching.

They reported at Timothy's, how they had seen June and her fiance at the theatre.

"In the stalls?" "No, not in the. . . . " "Oh! in the dress circle, of course. That seemed to be quite fashionable nowadays with young people!"

Well — not exactly. In the. . . . Anyway, that engagement wouldn't last long. They had never seen anyone look so thunder and lightningy as that little June! With tears of enjoyment in their eyes, they related how she had kicked a man's hat as she returned to her seat in the middle of an act, and how the man had looked. Euphemia had a noted, silent laugh, terminating most disappointingly in squeaks; and when Mrs. Small, holding up her hands, said: "My dear! Kicked a ha-at?" she let out such a number of these that she had to be recovered with smelling-salts. As she went away she said to Mrs. Tweetyman:

"Kicked a — ha-at! Oh! I shall die."

For 'that little June' this evening, that was to have been 'her treat,' was the most miserable she had ever spent. God knows she tried to stifle her pride, her suspicion, her jealousy!

She parted from Bosinney at old Jolyon's door without breaking down; the feeling that her lover must be conquered was strong enough to sustain her till his retiring footsteps brought home the true extent of her wretchedness.

The noiseless 'Sankey' let her in. She would have slipped up to her own room, but old Jolyon, who had heard her entrance, was in the dining-room doorway.

"Come in and have your milk," he said. "It's been kept hot for you. You're very late. Where have you been?"

June stood at the fireplace, with a foot on the fender and an arm on the mantelpiece, as her grandfather had done when he came in that night of the opera. She was too near a breakdown to care what she told him.

“We dined at Soames’s.”

“H’m! the man of property! His wife there and Bosinney?”

“Yes.”

Old Jolyon’s glance was fixed on her with the penetrating gaze from which it was difficult to hide; but she was not looking at him, and when she turned her face, he dropped his scrutiny at once. He had seen enough, and too much. He bent down to lift the cup of milk for her from the hearth, and, turning away, grumbled: “You oughtn’t to stay out so late; it makes you fit for nothing.”

He was invisible now behind his paper, which he turned with a vicious crackle; but when June came up to kiss him, he said: “Good-night, my darling,” in a tone so tremulous and unexpected, that it was all the girl could do to get out of the room without breaking into the fit of sobbing which lasted her well on into the night.

When the door was closed, old Jolyon dropped his paper, and stared long and anxiously in front of him.

‘The beggar!’ he thought. ‘I always knew she’d have trouble with him!’

Uneasy doubts and suspicions, the more poignant that he felt himself powerless to check or control the march of events, came crowding upon him.

Was the fellow going to jilt her? He longed to go and say to him: “Look here, you sir! Are you going to jilt my grand-daughter?” But how could he? Knowing little or nothing, he was yet certain, with his unerring astuteness, that there was something going on. He suspected Bosinney of being too much at Montpellier Square.

‘This fellow,’ he thought, ‘may not be a scamp; his face is not a bad one, but he’s a queer fish. I don’t know what to make of him. I shall never know what to make of him! They tell me he works like a nigger, but I see no good coming of it. He’s unpractical, he has no method. When he comes here, he sits as glum as a monkey. If I ask him what wine he’ll have, he says: “Thanks, any wine.” If I offer him a cigar, he smokes it as if it were a twopenny German thing. I never see him looking at June as he ought to look at her; and yet, he’s not after her money. If she were to make a sign, he’d be off his bargain to-morrow. But she won’t — not she! She’ll stick to him! She’s as obstinate as fate — She’ll never let go!’

Sighing deeply, he turned the paper; in its columns, perchance he might find consolation.

And upstairs in her room June sat at her open window, where the spring wind came, after its revel across the Park, to cool her hot cheeks and burn her heart.

❦

CHAPTER 12

DRIVE WITH SWITHIN

Two lines of a certain song in a certain famous old school's songbook run as follows:

'How the buttons on his blue frock shone, tra-la-la! How he carolled and he sang, like a bird!. . . . '

Swithin did not exactly carol and sing like a bird, but he felt almost like endeavouring to hum a tune, as he stepped out of Hyde Park Mansions, and contemplated his horses drawn up before the door.

The afternoon was as balmy as a day in June, and to complete the simile of the old song, he had put on a blue frock-coat, dispensing with an overcoat, after sending Adolf down three times to make sure that there was not the least suspicion of east in the wind; and the frock-coat was buttoned so tightly around his personable form, that, if the buttons did not shine, they might pardonably have done so. Majestic on the pavement he fitted on a pair of dog-skin gloves; with his large bell-shaped top hat, and his great stature and bulk he looked too primeval for a Forsyte. His thick white hair, on which Adolf had bestowed a touch of pomatum, exhaled the fragrance of opoponax and cigars — the celebrated Swithin brand, for which he paid one hundred and forty shillings the hundred, and of which old Jolyon had unkindly said, he wouldn't smoke them as a gift; they wanted the stomach of a horse!

"Adolf!"

"Sare!"

"The new plaid rug!"

He would never teach that fellow to look smart; and Mrs. Soames he felt sure, had an eye!

"The phaeton hood down; I am going — to — drive — a — lady!"

A pretty woman would want to show off her frock; and well — he was going to drive a lady! It was like a new beginning to the good old days.

Ages since he had driven a woman! The last time, if he remembered, it had been Juley; the poor old soul had been as nervous as a cat the whole time, and so put him out of patience that, as he dropped her in the Bayswater Road, he had said: "Well I'm d —-d if I ever drive you again!" And he never had, not he!

Going up to his horses' heads, he examined their bits; not that he knew anything about bits — he didn't pay his coachman sixty pounds a year to do his work for him, that had never been his principle. Indeed, his reputation as a horsey man rested mainly on the fact that once, on Derby Day, he had been welshed by some thimble-riggers. But someone at the Club, after seeing him drive his greys up to the door — he always drove grey horses, you got more style for the money, some thought — had called him 'Four-in-hand Forsyte.' The name having reached his ears through that fellow Nicholas Treffry, old Jolyon's dead partner, the great driving man notorious for more carriage accidents than any man in the kingdom — Swithin had ever after conceived it right to act up to it. The name had taken his fancy, not because he had ever driven four-in-hand, or was ever likely to, but because of something distinguished in the sound. Four-in-hand Forsyte! Not bad! Born too soon, Swithin had missed his vocation. Coming upon London twenty years later, he could not have failed to have become a stockbroker, but at the time when he was obliged to select, this great profession had not as yet became the chief glory of the upper-middle class. He had literally been forced into land agency.

Once in the driving seat, with the reins handed to him, and blinking over his pale old cheeks in the full sunlight, he took a slow look round — Adolf was already up behind; the cockaded groom at the horses' heads stood ready to let go; everything was prepared for the signal, and Swithin gave it. The equipage dashed forward, and before you could say Jack Robinson, with a rattle and flourish drew up at Soames' door.

Irene came out at once, and stepped in — he afterward described it at Timothy's —"as light as — er — Taglioni, no fuss about it, no wanting this or wanting that;" and above all, Swithin dwelt on this, staring at Mrs. Septimus in a way that disconcerted her a good deal, "no silly nervousness!" To Aunt Hester he portrayed Irene's hat. "Not one of your great flopping things, sprawling about, and catching the dust, that women are so fond of nowadays, but a neat little —" he made a circular motion of his hand, "white veil — capital taste."

“What was it made of?” inquired Aunt Hester, who manifested a languid but permanent excitement at any mention of dress.

“Made of?” returned Swithin; “now how should I know?”

He sank into silence so profound that Aunt Hester began to be afraid he had fallen into a trance. She did not try to rouse him herself, it not being her custom.

‘I wish somebody would come,’ she thought; ‘I don’t like the look of him!’

But suddenly Swithin returned to life. “Made of” he wheezed out slowly, “what should it be made of?”

They had not gone four miles before Swithin received the impression that Irene liked driving with him. Her face was so soft behind that white veil, and her dark eyes shone so in the spring light, and whenever he spoke she raised them to him and smiled.

On Saturday morning Soames had found her at her writing-table with a note written to Swithin, putting him off. Why did she want to put him off? he asked. She might put her own people off when she liked, he would not have her putting off his people!

She had looked at him intently, had torn up the note, and said: “Very well!”

And then she began writing another. He took a casual glance presently, and saw that it was addressed to Bosinney.

“What are you writing to him about?” he asked.

Irene, looking at him again with that intent look, said quietly: “Something he wanted me to do for him!”

“Humph!” said Soames — “Commissions!”

“You’ll have your work cut out if you begin that sort of thing!” He said no more.

Swithin opened his eyes at the mention of Robin Hill; it was a long way for his horses, and he always dined at half-past seven, before the rush at the Club began; the new chef took more trouble with an early dinner — a lazy rascal!

He would like to have a look at the house, however. A house appealed to any Forsyte, and especially to one who had been an auctioneer. After all he said the distance was nothing. When he was a younger man he had had rooms at Richmond for many years, kept his carriage and pair there, and drove them up and down to business every day of his life.

Four-in-hand Forsyte they called him! His T-cart, his horses had been known from Hyde Park Corner to the Star and Garter. The Duke of Z. . . . wanted to get hold of them, would have given him double the money, but he had kept them; know a good thing when you have it, eh? A look of solemn pride came portentously on his shaven square old face, he rolled his head in his stand-up collar, like a turkey-cock preening himself.

She was really — a charming woman! He enlarged upon her frock afterwards to Aunt Juley, who held up her hands at his way of putting it.

Fitted her like a skin — tight as a drum; that was how he liked ’em, all of a piece, none of your daverdy, scarecrow women! He gazed at Mrs. Septimus Small, who took after James — long and thin.

“There’s style about her,” he went on, “fit for a king! And she’s so quiet with it too!”

“She seems to have made quite a conquest of you, any way,” drawled Aunt Hester from her corner.

Swithin heard extremely well when anybody attacked him.

“What’s that?” he said. “I know a — pretty — woman when I see one, and all I can say is, I don’t see the young man about that’s fit for her; but perhaps — you — do, come, perhaps — you-do!”

“Oh?” murmured Aunt Hester, “ask Juley!”

Long before they reached Robin Hill, however, the unaccustomed airing had made him terribly sleepy; he drove with his eyes closed, a life-time of deportment alone keeping his tall and bulky form from falling askew.

Bosinney, who was watching, came out to meet them, and all three entered the house together; Swithin in front making play with a stout gold-mounted Malacca cane, put into his hand by Adolf, for his knees were feeling the effects of their long stay in the same position. He had assumed his fur coat, to guard against the draughts of the unfinished house.

The staircase — he said — was handsome! the baronial style! They would want some statuary about! He came to a standstill between the columns of the doorway into the inner court, and held out his cane inquiringly.

What was this to be — this vestibule, or whatever they called it? But gazing at the skylight, inspiration came to him.

“Ah! the billiard-room!”

When told it was to be a tiled court with plants in the centre, he turned to Irene:

“Waste this on plants? You take my advice and have a billiard table here!”

Irene smiled. She had lifted her veil, banding it like a nun’s coif across her forehead, and the smile of her dark eyes below this seemed to Swithin more charming than ever. He nodded. She would take his advice he saw.

He had little to say of the drawing or dining-rooms, which he described as “spacious”; but fell into such raptures as he permitted to a man of his dignity, in the wine-cellar, to which he descended by stone steps, Bosinney going first with a light.

“You’ll have room here,” he said, “for six or seven hundred dozen — a very pooty little cellar!”

Bosinney having expressed the wish to show them the house from the copse below, Swithin came to a stop.

“There’s a fine view from here,” he remarked; “you haven’t such a thing as a chair?”

A chair was brought him from Bosinney’s tent.

“You go down,” he said blandly; “you two! I’ll sit here and look at the view.”

He sat down by the oak tree, in the sun; square and upright, with one hand stretched out, resting on the nob of his cane, the other planted on his knee; his fur coat thrown open, his hat, roofing with its flat top the pale square of his face; his stare, very blank, fixed on the landscape.

He nodded to them as they went off down through the fields. He was, indeed, not sorry to be left thus for a quiet moment of reflection. The air was balmy, not too much heat in the sun; the prospect a fine one, a remarka. . . . His head fell a little to one side; he jerked it up and thought: Odd! He — ah! They were waving to him from the bottom! He put up his hand, and moved it more than once. They were active — the prospect was remar. . . . His head fell to the left, he jerked it up at once; it fell to the right. It remained there; he was asleep.

And asleep, a sentinel on the — top of the rise, he appeared to rule over this prospect — remarkable — like some image blocked out by the special artist, of primeval Forsytes in pagan days, to record the domination of mind over matter!

And all the unnumbered generations of his yeoman ancestors, wont of a Sunday to stand akimbo surveying their little plots of land, their grey unmoving eyes hiding their instinct with its hidden roots of violence, their instinct for possession to the exclusion of all the world — all these unnumbered generations seemed to sit there with him on the top of the rise.

But from him, thus slumbering, his jealous Forsyte spirit travelled far, into God-knows-what jungle of fancies; with those two young people, to see what they were doing down there in the copse — in the copse where the spring was running riot with the scent of sap and bursting buds, the song of birds innumerable, a carpet of bluebells and sweet growing things, and the sun caught like gold in the tops of the trees; to see what they were doing, walking along there so close together on the path that was too narrow; walking along there so close that they were always touching; to watch Irene’s eyes, like dark thieves, stealing the heart out of the spring. And a great unseen chaperon, his spirit was there, stopping with them to look at the little furry corpse of a mole, not dead an hour, with his mushroom-and-silver coat untouched by the rain or dew; watching over Irene’s bent head, and the soft look of her pitying eyes; and over that young man’s head, gazing at her so hard, so strangely. Walking on with them, too, across the open space where a wood-cutter had been at work, where the bluebells were trampled down, and a trunk had swayed and staggered down from its gashed stump. Climbing it with them, over, and on to the very edge of the copse, whence there stretched an undiscovered country, from far away in which came the sounds, ‘Cuckoo-cuckoo!’

Silent, standing with them there, and uneasy at their silence! Very queer, very strange!

Then back again, as though guilty, through the wood — back to the cutting, still silent, amongst the songs of birds that never ceased, and the wild scent — hum! what was it — like that herb they put in — back to the log across the path. . . .

And then unseen, uneasy, flapping above them, trying to make noises, his Forsyte spirit watched her balanced on the log, her pretty figure swaying, smiling down at that young man gazing up with such strange, shining eyes, slipping now — a — ah! falling, o — oh! sliding — down his breast; her soft, warm body clutched, her head bent back from his lips; his kiss; her recoil; his cry: “You must know — I love you!” Must know — indeed, a pretty . . .? Love! Hah!

Swithin awoke; virtue had gone out of him. He had a taste in his mouth. Where was he?

Damme! He had been asleep!

He had dreamed something about a new soup, with a taste of mint in it.

Those young people — where had they got to? His left leg had pins and needles.

“Adolf!” The rascal was not there; the rascal was asleep somewhere.

He stood up, tall, square, bulky in his fur, looking anxiously down over the fields, and presently he saw them coming.

Irene was in front; that young fellow — what had they nicknamed him —‘The Buccaneer?’ looked precious hangdog there behind her; had got a flea in his ear, he shouldn’t wonder. Serve him right, taking her down all that way to look at the house! The proper place to look at a house from was the lawn.

They saw him. He extended his arm, and moved it spasmodically to encourage them. But they had stopped. What were they standing there for, talking — talking? They came on again. She had been, giving him a rub, he had not the least doubt of it, and no wonder, over a house like that — a great ugly thing, not the sort of house he was accustomed to.

He looked intently at their faces, with his pale, immovable stare. That young man looked very queer!

“You’ll never make anything of this!” he said tartly, pointing at the mansion; —“too newfangled!”

Bosinney gazed at him as though he had not heard; and Swithin afterwards described him to Aunt Hester as “an extravagant sort of fellow very odd way of looking at you — a bumpy beggar!”

What gave rise to this sudden piece of psychology he did not state; possibly Bosinney’s, prominent forehead and cheekbones and chin, or something hungry in his face, which quarrelled with Swithin’s conception of the calm satiety that should characterize the perfect gentleman.

He brightened up at the mention of tea. He had a contempt for tea — his brother Jolyon had been in tea; made a lot of money by it — but he was so thirsty, and had such a taste in his mouth, that he was prepared to drink anything. He longed to inform Irene of the taste in his mouth — she was so sympathetic — but it would not be a distinguished thing to do; he rolled his tongue round, and faintly smacked it against his palate.

In a far corner of the tent Adolf was bending his cat-like moustaches over a kettle. He left it at once to draw the cork of a pint-bottle of champagne. Swithin smiled, and, nodding at Bosinney, said: “Why, you’re quite a Monte Cristo!” This celebrated novel — one of the half-dozen he had read — had produced an extraordinary impression on his mind.

Taking his glass from the table, he held it away from him to scrutinize the colour; thirsty as he was, it was not likely that he was going to drink trash! Then, placing it to his lips, he took a sip.

“A very nice wine,” he said at last, passing it before his nose; “not the equal of my Heidsieck!”

It was at this moment that the idea came to him which he afterwards imparted at Timothy’s in this nutshell: “I shouldn’t wonder a bit if that architect chap were sweet upon Mrs. Soames!”

And from this moment his pale, round eyes never ceased to bulge with the interest of his discovery.

“The fellow,” he said to Mrs. Septimus, “follows her about with his eyes like a dog — the bumpy beggar! I don’t wonder at it — she’s a very charming woman, and, I should say, the pink of discretion!” A vague consciousness of perfume caging about Irene, like that from a flower with half-closed petals and a passionate heart, moved him to the creation of this image. “But I wasn’t sure of it,” he said, “till I saw him pick up her handkerchief.”

Mrs. Small’s eyes boiled with excitement.

“And did he give it her back?” she asked.

“Give it back?” said Swithin: “I saw him slobber on it when he thought I wasn’t looking!”

Mrs. Small gasped — too interested to speak.

“But she gave him no encouragement,” went on Swithin; he stopped, and stared for a minute or two in the way that alarmed Aunt Hester so — he had suddenly recollected that, as they were starting back in the phaeton, she had given Bosinney her hand a second time, and let it stay there too. . . . He had touched his horses smartly with the whip, anxious to get her all to himself. But she had looked back, and she had not answered his first question; neither had he been able to see her face — she had kept it hanging down.

There is somewhere a picture, which Swithin has not seen, of a man sitting on a rock, and by him, immersed in the still, green water, a sea-nymph lying on her back, with her hand on her naked breast. She has a half-smile on her face — a smile of hopeless surrender and of secret joy.

Seated by Swithin’s side, Irene may have been smiling like that.

When, warmed by champagne, he had her all to himself, he unbosomed himself of his wrongs; of his smothered resentment against the new chef at the club; his worry over the house in Wigmore Street, where the rascally tenant had gone bankrupt through helping his brother-in-law as if charity did not begin at home; of his deafness, too, and that pain he sometimes got in his right side. She listened, her eyes swimming under their lids. He thought she was thinking deeply of his troubles, and pitied himself terribly. Yet in his fur coat, with frogs across the breast, his top hat aslant, driving this beautiful woman, he had never felt more distinguished.

A coster, however, taking his girl for a Sunday airing, seemed to have the same impression about himself. This person had flogged his donkey into a gallop alongside, and sat, upright as a waxwork, in his shallopy chariot, his chin settled pompously on a red handkerchief, like Swithin's on his full cravat; while his girl, with the ends of a fly-blown boa floating out behind, aped a woman of fashion. Her swain moved a stick with a ragged bit of string dangling from the end, reproducing with strange fidelity the circular flourish of Swithin's whip, and rolled his head at his lady with a leer that had a weird likeness to Swithin's primeval stare.

Though for a time unconscious of the lowly ruffian's presence, Swithin presently took it into his head that he was being guyed. He laid his whip-lash across the mares flank. The two chariots, however, by some unfortunate fatality continued abreast. Swithin's yellow, puffy face grew red; he raised his whip to lash the costermonger, but was saved from so far forgetting his dignity by a special intervention of Providence. A carriage driving out through a gate forced phaeton and donkey-cart into proximity; the wheels grated, the lighter vehicle skidded, and was overturned.

Swithin did not look round. On no account would he have pulled up to help the ruffian. Serve him right if he had broken his neck!

But he could not if he would. The greys had taken alarm. The phaeton swung from side to side, and people raised frightened faces as they went dashing past. Swithin's great arms, stretched at full length, tugged at the reins. His cheeks were puffed, his lips compressed, his swollen face was of a dull, angry red.

Irene had her hand on the rail, and at every lurch she gripped it tightly. Swithin heard her ask:

"Are we going to have an accident, Uncle Swithin?"

He gasped out between his pants: "It's nothing; a — little fresh!"

"I've never been in an accident."

"Don't you move!" He took a look at her. She was smiling, perfectly calm. "Sit still," he repeated. "Never fear, I'll get you home!"

And in the midst of all his terrible efforts, he was surprised to hear her answer in a voice not like her own:

"I don't care if I never get home!"

The carriage giving a terrific lurch, Swithin's exclamation was jerked back into his throat. The horses, winded by the rise of a hill, now steadied to a trot, and finally stopped of their own accord.

"When"— Swithin described it at Timothy's —"I pulled 'em up, there she was as cool as myself. God bless my soul! she behaved as if she didn't care whether she broke her neck or not! What was it she said: 'I don't care if I never get home?" Leaning over the handle of his cane, he wheezed out, to Mrs. Small's terror: "And I'm not altogether surprised, with a finickin' feller like young Soames for a husband!"

It did not occur to him to wonder what Bosinney had done after they had left him there alone; whether he had gone wandering about like the dog to which Swithin had compared him; wandering down to that copse where the spring was still in riot, the cuckoo still calling from afar; gone down there with her handkerchief pressed to lips, its fragrance mingling with the scent of mint and thyme. Gone down there with such a wild, exquisite pain in his heart that he could have cried out among the trees. Or what, indeed, the fellow had done. In fact, till he came to Timothy's, Swithin had forgotten all about him.

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CHAPTER 13

JAMES GOES TO SEE FOR HIMSELF

Those ignorant of Forsyte 'Change would not, perhaps, foresee all the stir made by Irene's visit to the house.

After Swithin had related at Timothy's the full story of his memorable drive, the same, with the least suspicion of curiosity, the merest touch of malice, and a real desire to do good, was passed on to June.

"And what a dreadful thing to say, my dear!" ended Aunt Juley; "that about not going home. What did she mean?"

It was a strange recital for the girl. She heard it flushing painfully, and, suddenly, with a curt handshake, took her departure.

"Almost rude!" Mrs. Small said to Aunt Hester, when June was gone.

The proper construction was put on her reception of the news. She was upset. Something was therefore very wrong. Odd! She and Irene had been such friends!

It all tallied too well with whispers and hints that had been going about for some time past. Recollections of Euphemia's account of the visit to the theatre — Mr. Bosinney always at Soames's? Oh, indeed! Yes, of course, he would be about the house! Nothing open. Only upon the greatest, the most important provocation was it necessary to say anything open on Forsyte 'Change. This machine was too nicely adjusted; a hint, the merest trifling expression of regret or doubt, sufficed to set the family soul so sympathetic — vibrating. No one desired that harm should come of these vibrations — far from it; they were set in motion with the best intentions, with the feeling, that each member of the family had a stake in the family soul.

And much kindness lay at the bottom of the gossip; it would frequently result in visits of condolence being made, in accordance with the customs of Society, thereby conferring a real benefit upon the sufferers, and affording consolation to the sound, who felt pleasantly that someone at all events was suffering from that from which they themselves were not suffering. In fact, it was simply a desire to keep things well-aired, the desire which animates the Public Press, that brought James, for instance, into communication with Mrs. Septimus, Mrs. Septimus, with the little Nicholases, the little Nicholases with who-knows-whom, and so on. That great class to which they had risen, and now belonged, demanded a certain candour, a still more certain reticence. This combination guaranteed their membership.

Many of the younger Forsytes felt, very naturally, and would openly declare, that they did not want their affairs pried into; but so powerful was the invisible, magnetic current of family gossip, that for the life of them they could not help knowing all about everything. It was felt to be hopeless.

One of them (young Roger) had made an heroic attempt to free the rising generation, by speaking of Timothy as an 'old cat.' The effort had justly recoiled upon himself; the words, coming round in the most delicate way to Aunt Juley's ears, were repeated by her in a shocked voice to Mrs. Roger, whence they returned again to young Roger.

And, after all, it was only the wrong-doers who suffered; as, for instance, George, when he lost all that money playing billiards; or young Roger himself, when he was so dreadfully near to marrying the girl to whom, it was whispered, he was already married by the laws of Nature; or again Irene, who was thought, rather than said, to be in danger.

All this was not only pleasant but salutary. And it made so many hours go lightly at Timothy's in the Bayswater Road; so many hours that must otherwise have been sterile and heavy to those three who lived there; and Timothy's was but one of hundreds of such homes in this City of London — the homes of neutral persons of the secure classes, who are out of the battle themselves, and must find their reason for existing, in the battles of others.

But for the sweetness of family gossip, it must indeed have been lonely there. Rumours and tales, reports, surmises — were they not the children of the house, as dear and precious as the prattling babes the brother and sisters had missed in their own journey? To talk about them was as near as they could get to the possession of all those children and grandchildren, after whom their soft hearts yearned. For though it is doubtful whether Timothy's heart yearned, it is indubitable that at the arrival of each fresh Forsyte child he was quite upset.

Useless for young Roger to say, "Old cat!" for Euphemia to hold up her hands and cry: "Oh! those three!" and break into her silent laugh with the squeak at the end. Useless, and not too kind.

The situation which at this stage might seem, and especially to Forsyte eyes, strange — not to say 'impossible'— was, in view of certain facts, not so strange after all. Some things had been lost sight of. And first, in the security bred of many harmless marriages, it had been forgotten that Love is no hot-house flower, but a wild plant, born of a wet night, born of an hour of sunshine; sprung from wild seed, blown along the road by a wild wind. A wild plant that, when it blooms by chance within the hedge of our gardens, we call a flower; and when it blooms outside we call a weed; but, flower or weed, whose scent and colour are always, wild! And further — the facts and figures of their own lives being against the perception of this truth — it was not generally recognised by Forsytes that, where, this wild plant springs, men and women are but moths around the pale, flame-like blossom.

It was long since young Jolyon's escapade — there was danger of a tradition again arising that people in their position never cross the hedge to pluck that flower; that one could reckon on having love, like measles, once in due season, and getting over it comfortably for all time — as with measles, on a soothing mixture of butter and honey — in the arms of wedlock.

Of all those whom this strange rumour about Bosinney and Mrs. Soames reached, James was the most affected. He had long forgotten how he had hovered, lanky and pale, in side whiskers of chestnut hue, round Emily, in the days of his own courtship. He had long forgotten the small house in the purlieus of Mayfair, where he had spent the early days of his married life, or rather, he had long forgotten the early days, not the small house — a Forsyte never forgot a house — he had afterwards sold it at a clear profit of four hundred pounds.

He had long forgotten those days, with their hopes and fears and doubts about the prudence of the match (for Emily, though pretty, had nothing, and he himself at that time was making a bare thousand a year), and that strange, irresistible attraction which had drawn him on, till he felt he must die if he could not marry the girl with the fair hair, looped so neatly back, the fair arms emerging from a skin-tight bodice, the fair form decorously shielded by a cage of really stupendous circumference.

James had passed through the fire, but he had passed also through the river of years which washes out the fire; he had experienced the saddest experience of all — forgetfulness of what it was like to be in love.

Forgotten! Forgotten so long, that he had forgotten even that he had forgotten.

And now this rumour had come upon him, this rumour about his son's wife; very vague, a shadow dodging among the palpable, straightforward appearances of things, unreal, unintelligible as a ghost, but carrying with it, like a ghost, inexplicable terror.

He tried to bring it home to his mind, but it was no more use than trying to apply to himself one of those tragedies he read of daily in his evening paper. He simply could not. There could be nothing in it. It was all their nonsense. She didn't get on with Soames as well as she might, but she was a good little thing — a good little thing!

Like the not inconsiderable majority of men, James relished a nice little bit of scandal, and would say, in a matter-of-fact tone, licking his lips, "Yes, yes — she and young Dyson; they tell me they're living at Monte Carlo!"

But the significance of an affair of this sort — of its past, its present, or its future — had never struck him. What it meant, what torture and raptures had gone to its construction, what slow, overmastering fate had lurked within the facts, very naked, sometimes sordid, but generally spicy, presented to his gaze. He was not in the habit of blaming, praising, drawing deductions, or generalizing at all about such things; he simply listened rather greedily, and repeated what he was told, finding considerable benefit from the practice, as from the consumption of a sherry and bitters before a meal.

Now, however, that such a thing — or rather the rumour, the breath of it — had come near him personally, he felt as in a fog, which filled his mouth full of a bad, thick flavour, and made it difficult to draw breath.

A scandal! A possible scandal!

To repeat this word to himself thus was the only way in which he could focus or make it thinkable. He had forgotten the sensations necessary for understanding the progress, fate, or meaning of any such business; he simply could no longer grasp the possibilities of people running any risk for the sake of passion.

Amongst all those persons of his acquaintance, who went into the City day after day and did their business there, whatever it was, and in their leisure moments bought shares, and houses, and ate dinners, and played games, as he was told, it would have seemed to him ridiculous to suppose that there were any who would run risks for the sake of anything so recondite, so figurative, as passion.

Passion! He seemed, indeed, to have heard of it, and rules such as ‘A young man and a young woman ought never to be trusted together’ were fixed in his mind as the parallels of latitude are fixed on a map (for all Forsytes, when it comes to ‘bed-rock’ matters of fact, have quite a fine taste in realism); but as to anything else — well, he could only appreciate it at all through the catch-word ‘scandal.’

Ah! but there was no truth in it — could not be. He was not afraid; she was really a good little thing. But there it was when you got a thing like that into your mind. And James was of a nervous temperament — one of those men whom things will not leave alone, who suffer tortures from anticipation and indecision. For fear of letting something slip that he might otherwise secure, he was physically unable to make up his mind until absolutely certain that, by not making it up, he would suffer loss.

In life, however, there were many occasions when the business of making up his mind did not even rest with himself, and this was one of them.

What could he do? Talk it over with Soames? That would only make matters worse. And, after all, there was nothing in it, he felt sure.

It was all that house. He had mistrusted the idea from the first. What did Soames want to go into the country for? And, if he must go spending a lot of money building himself a house, why not have a first-rate man, instead of this young Bosinney, whom nobody knew anything about? He had told them how it would be. And he had heard that the house was costing Soames a pretty penny beyond what he had reckoned on spending.

This fact, more than any other, brought home to James the real danger of the situation. It was always like this with these ‘artistic’ chaps; a sensible man should have nothing to say to them. He had warned Irene, too. And see what had come of it!

And it suddenly sprang into James’s mind that he ought to go and see for himself. In the midst of that fog of uneasiness in which his mind was enveloped the notion that he could go and look at the house afforded him inexplicable satisfaction. It may have been simply the decision to do something — more possibly the fact that he was going to look at a house — that gave him relief. He felt that in staring at an edifice of bricks and mortar, of wood and stone, built by the suspected man himself, he would be looking into the heart of that rumour about Irene.

Without saying a word, therefore, to anyone, he took a hansom to the station and proceeded by train to Robin Hill; thence — there being no ‘flies,’ in accordance with the custom of the neighbourhood — he found himself obliged to walk.

He started slowly up the hill, his angular knees and high shoulders bent complainingly, his eyes fixed on his feet, yet, neat for all that, in his high hat and his frock-coat, on which was the speckless gloss imparted by perfect superintendence. Emily saw to that; that is, she did not, of course, see to it — people of good position not seeing to each other’s buttons, and Emily was of good position — but she saw that the butler saw to it.

He had to ask his way three times; on each occasion he repeated the directions given him, got the man to repeat them, then repeated them a second time, for he was naturally of a talkative disposition, and one could not be too careful in a new neighbourhood.

He kept assuring them that it was a new house he was looking for; it was only, however, when he was shown the roof through the trees that he could feel really satisfied that he had not been directed entirely wrong.

A heavy sky seemed to cover the world with the grey whiteness of a whitewashed ceiling. There was no freshness or fragrance in the air. On such a day even British workmen scarcely cared to do more then they were obliged, and moved about their business without the drone of talk which whiles away the pangs of labour.

Through spaces of the unfinished house, shirt-sleeved figures worked slowly, and sounds arose — spasmodic knockings, the scraping of metal, the sawing of wood, with the rumble of wheelbarrows along boards; now and again the foreman’s dog, tethered by a string to an oaken beam, whimpered feebly, with a sound like the singing of a kettle.

The fresh-fitted window-panes, daubed each with a white patch in the centre, stared out at James like the eyes of a blind dog.

And the building chorus went on, strident and mirthless under the grey-white sky. But the thrushes, hunting amongst the fresh-turned earth for worms, were silent quite.

James picked his way among the heaps of gravel — the drive was being laid — till he came opposite the porch. Here he stopped and raised his eyes. There was but little to see from this point of view, and that little he took in at once; but he stayed in this position many minutes, and who shall know of what he thought.

His china-blue eyes under white eyebrows that jutted out in little horns, never stirred; the long upper lip of his wide mouth, between the fine white whiskers, twitched once or twice; it was easy to see from that anxious rapt expression, whence Soames derived the handicapped look which sometimes came upon his face. James might have been saying to himself: 'I don't know — life's a tough job.'

In this position Bosinney surprised him.

James brought his eyes down from whatever bird's-nest they had been looking for in the sky to Bosinney's face, on which was a kind of humorous scorn.

"How do you do, Mr. Forsyte? Come down to see for yourself?"

It was exactly what James, as we know, had come for, and he was made correspondingly uneasy. He held out his hand, however, saying:

"How are you?" without looking at Bosinney.

The latter made way for him with an ironical smile.

James scented something suspicious in this courtesy. "I should like to walk round the outside first," he said, "and see what you've been doing!"

A flagged terrace of rounded stones with a list of two or three inches to port had been laid round the south-east and south-west sides of the house, and ran with a bevelled edge into mould, which was in preparation for being turfed; along this terrace James led the way.

"Now what did this cost?" he asked, when he saw the terrace extending round the corner.

"What should you think?" inquired Bosinney.

"How should I know?" replied James somewhat nonplussed; "two or three hundred, I dare say!"

"The exact sum!"

James gave him a sharp look, but the architect appeared unconscious, and he put the answer down to mishearing.

On arriving at the garden entrance, he stopped to look at the view.

"That ought to come down," he said, pointing to the oak-tree.

"You think so? You think that with the tree there you don't get enough view for your money."

Again James eyed him suspiciously — this young man had a peculiar way of putting things: "Well!" he said, with a perplexed, nervous, emphasis, "I don't see what you want with a tree."

"It shall come down to-morrow," said Bosinney.

James was alarmed. "Oh," he said, "don't go saying I said it was to come down! I know nothing about it!"

"No?"

James went on in a fluster: "Why, what should I know about it? It's nothing to do with me! You do it on your own responsibility."

"You'll allow me to mention your name?"

James grew more and more alarmed: "I don't know what you want mentioning my name for," he muttered; "you'd better leave the tree alone. It's not your tree!"

He took out a silk handkerchief and wiped his brow. They entered the house. Like Swithin, James was impressed by the inner court-yard.

"You must have spent a douce of a lot of money here," he said, after staring at the columns and gallery for some time. "Now, what did it cost to put up those columns?"

"I can't tell you off-hand," thoughtfully answered Bosinney, "but I know it was a deuce of a lot!"

"I should think so," said James. "I should. . . . " He caught the architect's eye, and broke off. And now, whenever he came to anything of which he desired to know the cost, he stifled that curiosity.

Bosinney appeared determined that he should see everything, and had not James been of too 'noticing' a nature, he would certainly have found himself going round the house a second time. He seemed so anxious to be asked questions, too, that James felt he must be on his guard. He began to suffer from his exertions, for, though wiry enough for a man of his long build, he was seventy-five years old.

He grew discouraged; he seemed no nearer to anything, had not obtained from his inspection any of the knowledge he had vaguely hoped for. He had merely increased his dislike and mistrust of this young man, who had tired him out with his politeness, and in whose manner he now certainly detected mockery.

The fellow was sharper than he had thought, and better-looking than he had hoped. He had a — a 'don't care' appearance that James, to whom risk was the most intolerable thing in life, did not appreciate; a peculiar smile, too, coming when least expected; and very queer eyes. He reminded James, as he said afterwards, of a hungry cat. This was as near as he could get, in conversation with Emily, to a description of the peculiar exasperation, velvetiness, and mockery, of which Bosinney's manner had been composed.

At last, having seen all that was to be seen, he came out again at the door where he had gone in; and now, feeling that he was wasting time and strength and money, all for nothing, he took the courage of a Forsyte in both hands, and, looking sharply at Bosinney, said:

"I dare say you see a good deal of my daughter-in-law; now, what does she think of the house? But she hasn't seen it, I suppose?"

This he said, knowing all about Irene's visit not, of course, that there was anything in the visit, except that extraordinary remark she had made about 'not caring to get home'— and the story of how June had taken the news!

He had determined, by this way of putting the question, to give Bosinney a chance, as he said to himself.

The latter was long in answering, but kept his eyes with uncomfortable steadiness on James.

"She has seen the house, but I can't tell you what she thinks of it."

Nervous and baffled, James was constitutionally prevented from letting the matter drop.

"Oh!" he said, "she has seen it? Soames brought her down, I suppose?"

Bosinney smilingly replied: "Oh, no!"

"What, did she come down alone?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then — who brought her?"

"I really don't know whether I ought to tell you who brought her."

To James, who knew that it was Swithin, this answer appeared incomprehensible.

"Why!" he stammered, "you know that. . . . " but he stopped, suddenly perceiving his danger.

"Well," he said, "if you don't want to tell me I suppose you won't! Nobody tells me anything."

Somewhat to his surprise Bosinney asked him a question.

"By the by," he said, "could you tell me if there are likely to be any more of you coming down? I should like to be on the spot!"

"Any more?" said James bewildered, "who should there be more? I don't know of any more. Good-bye?"

Looking at the ground he held out his hand, crossed the palm of it with Bosinney's, and taking his umbrella just above the silk, walked away along the terrace.

Before he turned the corner he glanced back, and saw Bosinney following him slowly —'slinking along the wall' as he put it to himself, 'like a great cat.' He paid no attention when the young fellow raised his hat.

Outside the drive, and out of sight, he slackened his pace still more. Very slowly, more bent than when he came, lean, hungry, and disheartened, he made his way back to the station.

The Buccaneer, watching him go so sadly home, felt sorry perhaps for his behaviour to the old man.

❦

CHAPTER 14

SOAMES AND BOSINNEY CORRESPOND

James said nothing to his son of this visit to the house; but, having occasion to go to Timothy's on morning on a matter connected with a drainage scheme which was being forced by the sanitary authorities on his brother, he mentioned it there.

It was not, he said, a bad house. He could see that a good deal could be made of it. The fellow was clever in his way, though what it was going to cost Soames before it was done with he didn't know.

Euphemia Forsyte, who happened to be in the room — she had come round to borrow the Rev. Mr. Scoles' last novel, 'Passion and Paregoric', which was having such a vogue — chimed in.

"I saw Irene yesterday at the Stores; she and Mr. Bosinney were having a nice little chat in the Groceries."

It was thus, simply, that she recorded a scene which had really made a deep and complicated impression on her. She had been hurrying to the silk department of the Church and Commercial Stores — that Institution than which, with its admirable system, admitting only guaranteed persons on a basis of payment before delivery, no emporium can be more highly recommended to Forsytes — to match a piece of prunella silk for her mother, who was waiting in the carriage outside.

Passing through the Groceries her eye was unpleasantly attracted by the back view of a very beautiful figure. It was so charmingly proportioned, so balanced, and so well clothed, that Euphemia's instinctive propriety was at once alarmed; such figures, she knew, by intuition rather than experience, were rarely connected with virtue — certainly never in her mind, for her own back was somewhat difficult to fit.

Her suspicions were fortunately confirmed. A young man coming from the Drugs had snatched off his hat, and was accosting the lady with the unknown back.

It was then that she saw with whom she had to deal; the lady was undoubtedly Mrs. Soames, the young man Mr. Bosinney. Concealing herself rapidly over the purchase of a box of Tunisian dates, for she was impatient of awkwardly meeting people with parcels in her hands, and at the busy time of the morning, she was quite unintentionally an interested observer of their little interview.

Mrs. Soames, usually somewhat pale, had a delightful colour in her cheeks; and Mr. Bosinney's manner was strange, though attractive (she thought him rather a distinguished-looking man, and George's name for him, 'The Buccaneer'— about which there was something romantic — quite charming). He seemed to be pleading. Indeed, they talked so earnestly — or, rather, he talked so earnestly, for Mrs. Soames did not say much — that they caused, inconsiderately, an eddy in the traffic. One nice old General, going towards Cigars, was obliged to step quite out of the way, and chancing to look up and see Mrs. Soames' face, he actually took off his hat, the old fool! So like a man!

But it was Mrs. Soames' eyes that worried Euphemia. She never once looked at Mr. Bosinney until he moved on, and then she looked after him. And, oh, that look!

On that look Euphemia had spent much anxious thought. It is not too much to say that it had hurt her with its dark, lingering softness, for all the world as though the woman wanted to drag him back, and unsay something she had been saying.

Ah, well, she had had no time to go deeply into the matter just then, with that prunella silk on her hands; but she was 'very intriguee'— very! She had just nodded to Mrs. Soames, to show her that she had seen; and, as she confided, in talking it over afterwards, to her chum Francie (Roger's daughter), "Didn't she look caught out just? . . . . "

James, most averse at the first blush to accepting any news confirmatory of his own poignant suspicions, took her up at once.

"Oh" he said, "they'd be after wall-papers no doubt."

Euphemia smiled. "In the Groceries?" she said softly; and, taking 'Passion and Paregoric' from the table, added: "And so you'll lend me this, dear Auntie? Good-bye!" and went away.

James left almost immediately after; he was late as it was.

When he reached the office of Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte, he found Soames, sitting in his revolving, chair, drawing up a defence. The latter greeted his father with a curt good-morning, and, taking an envelope from his pocket, said:

“It may interest you to look through this.”

James read as follows:

309D, SLOANE STREET, May 15. ‘DEAR FORSYTE,

‘The construction of your house being now completed, my duties as architect have come to an end. If I am to go on with the business of decoration, which at your request I undertook, I should like you to clearly understand that I must have a free hand.

‘You never come down without suggesting something that goes counter to my scheme. I have here three letters from you, each of which recommends an article I should never dream of putting in. I had your father here yesterday afternoon, who made further valuable suggestions.

‘Please make up your mind, therefore, whether you want me to decorate for you, or to retire which on the whole I should prefer to do.

‘But understand that, if I decorate, I decorate alone, without interference of any sort.

If I do the thing, I will do it thoroughly, but I must have a free hand.

‘Yours truly, ‘PHILIP BOSINNEY.’

The exact and immediate cause of this letter cannot, of course, be told, though it is not improbable that Bosinney may have been moved by some sudden revolt against his position towards Soames — that eternal position of Art towards Property — which is so admirably summed up, on the back of the most indispensable of modern appliances, in a sentence comparable to the very finest in Tacitus:

THOS. T. SORROW, Inventor. BERT M. PADLAND, Proprietor.

“What are you going to say to him?” James asked.

Soames did not even turn his head. “I haven’t made up my mind,” he said, and went on with his defence.

A client of his, having put some buildings on a piece of ground that did not belong to him, had been suddenly and most irritatingly warned to take them off again. After carefully going into the facts, however, Soames had seen his way to advise that his client had what was known as a title by possession, and that, though undoubtedly the ground did not belong to him, he was entitled to keep it, and had better do so; and he was now following up this advice by taking steps to — as the sailors say —‘make it so.’

He had a distinct reputation for sound advice; people saying of him: “Go to young Forsyte — a long-headed fellow!” and he prized this reputation highly.

His natural taciturnity was in his favour; nothing could be more calculated to give people, especially people with property (Soames had no other clients), the impression that he was a safe man. And he was safe. Tradition, habit, education, inherited aptitude, native caution, all joined to form a solid professional honesty, superior to temptation — from the very fact that it was built on an innate avoidance of risk. How could he fall, when his soul abhorred circumstances which render a fall possible — a man cannot fall off the floor!

And those countless Forsytes, who, in the course of innumerable transactions concerned with property of all sorts (from wives to water rights), had occasion for the services of a safe man, found it both reposeful and profitable to confide in Soames. That slight superciliousness of his, combined with an air of mousing amongst precedents, was in his favour too — a man would not be supercilious unless he knew!

He was really at the head of the business, for though James still came nearly every day to, see for himself, he did little now but sit in his chair, twist his legs, slightly confuse things already decided, and presently go away again, and the other partner, Bustard, was a poor thing, who did a great deal of work, but whose opinion was never taken.

So Soames went steadily on with his defence. Yet it would be idle to say that his mind was at ease. He was suffering from a sense of impending trouble, that had haunted him for some time past. He tried to think it physical — a condition of his liver — but knew that it was not.

He looked at his watch. In a quarter of an hour he was due at the General Meeting of the New Colliery Company — one of Uncle Jolyon's concerns; he should see Uncle Jolyon there, and say something to him about Bosinney — he had not made up his mind what, but something — in any case he should not answer this letter until he had seen Uncle Jolyon. He got up and methodically put away the draft of his defence. Going into a dark little cupboard, he turned up the light, washed his hands with a piece of brown Windsor soap, and dried them on a roller towel. Then he brushed his hair, paying strict attention to the parting, turned down the light, took his hat, and saying he would be back at half-past two, stepped into the Poultry.

It was not far to the Offices of the New Colliery Company in Ironmonger Lane, where, and not at the Cannon Street Hotel, in accordance with the more ambitious practice of other companies, the General Meeting was always held. Old Jolyon had from the first set his face against the Press. What business — he said — had the Public with his concerns!

Soames arrived on the stroke of time, and took his seat alongside the Board, who, in a row, each Director behind his own ink-pot, faced their Shareholders.

In the centre of this row old Jolyon, conspicuous in his black, tightly-buttoned frock-coat and his white moustaches, was leaning back with finger tips crossed on a copy of the Directors' report and accounts.

On his right hand, always a little larger than life, sat the Secretary, 'Down-by-the-starn' Hemmings; an all-too-sad sadness beaming in his fine eyes; his iron-grey beard, in mourning like the rest of him, giving the feeling of an all-too-black tie behind it.

The occasion indeed was a melancholy one, only six weeks having elapsed since that telegram had come from Scorrier, the mining expert, on a private mission to the Mines, informing them that Pippin, their Superintendent, had committed suicide in endeavouring, after his extraordinary two years' silence, to write a letter to his Board. That letter was on the table now; it would be read to the Shareholders, who would of course be put into possession of all the facts.

Hemmings had often said to Soames, standing with his coat-tails divided before the fireplace:

"What our Shareholders don't know about our affairs isn't worth knowing. You may take that from me, Mr. Soames."

On one occasion, old Jolyon being present, Soames recollected a little unpleasantness. His uncle had looked up sharply and said: "Don't talk nonsense, Hemmings! You mean that what they do know isn't worth knowing!" Old Jolyon detested humbug.

Hemmings, angry-eyed, and wearing a smile like that of a trained poodle, had replied in an outburst of artificial applause: "Come, now, that's good, sir — that's very good. Your uncle will have his joke!"

The next time he had seen Soames he had taken the opportunity of saying to him: "The chairman's getting very old! — I can't get him to understand things; and he's so wilful — but what can you expect, with a chin like his?"

Soames had nodded.

Everyone knew that Uncle Jolyon's chin was a caution. He was looking worried to-day, in spite of his General Meeting look; he (Soames) should certainly speak to him about Bosinney.

Beyond old Jolyon on the left was little Mr. Booker, and he, too, wore his General Meeting look, as though searching for some particularly tender shareholder. And next him was the deaf director, with a frown; and beyond the deaf director, again, was old Mr. Bleedham, very bland, and having an air of conscious virtue — as well he might, knowing that the brown-paper parcel he always brought to the Board-room was concealed behind his hat (one of that old-fashioned class, of flat-brimmed top-hats which go with very large bow ties, clean-shaven lips, fresh cheeks, and neat little, white whiskers).

Soames always attended the General Meeting; it was considered better that he should do so, in case 'anything should arise!' He glanced round with his close, supercilious air at the walls of the room, where hung plans of the mine and harbour, together with a large photograph of a shaft leading to a working which had proved quite remarkably unprofitable. This photograph — a witness to the eternal irony underlying commercial enterprise till retained its position on the — wall, an effigy of the directors' pet, but dead, lamb.

And now old Jolyon rose, to present the report and accounts.

Veiling under a Jove-like serenity that perpetual antagonism deep-seated in the bosom of a director towards his shareholders, he faced them calmly. Soames faced them too. He knew most of them by sight. There was old Scrubsole, a tar man, who always came, as Hemmings would say, 'to make himself nasty,' a cantankerous-looking old fellow with a red face, a jowl, and an enormous low-crowned hat reposing on his knee. And the Rev. Mr. Boms, who always proposed a vote of thanks to the chairman, in which he invariably expressed the hope that the Board would not forget to elevate their employees, using the word with a double e, as being more vigorous and Anglo-Saxon (he had the strong Imperialistic tendencies of his cloth). It was his salutary custom to buttonhole a director afterwards, and ask him whether he thought the coming year would be good or bad; and, according to the trend of the answer, to buy or sell three shares within the ensuing fortnight.

And there was that military man, Major O'Bally, who could not help speaking, if only to second the re-election of the auditor, and who sometimes caused serious consternation by taking toasts — proposals rather — out of the hands of persons who had been flattered with little slips of paper, entrusting the said proposals to their care.

These made up the lot, together with four or five strong, silent shareholders, with whom Soames could sympathize — men of business, who liked to keep an eye on their affairs for themselves, without being fussy — good, solid men, who came to the City every day and went back in the evening to good, solid wives.

Good, solid wives! There was something in that thought which roused the nameless uneasiness in Soames again.

What should he say to his uncle? What answer should he make to this letter?

. . . . "If any shareholder has any question to put, I shall be glad to answer it." A soft thump. Old Jolyon had let the report and accounts fall, and stood twisting his tortoise-shell glasses between thumb and forefinger.

The ghost of a smile appeared on Soames' face. They had better hurry up with their questions! He well knew his uncle's method (the ideal one) of at once saying: "I propose, then, that the report and accounts be adopted!" Never let them get their wind — shareholders were notoriously wasteful of time!

A tall, white-bearded man, with a gaunt, dissatisfied face, arose:

"I believe I am in order, Mr. Chairman, in raising a question on this figure of L5000 in the accounts. 'To the widow and family'" (he looked sourly round), "'of our late superintendent,' who so — er — ill-advisedly (I say — ill-advisedly) committed suicide, at a time when his services were of the utmost value to this Company. You have stated that the agreement which he has so unfortunately cut short with his own hand was for a period of five years, of which one only had expired — I—"

Old Jolyon made a gesture of impatience.

"I believe I am in order, Mr. Chairman — I ask whether this amount paid, or proposed to be paid, by the Board to the er — deceased — is for services which might have been rendered to the Company — had he not committed suicide?"

"It is in recognition of past services, which we all know — you as well as any of us — to have been of vital value."

"Then, sir, all I have to say is that the services being past, the amount is too much."

The shareholder sat down.

Old Jolyon waited a second and said: "I now propose that the report and —"

The shareholder rose again: "May I ask if the Board realizes that it is not their money which — I don't hesitate to say that if it were their money. . . . "

A second shareholder, with a round, dogged face, whom Soames recognised as the late superintendent's brother-in-law, got up and said warmly: "In my opinion, sir, the sum is not enough!"

The Rev. Mr. Boms now rose to his feet. "If I may venture to express myself," he said, "I should say that the fact of the — er — deceased having committed suicide should weigh very heavily — very heavily with our worthy chairman. I have no doubt it has weighed with him, for — I say this for myself and I think for everyone present (hear, hear)— he enjoys our confidence in a high degree. We all desire, I should hope, to be charitable. But I feel sure" (he-looked severely at the late superintendent's brother-in-law) "that he will in some way, by some written expression, or better perhaps by reducing the amount, record our grave disapproval that so promising and valuable a life should have been thus impiously removed from a sphere where both its own interests and — if I may say so — our interests so imperatively demanded its continuance. We should not — nay, we may not — countenance so grave a dereliction of all duty, both human and divine."

The reverend gentleman resumed his seat. The late superintendent's brother-in-law again rose: "What I have said I stick to," he said; "the amount is not enough!"

The first shareholder struck in: "I challenge the legality of the payment. In my opinion this payment is not legal. The Company's solicitor is present; I believe I am in order in asking him the question."

All eyes were now turned upon Soames. Something had arisen!

He stood up, close-lipped and cold; his nerves inwardly fluttered, his attention tweaked away at last from contemplation of that cloud looming on the horizon of his mind.

“The point,” he said in a low, thin voice, “is by no means clear. As there is no possibility of future consideration being received, it is doubtful whether the payment is strictly legal. If it is desired, the opinion of the court could be taken.”

The superintendent’s brother-in-law frowned, and said in a meaning tone: “We have no doubt the opinion of the court could be taken. May I ask the name of the gentleman who has given us that striking piece of information? Mr. Soames Forsyte? Indeed!” He looked from Soames to old Jolyon in a pointed manner.

A flush coloured Soames’ pale cheeks, but his superciliousness did not waver. Old Jolyon fixed his eyes on the speaker.

“If,” he said, “the late superintendents brother-in-law has nothing more to say, I propose that the report and accounts. . . . ”

At this moment, however, there rose one of those five silent, stolid shareholders, who had excited Soames’ sympathy. He said:

“I deprecate the proposal altogether. We are expected to give charity to this man’s wife and children, who, you tell us, were dependent on him. They may have been; I do not care whether they were or not. I object to the whole thing on principle. It is high time a stand was made against this sentimental humanitarianism. The country is eaten up with it. I object to my money being paid to these people of whom I know nothing, who have done nothing to earn it. I object in toto; it is not business. I now move that the report and accounts be put back, and amended by striking out the grant altogether.”

Old Jolyon had remained standing while the strong, silent man was speaking. The speech awoke an echo in all hearts, voicing, as it did, the worship of strong men, the movement against generosity, which had at that time already commenced among the saner members of the community.

The words ‘it is not business’ had moved even the Board; privately everyone felt that indeed it was not. But they knew also the chairman’s domineering temper and tenacity. He, too, at heart must feel that it was not business; but he was committed to his own proposition. Would he go back upon it? It was thought to be unlikely.

All waited with interest. Old Jolyon held up his hand; dark-rimmed glasses depending between his finger and thumb quivered slightly with a suggestion of menace.

He addressed the strong, silent shareholder.

“Knowing, as you do, the efforts of our late superintendent upon the occasion of the explosion at the mines, do you seriously wish me to put that amendment, sir?”

“I do.”

Old Jolyon put the amendment.

“Does anyone second this?” he asked, looking calmly round.

And it was then that Soames, looking at his uncle, felt the power of will that was in that old man. No one stirred. Looking straight into the eyes of the strong, silent shareholder, old Jolyon said:

“I now move, ‘That the report and accounts for the year 1886 be received and adopted.’ You second that? Those in favour signify the same in the usual way. Contrary — no. Carried. The next business, gentlemen. . . . ”

Soames smiled. Certainly Uncle Jolyon had a way with him!

But now his attention relapsed upon Bosinney.

Odd how that fellow haunted his thoughts, even in business hours.

Irene’s visit to the house — but there was nothing in that, except that she might have told him; but then, again, she never did tell him anything. She was more silent, more touchy, every day. He wished to God the house were finished, and they were in it, away from London. Town did not suit her; her nerves were not strong enough. That nonsense of the separate room had cropped up again!

The meeting was breaking up now. Underneath the photograph of the lost shaft Hemmings was buttonholed by the Rev. Mr. Boms. Little Mr. Booker, his bristling eyebrows wreathed in angry smiles, was having a parting turn-up with old Scrubsole. The two hated each other like poison. There was some matter of a tar-contract between them, little Mr. Booker having secured it from the Board for a nephew of his, over old Scrubsole’s head. Soames had heard that from Hemmings, who liked a gossip, more especially about his directors, except, indeed, old Jolyon, of whom he was afraid.

Soames awaited his opportunity. The last shareholder was vanishing through the door, when he approached his uncle, who was putting on his hat.

“Can I speak to you for a minute, Uncle Jolyon?”

It is uncertain what Soames expected to get out of this interview.

Apart from that somewhat mysterious awe in which Forsytes in general held old Jolyon, due to his philosophic twist, or perhaps — as Hemmings would doubtless have said — to his chin, there was, and always had been, a subtle antagonism between the younger man and the old. It had lurked under their dry manner of greeting, under their non-committal allusions to each other, and arose perhaps from old Jolyon’s perception of the quiet tenacity (‘obstinacy,’ he rather naturally called it) of the young man, of a secret doubt whether he could get his own way with him.

Both these Forsytes, wide asunder as the poles in many respects, possessed in their different ways — to a greater degree than the rest of the family — that essential quality of tenacious and prudent insight into ‘affairs,’ which is the highwater mark of their great class. Either of them, with a little luck and opportunity, was equal to a lofty career; either of them would have made a good financier, a great contractor, a statesman, though old Jolyon, in certain of his moods when under the influence of a cigar or of Nature — would have been capable of, not perhaps despising, but certainly of questioning, his own high position, while Soames, who never smoked cigars, would not.

Then, too, in old Jolyon’s mind there was always the secret ache, that the son of James — of James, whom he had always thought such a poor thing, should be pursuing the paths of success, while his own son . . .!

And last, not least — for he was no more outside the radiation of family gossip than any other Forsyte — he had now heard the sinister, indefinite, but none the less disturbing rumour about Bosinney, and his pride was wounded to the quick.

Characteristically, his irritation turned not against Irene but against Soames. The idea that his nephew’s wife (why couldn’t the fellow take better care of her — Oh! quaint injustice! as though Soames could possibly take more care!)— should be drawing to herself June’s lover, was intolerably humiliating. And seeing the danger, he did not, like James, hide it away in sheer nervousness, but owned with the dispassion of his broader outlook, that it was not unlikely; there was something very attractive about Irene!

He had a presentiment on the subject of Soames’ communication as they left the Board Room together, and went out into the noise and hurry of Cheapside. They walked together a good minute without speaking, Soames with his mousing, mincing step, and old Jolyon upright and using his umbrella languidly as a walking-stick.

They turned presently into comparative quiet, for old Jolyon’s way to a second Board led him in the direction of Moorage Street.

Then Soames, without lifting his eyes, began: “I’ve had this letter from Bosinney. You see what he says; I thought I’d let you know. I’ve spent a lot more than I intended on this house, and I want the position to be clear.”

Old Jolyon ran his eyes unwillingly over the letter: “What he says is clear enough,” he said.

“He talks about ‘a free hand,’” replied Soames.

Old Jolyon looked at him. The long-suppressed irritation and antagonism towards this young fellow, whose affairs were beginning to intrude upon his own, burst from him.

“Well, if you don’t trust him, why do you employ him?”

Soames stole a sideway look: “It’s much too late to go into that,” he said, “I only want it to be quite understood that if I give him a free hand, he doesn’t let me in. I thought if you were to speak to him, it would carry more weight!”

“No,” said old Jolyon abruptly; “I’ll have nothing to do with it!”

The words of both uncle and nephew gave the impression of unspoken meanings, far more important, behind. And the look they interchanged was like a revelation of this consciousness.

“Well,” said Soames; “I thought, for June’s sake, I’d tell you, that’s all; I thought you’d better know I shan’t stand any nonsense!”

“What is that to me?” old Jolyon took him up.

“Oh! I don’t know,” said Soames, and flurried by that sharp look he was unable to say more. “Don’t say I didn’t tell you," he added sulkily, recovering his composure.

"Tell me!" said old Jolyon; "I don't know what you mean. You come worrying me about a thing like this. I don't want to hear about your affairs; you must manage them yourself!"

"Very well," said Soames immovably, "I will!"

"Good-morning, then," said old Jolyon, and they parted.

Soames retraced his steps, and going into a celebrated eating-house, asked for a plate of smoked salmon and a glass of Chablis; he seldom ate much in the middle of the day, and generally ate standing, finding the position beneficial to his liver, which was very sound, but to which he desired to put down all his troubles.

When he had finished he went slowly back to his office, with bent head, taking no notice of the swarming thousands on the pavements, who in their turn took no notice of him.

The evening post carried the following reply to Bosinney:

'FORSYTE, BUSTARD AND FORSYTE, 'Commissioners for Oaths, '92001, BRANCH LANE, POULTRY, E.C.,

'May 17, 1887. 'DEAR BOSINNEY,

'I have, received your letter, the terms of which not a little surprise me. I was under the impression that you had, and have had all along, a "free hand"; for I do not recollect that any suggestions I have been so unfortunate as to make have met with your approval. In giving you, in accordance with your request, this "free hand," I wish you to clearly understand that the total cost of the house as handed over to me completely decorated, inclusive of your fee (as arranged between us), must not exceed twelve thousand pounds — L12,000. This gives you an ample margin, and, as you know, is far more than I originally contemplated.

'I am, 'Yours truly,

'SOAMES FORSYTE.'

On the following day he received a note from Bosinney:

'PHILIP BAYNES BOSINNEY, 'Architect, '309D, SLOANE STREET, S.W., 'May 18. 'DEAR FORSYTE,

'If you think that in such a delicate matter as decoration I can bind myself to the exact pound, I am afraid you are mistaken. I can see that you are tired of the arrangement, and of me, and I had better, therefore, resign.

'Yours faithfully, 'PHILIP BAYNES BOSINNEY.'

Soames pondered long and painfully over his answer, and late at night in the dining-room, when Irene had gone to bed, he composed the following:

'62, MONTPELLIER SQUARE, S.W., 'May 19, 1887. 'DEAR BOSINNEY,

'I think that in both our interests it would be extremely undesirable that matters should be so left at this stage. I did not mean to say that if you should exceed the sum named in my letter to you by ten or twenty or even fifty pounds, there would be any difficulty between us. This being so, I should like you to reconsider your answer. You have a "free hand" in the terms of this correspondence, and I hope you will see your way to completing the decorations, in the matter of which I know it is difficult to be absolutely exact.

'Yours truly, 'SOAMES FORSYTE.'

Bosinney's answer, which came in the course of the next day, was:

'May 20. 'DEAR FORSYTE,

'Very well. 'PH. BOSINNEY.'

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CHAPTER 15

OLD JOLYON AT THE ZOO

Old Jolyon disposed of his second Meeting — an ordinary Board — summarily. He was so dictatorial that his fellow directors were left in cabal over the increasing domineeringness of old Forsyte, which they were far from intending to stand much longer, they said.

He went out by Underground to Portland Road Station, whence he took a cab and drove to the Zoo.

He had an assignation there, one of those assignations that had lately been growing more frequent, to which his increasing uneasiness about June and the 'change in her,' as he expressed it, was driving him.

She buried herself away, and was growing thin; if he spoke to her he got no answer, or had his head snapped off, or she looked as if she would burst into tears. She was as changed as she could be, all through this Bosinney. As for telling him about anything, not a bit of it!

And he would sit for long spells brooding, his paper unread before him, a cigar extinct between his lips. She had been such a companion to him ever since she was three years old! And he loved her so!

Forces regardless of family or class or custom were beating down his guard; impending events over which he had no control threw their shadows on his head. The irritation of one accustomed to have his way was roused against he knew not what.

Chafing at the slowness of his cab, he reached the Zoo door; but, with his sunny instinct for seizing the good of each moment, he forgot his vexation as he walked towards the tryst.

From the stone terrace above the bear-pit his son and his two grandchildren came hastening down when they saw old Jolyon coming, and led him away towards the lion-house. They supported him on either side, holding one to each of his hands — whilst Jolly, perverse like his father, carried his grandfather's umbrella in such a way as to catch people's legs with the crutch of the handle.

Young Jolyon followed.

It was as good as a play to see his father with the children, but such a play as brings smiles with tears behind. An old man and two small children walking together can be seen at any hour of the day; but the sight of old Jolyon, with Jolly and Holly seemed to young Jolyon a special peep-show of the things that lie at the bottom of our hearts. The complete surrender of that erect old figure to those little figures on either hand was too poignantly tender, and, being a man of an habitual reflex action, young Jolyon swore softly under his breath. The show affected him in a way unbecoming to a Forsyte, who is nothing if not undemonstrative.

Thus they reached the lion-house.

There had been a morning fete at the Botanical Gardens, and a large number of Forsy . . . '— that is, of well-dressed people who kept carriages had brought them on to the Zoo, so as to have more, if possible, for their money, before going back to Rutland Gate or Bryanston Square.

"Let's go on to the Zoo," they had said to each other; "it'll be great fun!" It was a shilling day; and there would not be all those horrid common people.

In front of the long line of cages they were collected in rows, watching the tawny, ravenous beasts behind the bars await their only pleasure of the four-and-twenty hours. The hungrier the beast, the greater the fascination. But whether because the spectators envied his appetite, or, more humanely, because it was so soon to be satisfied, young Jolyon could not tell. Remarks kept falling on his ears: "That's a nasty-looking brute, that tiger!" "Oh, what a love! Look at his little mouth!" "Yes, he's rather nice! Don't go too near, mother."

And frequently, with little pats, one or another would clap their hands to their pockets behind and look round, as though expecting young Jolyon or some disinterested-looking person to relieve them of the contents.

A well-fed man in a white waistcoat said slowly through his teeth: "It's all greed; they can't be hungry. Why, they take no exercise." At these words a tiger snatched a piece of bleeding liver, and the fat man laughed. His wife, in a Paris model frock and gold nose-nippers, reproved him: “How can you laugh, Harry? Such a horrid sight!”

Young Jolyon frowned.

The circumstances of his life, though he had ceased to take a too personal view of them, had left him subject to an intermittent contempt; and the class to which he had belonged — the carriage class — especially excited his sarcasm.

To shut up a lion or tiger in confinement was surely a horrible barbarity. But no cultivated person would admit this.

The idea of its being barbarous to confine wild animals had probably never even occurred to his father for instance; he belonged to the old school, who considered it at once humanizing and educational to confine baboons and panthers, holding the view, no doubt, that in course of time they might induce these creatures not so unreasonably to die of misery and heart-sickness against the bars of their cages, and put the society to the expense of getting others! In his eyes, as in the eyes of all Forsytes, the pleasure of seeing these beautiful creatures in a state of captivity far outweighed the inconvenience of imprisonment to beasts whom God had so improvidently placed in a state of freedom! It was for the animals good, removing them at once from the countless dangers of open air and exercise, and enabling them to exercise their functions in the guaranteed seclusion of a private compartment! Indeed, it was doubtful what wild animals were made for but to be shut up in cages!

But as young Jolyon had in his constitution the elements of impartiality, he reflected that to stigmatize as barbarity that which was merely lack of imagination must be wrong; for none who held these views had been placed in a similar position to the animals they caged, and could not, therefore, be expected to enter into their sensations. It was not until they were leaving the gardens — Jolly and Holly in a state of blissful delirium — that old Jolyon found an opportunity of speaking to his son on the matter next his heart. “I don’t know what to make of it,” he said; “if she’s to go on as she’s going on now, I can’t tell what’s to come. I wanted her to see the doctor, but she won’t. She’s not a bit like me. She’s your mother all over. Obstinate as a mule! If she doesn’t want to do a thing, she won’t, and there’s an end of it!”

Young Jolyon smiled; his eyes had wandered to his father’s chin. ‘A pair of you,’ he thought, but he said nothing.

“And then,” went on old Jolyon, “there’s this Bosinney. I should like to punch the fellow’s head, but I can’t, I suppose, though — I don’t see why you shouldn’t,” he added doubtfully.

“What has he done? Far better that it should come to an end, if they don’t hit it off!”

Old Jolyon looked at his son. Now they had actually come to discuss a subject connected with the relations between the sexes he felt distrustful. Jo would be sure to hold some loose view or other.

“Well, I don’t know what you think,” he said; “I dare say your sympathy’s with him — shouldn’t be surprised; but I think he’s behaving precious badly, and if he comes my way I shall tell him so.” He dropped the subject.

It was impossible to discuss with his son the true nature and meaning of Bosinney’s defection. Had not his son done the very same thing (worse, if possible) fifteen years ago? There seemed no end to the consequences of that piece of folly.

Young Jolyon also was silent; he had quickly penetrated his father’s thought, for, dethroned from the high seat of an obvious and uncomplicated view of things, he had become both perceptive and subtle.

The attitude he had adopted towards sexual matters fifteen years before, however, was too different from his father’s. There was no bridging the gulf.

He said coolly: “I suppose he’s fallen in love with some other woman?”

Old Jolyon gave him a dubious look: “I can’t tell,” he said; “they say so!”

“Then, it’s probably true,” remarked young Jolyon unexpectedly; “and I suppose they’ve told you who she is?”

“Yes,” said old Jolyon, “Soames’s wife!”

Young Jolyon did not whistle: The circumstances of his own life had rendered him incapable of whistling on such a subject, but he looked at his father, while the ghost of a smile hovered over his face.

If old Jolyon saw, he took no notice.

“She and June were bosom friends!” he muttered.

“Poor little June!” said young Jolyon softly. He thought of his daughter still as a babe of three.

Old Jolyon came to a sudden halt.

“I don’t believe a word of it,” he said, “it’s some old woman’s tale. Get me a cab, Jo, I’m tired to death!”

They stood at a corner to see if an empty cab would come along, while carriage after carriage drove past, bearing Forsytes of all descriptions from the Zoo. The harness, the liveries, the gloss on the horses' coats, shone and glittered in the May sunlight, and each equipage, landau, sociable, barouche, Victoria, or brougham, seemed to roll out proudly from its wheels:

'I and my horses and my men you know,' Indeed the whole turn-out have cost a pot. But we were worth it every penny. Look At Master and at Missis now, the dawgs! Ease with security — ah! that's the ticket!

And such, as everyone knows, is fit accompaniment for a perambulating Forsyte.

Amongst these carriages was a barouche coming at a greater pace than the others, drawn by a pair of bright bay horses. It swung on its high springs, and the four people who filled it seemed rocked as in a cradle.

This chariot attracted young Jolyon's attention; and suddenly, on the back seat, he recognised his Uncle James, unmistakable in spite of the increased whiteness of his whiskers; opposite, their backs defended by sunshades, Rachel Forsyte and her elder but married sister, Winifred Dartie, in irreproachable toilettes, had posed their heads haughtily, like two of the birds they had been seeing at the Zoo; while by James' side reclined Dartie, in a brand-new frock-coat buttoned tight and square, with a large expanse of carefully shot linen protruding below each wristband.

An extra, if subdued, sparkle, an added touch of the best gloss or varnish characterized this vehicle, and seemed to distinguish it from all the others, as though by some happy extravagance — like that which marks out the real 'work of art' from the ordinary 'picture'— it were designated as the typical car, the very throne of Forsytedom.

Old Jolyon did not see them pass; he was petting poor Holly who was tired, but those in the carriage had taken in the little group; the ladies' heads tilted suddenly, there was a spasmodic screening movement of parasols; James' face protruded naively, like the head of a long bird, his mouth slowly opening. The shield-like rounds of the parasols grew smaller and smaller, and vanished.

Young Jolyon saw that he had been recognised, even by Winifred, who could not have been more than fifteen when he had forfeited the right to be considered a Forsyte.

There was not much change in them! He remembered the exact look of their turn-out all that time ago: Horses, men, carriage — all different now, no doubt — but of the precise stamp of fifteen years before; the same neat display, the same nicely calculated arrogance ease with security! The swing exact, the pose of the sunshades exact, exact the spirit of the whole thing.

And in the sunlight, defended by the haughty shields of parasols, carriage after carriage went by.

"Uncle James has just passed, with his female folk," said young Jolyon.

His father looked black. "Did your uncle see us? Yes? Hmph! What's he want, coming down into these parts?"

An empty cab drove up at this moment, and old Jolyon stopped it.

"I shall see you again before long, my boy!" he said. "Don't you go paying any attention to what I've been saying about young Bosinney — I don't believe a word of it!"

Kissing the children, who tried to detain him, he stepped in and was borne away.

Young Jolyon, who had taken Holly up in his arms, stood motionless at the corner, looking after the cab.

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Chapter 16

Afternoon at Timothy's

If old Jolyon, as he got into his cab, had said: 'I won't believe a word of it!' he would more truthfully have expressed his sentiments.

The notion that James and his womankind had seen him in the company of his son had awakened in him not only the impatience he always felt when crossed, but that secret hostility natural between brothers, the roots of which — little nursery rivalries — sometimes toughen and deepen as life goes on, and, all hidden, support a plant capable of producing in season the bitterest fruits.

Hitherto there had been between these six brothers no more unfriendly feeling than that caused by the secret and natural doubt that the others might be richer than themselves; a feeling increased to the pitch of curiosity by the approach of death — that end of all handicaps — and the great 'closeness' of their man of business, who, with some sagacity, would profess to Nicholas ignorance of James' income, to James ignorance of old Jolyon's, to Jolyon ignorance of Roger's, to Roger ignorance of Swithin's, while to Swithin he would say most irritatingly that Nicholas must be a rich man. Timothy alone was exempt, being in gilt-edged securities.

But now, between two of them at least, had arisen a very different sense of injury. From the moment when James had the impertinence to pry into his affairs — as he put it — old Jolyon no longer chose to credit this story about Bosinney. His grand-daughter slighted through a member of 'that fellow's' family! He made up his mind that Bosinney was maligned. There must be some other reason for his defection.

June had flown out at him, or something; she was as touchy as she could be!

He would, however, let Timothy have a bit of his mind, and see if he would go on dropping hints! And he would not let the grass grow under his feet either, he would go there at once, and take very good care that he didn't have to go again on the same errand.

He saw James' carriage blocking the pavement in front of 'The Bower.' So they had got there before him — cackling about having seen him, he dared say! And further on, Swithin's greys were turning their noses towards the noses of James' bays, as though in conclave over the family, while their coachmen were in conclave above.

Old Jolyon, depositing his hat on the chair in the narrow hall, where that hat of Bosinney's had so long ago been mistaken for a cat, passed his thin hand grimly over his face with its great drooping white moustaches, as though to remove all traces of expression, and made his way upstairs.

He found the front drawing-room full. It was full enough at the best of times — without visitors — without any one in it — for Timothy and his sisters, following the tradition of their generation, considered that a room was not quite 'nice' unless it was 'properly' furnished. It held, therefore, eleven chairs, a sofa, three tables, two cabinets, innumerable knicknacks, and part of a large grand piano. And now, occupied by Mrs. Small, Aunt Hester, by Swithin, James, Rachel, Winifred, Euphemia, who had come in again to return 'Passion and Paregoric' which she had read at lunch, and her chum Frances, Roger's daughter (the musical Forsyte, the one who composed songs), there was only one chair left unoccupied, except, of course, the two that nobody ever sat on — and the only standing room was occupied by the cat, on whom old Jolyon promptly stepped.

In these days it was by no means unusual for Timothy to have so many visitors. The family had always, one and all, had a real respect for Aunt Ann, and now that she was gone, they were coming far more frequently to The Bower, and staying longer.

Swithin had been the first to arrive, and seated torpid in a red satin chair with a gilt back, he gave every appearance of lasting the others out. And symbolizing Bosinney's name 'the big one,' with his great stature and bulk, his thick white hair, his puffy immovable shaven face, he looked more primeval than ever in the highly upholstered room.

His conversation, as usual of late, had turned at once upon Irene, and he had lost no time in giving Aunts Juley and Hester his opinion with regard to this rumour he heard was going about. No — as he said — she might want a bit of flirtation — a pretty woman must have her fling; but more than that he did not believe. Nothing open; she had too much good sense, too much proper appreciation of what was due to her position, and to the family! No sc . . ., he was going to say 'scandal' but the very idea was so preposterous that he waved his hand as though to say —'but let that pass!'

Granted that Swithin took a bachelor's view of the situation — still what indeed was not due to that family in which so many had done so well for themselves, had attained a certain position? If he had heard in dark, pessimistic moments the words 'yeomen' and 'very small beer' used in connection with his origin, did he believe them?

No! he cherished, hugging it pathetically to his bosom the secret theory that there was something distinguished somewhere in his ancestry.

"Must be," he once said to young Jolyon, before the latter went to the bad. "Look at us, we've got on! There must be good blood in us somewhere."

He had been fond of young Jolyon: the boy had been in a good set at College, had known that old ruffian Sir Charles Fiste's sons — a pretty rascal one of them had turned out, too; and there was style about him — it was a thousand pities he had run off with that half-foreign governess! If he must go off like that why couldn't he have chosen someone who would have done them credit! And what was he now? — an underwriter at Lloyd's; they said he even painted pictures — pictures! Damme! he might have ended as Sir Jolyon Forsyte, Bart., with a seat in Parliament, and a place in the country!

It was Swithin who, following the impulse which sooner or later urges thereto some member of every great family, went to the Heralds' Office, where they assured him that he was undoubtedly of the same family as the well-known Forsites with an 'i,' whose arms were 'three dexter buckles on a sable ground gules,' hoping no doubt to get him to take them up.

Swithin, however, did not do this, but having ascertained that the crest was a 'pheasant proper,' and the motto 'For Forsite,' he had the pheasant proper placed upon his carriage and the buttons of his coachman, and both crest and motto on his writing-paper. The arms he hugged to himself, partly because, not having paid for them, he thought it would look ostentatious to put them on his carriage, and he hated ostentation, and partly because he, like any practical man all over the country, had a secret dislike and contempt for things he could not understand he found it hard, as anyone might, to swallow 'three dexter buckles on a sable ground gules.'

He never forgot, however, their having told him that if he paid for them he would be entitled to use them, and it strengthened his conviction that he was a gentleman. Imperceptibly the rest of the family absorbed the 'pheasant proper,' and some, more serious than others, adopted the motto; old Jolyon, however, refused to use the latter, saying that it was humbug meaning nothing, so far as he could see.

Among the older generation it was perhaps known at bottom from what great historical event they derived their crest; and if pressed on the subject, sooner than tell a lie — they did not like telling lies, having an impression that only Frenchmen and Russians told them — they would confess hurriedly that Swithin had got hold of it somehow.

Among the younger generation the matter was wrapped in a discretion proper. They did not want to hurt the feelings of their elders, nor to feel ridiculous themselves; they simply used the crest. . . .

"No," said Swithin, "he had had an opportunity of seeing for himself, and what he should say was, that there was nothing in her manner to that young Buccaneer or Bosinney or whatever his name was, different from her manner to himself; in fact, he should rather say. . . . " But here the entrance of Frances and Euphemia put an unfortunate stop to the conversation, for this was not a subject which could be discussed before young people.

And though Swithin was somewhat upset at being stopped like this on the point of saying something important, he soon recovered his affability. He was rather fond of Frances — Francie, as she was called in the family. She was so smart, and they told him she made a pretty little pot of pin-money by her songs; he called it very clever of her.

He rather prided himself indeed on a liberal attitude towards women, not seeing any reason why they shouldn't paint pictures, or write tunes, or books even, for the matter of that, especially if they could turn a useful penny by it; not at all — kept them out of mischief. It was not as if they were men!

'Little Francie,' as she was usually called with good-natured contempt, was an important personage, if only as a standing illustration of the attitude of Forsytes towards the Arts. She was not really 'little,' but rather tall, with dark hair for a Forsyte, which, together with a grey eye, gave her what was called 'a Celtic appearance.' She wrote songs with titles like 'Breathing Sighs,' or 'Kiss me, Mother, ere I die,' with a refrain like an anthem:

> 'Kiss me, Mother, ere I die;
> Kiss me-kiss me, Mother, ah!

Kiss, ah! kiss me e-ere I—
Kiss me, Mother, ere I d-d-die!'

She wrote the words to them herself, and other poems. In lighter moments she wrote waltzes, one of which, the 'Kensington Coil,' was almost national to Kensington, having a sweet dip in it.

It was very original. Then there were her 'Songs for Little People,' at once educational and witty, especially 'Gran'ma's Porgie,' and that ditty, almost prophetically imbued with the coming Imperial spirit, entitled 'Black Him In His Little Eye.'

Any publisher would take these, and reviews like 'High Living,' and the 'Ladies' Genteel Guide' went into raptures over: 'Another of Miss Francie Forsyte's spirited ditties, sparkling and pathetic. We ourselves were moved to tears and laughter. Miss Forsyte should go far.'

With the true instinct of her breed, Francie had made a point of knowing the right people — people who would write about her, and talk about her, and people in Society, too — keeping a mental register of just where to exert her fascinations, and an eye on that steady scale of rising prices, which in her mind's eye represented the future. In this way she caused herself to be universally respected.

Once, at a time when her emotions were whipped by an attachment — for the tenor of Roger's life, with its whole-hearted collection of house property, had induced in his only daughter a tendency towards passion — she turned to great and sincere work, choosing the sonata form, for the violin. This was the only one of her productions that troubled the Forsytes. They felt at once that it would not sell.

Roger, who liked having a clever daughter well enough, and often alluded to the amount of pocket-money she made for herself, was upset by this violin sonata.

"Rubbish like that!" he called it. Francie had borrowed young Flageoletti from Euphemia, to play it in the drawing-room at Prince's Gardens.

As a matter of fact Roger was right. It was rubbish, but — annoying! the sort of rubbish that wouldn't sell. As every Forsyte knows, rubbish that sells is not rubbish at all — far from it.

And yet, in spite of the sound common sense which fixed the worth of art at what it would fetch, some of the Forsytes — Aunt Hester, for instance, who had always been musical — could not help regretting that Francie's music was not 'classical'; the same with her poems. But then, as Aunt Hester said, they didn't see any poetry nowadays, all the poems were 'little light things.'

There was nobody who could write a poem like 'Paradise Lost,' or 'Childe Harold'; either of which made you feel that you really had read something. Still, it was nice for Francie to have something to occupy her; while other girls were spending money shopping she was making it!

And both Aunt Hester and Aunt Juley were always ready to listen to the latest story of how Francie had got her price increased.

They listened now, together with Swithin, who sat pretending not to, for these young people talked so fast and mumbled so, he never could catch what they said.

"And I can't think," said Mrs. Septimus, "how you do it. I should never have the audacity!"

Francie smiled lightly. "I'd much rather deal with a man than a woman. Women are so sharp!"

"My dear," cried Mrs. Small, "I'm sure we're not."

Euphemia went off into her silent laugh, and, ending with the squeak, said, as though being strangled: "Oh, you'll kill me some day, auntie."

Swithin saw no necessity to laugh; he detested people laughing when he himself perceived no joke. Indeed, he detested Euphemia altogether, to whom he always alluded as 'Nick's daughter, what's she called — the pale one?' He had just missed being her god-father — indeed, would have been, had he not taken a firm stand against her outlandish name. He hated becoming a godfather. Swithin then said to Francie with dignity: "It's a fine day — er — for the time of year." But Euphemia, who knew perfectly well that he had refused to be her godfather, turned to Aunt Hester, and began telling her how she had seen Irene — Mrs. Soames — at the Church and Commercial Stores.

"And Soames was with her?" said Aunt Hester, to whom Mrs. Small had as yet had no opportunity of relating the incident.

"Soames with her? Of course not!"

"But was she all alone in London?"

"Oh, no; there was Mr. Bosinney with her. She was perfectly dressed."

But Swithin, hearing the name Irene, looked severely at Euphemia, who, it is true, never did look well in a dress, whatever she may have done on other occasions, and said:

"Dressed like a lady, I've no doubt. It's a pleasure to see her."

At this moment James and his daughters were announced. Dartie, feeling badly in want of a drink, had pleaded an appointment with his dentist, and, being put down at the Marble Arch, had got into a hansom, and was already seated in the window of his club in Piccadilly.

His wife, he told his cronies, had wanted to take him to pay some calls. It was not in his line — not exactly. Haw!

Hailing the waiter, he sent him out to the hall to see what had won the 4.30 race. He was dog-tired, he said, and that was a fact; had been drivin' about with his wife to 'shows' all the afternoon. Had put his foot down at last. A fellow must live his own life.

At this moment, glancing out of the bay window — for he loved this seat whence he could see everybody pass — his eye unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, chanced to light on the figure of Soames, who was mousing across the road from the Green Park-side, with the evident intention of coming in, for he, too, belonged to 'The Iseeum.'

Dartie sprang to his feet; grasping his glass, he muttered something about 'that 4.30 race,' and swiftly withdrew to the card-room, where Soames never came. Here, in complete isolation and a dim light, he lived his own life till half past seven, by which hour he knew Soames must certainly have left the club.

It would not do, as he kept repeating to himself whenever he felt the impulse to join the gossips in the bay-window getting too strong for him — it absolutely would not do, with finances as low as his, and the 'old man' (James) rusty ever since that business over the oil shares, which was no fault of his, to risk a row with Winifred.

If Soames were to see him in the club it would be sure to come round to her that he wasn't at the dentist's at all. He never knew a family where things 'came round' so. Uneasily, amongst the green baize card-tables, a frown on his olive coloured face, his check trousers crossed, and patent-leather boots shining through the gloom, he sat biting his forefinger, and wondering where the deuce he was to get the money if Erotic failed to win the Lancashire Cup.

His thoughts turned gloomily to the Forsytes. What a set they were! There was no getting anything out of them — at least, it was a matter of extreme difficulty. They were so d —-d particular about money matters; not a sportsman amongst the lot, unless it were George. That fellow Soames, for instance, would have a fit if you tried to borrow a tenner from him, or, if he didn't have a fit, he looked at you with his cursed supercilious smile, as if you were a lost soul because you were in want of money.

And that wife of his (Dartie's mouth watered involuntarily), he had tried to be on good terms with her, as one naturally would with any pretty sister-in-law, but he would be cursed if the (he mentally used a coarse word)— would have anything to say to him — she looked at him, indeed, as if he were dirt — and yet she could go far enough, he wouldn't mind betting. He knew women; they weren't made with soft eyes and figures like that for nothing, as that fellow Soames would jolly soon find out, if there were anything in what he had heard about this Buccaneer Johnny.

Rising from his chair, Dartie took a turn across the room, ending in front of the looking-glass over the marble chimney-piece; and there he stood for a long time contemplating in the glass the reflection of his face. It had that look, peculiar to some men, of having been steeped in linseed oil, with its waxed dark moustaches and the little distinguished commencements of side whiskers; and concernedly he felt the promise of a pimple on the side of his slightly curved and fattish nose.

In the meantime old Jolyon had found the remaining chair in Timothy's commodious drawing-room. His advent had obviously put a stop to the conversation, decided awkwardness having set in. Aunt Juley, with her well-known kindheartedness, hastened to set people at their ease again.

"Yes, Jolyon," she said, "we were just saying that you haven't been here for a long time; but we mustn't be surprised. You're busy, of course? James was just saying what a busy time of year. . . . "

"Was he?" said old Jolyon, looking hard at James. "It wouldn't be half so busy if everybody minded their own business.”

James, brooding in a small chair from which his knees ran uphill, shifted his feet uneasily, and put one of them down on the cat, which had unwisely taken refuge from old Jolyon beside him.

“Here, you’ve got a cat here,” he said in an injured voice, withdrawing his foot nervously as he felt it squeezing into the soft, furry body.

“Several,” said old Jolyon, looking at one face and another; “I trod on one just now.”

A silence followed.

Then Mrs. Small, twisting her fingers and gazing round with ‘pathetic calm’, asked: “And how is dear June?”

A twinkle of humour shot through the sternness of old Jolyon’s eyes. Extraordinary old woman, Juley! No one quite like her for saying the wrong thing!

“Bad!” he said; “London don’t agree with her — too many people about, too much clatter and chatter by half.” He laid emphasis on the words, and again looked James in the face.

Nobody spoke.

A feeling of its being too dangerous to take a step in any direction, or hazard any remark, had fallen on them all. Something of the sense of the impending, that comes over the spectator of a Greek tragedy, had entered that upholstered room, filled with those white-haired, frock-coated old men, and fashionably attired women, who were all of the same blood, between all of whom existed an unseizable resemblance.

Not that they were conscious of it — the visits of such fateful, bitter spirits are only felt.

Then Swithin rose. He would not sit there, feeling like that — he was not to be put down by anyone! And, manoeuvring round the room with added pomp, he shook hands with each separately.

“You tell Timothy from me,” he said, “that he coddles himself too much!” Then, turning to Francie, whom he considered ‘smart,’ he added: “You come with me for a drive one of these days.” But this conjured up the vision of that other eventful drive which had been so much talked about, and he stood quite still for a second, with glassy eyes, as though waiting to catch up with the significance of what he himself had said; then, suddenly recollecting that he didn’t care a damn, he turned to old Jolyon: “Well, good-bye, Jolyon! You shouldn’t go about without an overcoat; you’ll be getting sciatica or something!” And, kicking the cat slightly with the pointed tip of his patent leather boot, he took his huge form away.

When he had gone everyone looked secretly at the others, to see how they had taken the mention of the word ‘drive’— the word which had become famous, and acquired an overwhelming importance, as the only official — so to speak — news in connection with the vague and sinister rumour clinging to the family tongue.

Euphemia, yielding to an impulse, said with a short laugh: “I’m glad Uncle Swithin doesn’t ask me to go for drives.”

Mrs. Small, to reassure her and smooth over any little awkwardness the subject might have, replied: “My dear, he likes to take somebody well dressed, who will do him a little credit. I shall never forget the drive he took me. It was an experience!” And her chubby round old face was spread for a moment with a strange contentment; then broke into pouts, and tears came into her eyes. She was thinking of that long ago driving tour she had once taken with Septimus Small.

James, who had relapsed into his nervous brooding in the little chair, suddenly roused himself: “He’s a funny fellow, Swithin,” he said, but in a half-hearted way.

Old Jolyon’s silence, his stern eyes, held them all in a kind of paralysis. He was disconcerted himself by the effect of his own words — an effect which seemed to deepen the importance of the very rumour he had come to scotch; but he was still angry.

He had not done with them yet — No, no — he would give them another rub or two.

He did not wish to rub his nieces, he had no quarrel with them — a young and presentable female always appealed to old Jolyon’s clemency — but that fellow James, and, in a less degree perhaps, those others, deserved all they would get. And he, too, asked for Timothy.

As though feeling that some danger threatened her younger brother, Aunt Juley suddenly offered him tea: “There it is,” she said, “all cold and nasty, waiting for you in the back drawing room, but Smither shall make you some fresh.”

Old Jolyon rose: “Thank you,” he said, looking straight at James, “but I’ve no time for tea, and — scandal, and the rest of it! It’s time I was at home. Good-bye, Julia; good-bye, Hester; good-bye, Winifred.”

Without more ceremonious adieux, he marched out.

Once again in his cab, his anger evaporated, for so it ever was with his wrath — when he had rapped out, it was gone. Sadness came over his spirit. He had stopped their mouths, maybe, but at what a cost! At the cost of certain knowledge that the rumour he had been resolved not to believe was true. June was abandoned, and for the wife of that fellow’s son! He felt it was true, and hardened himself to treat it as if it were not; but the pain he hid beneath this resolution began slowly, surely, to vent itself in a blind resentment against James and his son.

The six women and one man left behind in the little drawing-room began talking as easily as might be after such an occurrence, for though each one of them knew for a fact that he or she never talked scandal, each one of them also knew that the other six did; all were therefore angry and at a loss. James only was silent, disturbed, to the bottom of his soul.

Presently Francie said: “Do you know, I think Uncle Jolyon is terribly changed this last year. What do you think, Aunt Hester?”

Aunt Hester made a little movement of recoil: “Oh, ask your Aunt Julia!” she said; “I know nothing about it.”

No one else was afraid of assenting, and James muttered gloomily at the floor: “He’s not half the man he was.”

“I’ve noticed it a long time,” went on Francie; “he’s aged tremendously.”

Aunt Juley shook her head; her face seemed suddenly to have become one immense pout.

“Poor dear Jolyon,” she said, “somebody ought to see to it for him!”

There was again silence; then, as though in terror of being left solitarily behind, all five visitors rose simultaneously, and took their departure.

Mrs. Small, Aunt Hester, and their cat were left once more alone, the sound of a door closing in the distance announced the approach of Timothy.

That evening, when Aunt Hester had just got off to sleep in the back bedroom that used to be Aunt Juley’s before Aunt Juley took Aunt Ann’s, her door was opened, and Mrs. Small, in a pink night-cap, a candle in her hand, entered: “Hester!” she said. “Hester!”

Aunt Hester faintly rustled the sheet.

“Hester,” repeated Aunt Juley, to make quite sure that she had awakened her, “I am quite troubled about poor dear Jolyon. What,” Aunt Juley dwelt on the word, “do you think ought to be done?”

Aunt Hester again rustled the sheet, her voice was heard faintly pleading: “Done? How should I know?”

Aunt Juley turned away satisfied, and closing the door with extra gentleness so as not to disturb dear Hester, let it slip through her fingers and fall to with a ‘crack.’

Back in her own room, she stood at the window gazing at the moon over the trees in the Park, through a chink in the muslin curtains, close drawn lest anyone should see. And there, with her face all round and pouting in its pink cap, and her eyes wet, she thought of ‘dear Jolyon,’ so old and so lonely, and how she could be of some use to him; and how he would come to love her, as she had never been loved since — since poor Septimus went away.

❦

CHAPTER 17

DANCE AT ROGER'S

Roger's house in Prince's Gardens was brilliantly alight. Large numbers of wax candles had been collected and placed in cut-glass chandeliers, and the parquet floor of the long, double drawing-room reflected these constellations. An appearance of real spaciousness had been secured by moving out all the furniture on to the upper landings, and enclosing the room with those strange appendages of civilization known as 'rout' seats. In a remote corner, embowered in palms, was a cottage piano, with a copy of the 'Kensington Coil' open on the music-stand.

Roger had objected to a band. He didn't see in the least what they wanted with a band; he wouldn't go to the expense, and there was an end of it. Francie (her mother, whom Roger had long since reduced to chronic dyspepsia, went to bed on such occasions), had been obliged to content herself with supplementing the piano by a young man who played the cornet, and she so arranged with palms that anyone who did not look into the heart of things might imagine there were several musicians secreted there. She made up her mind to tell them to play loud — there was a lot of music in a cornet, if the man would only put his soul into it.

In the more cultivated American tongue, she was 'through' at last — through that tortuous labyrinth of make-shifts, which must be traversed before fashionable display can be combined with the sound economy of a Forsyte. Thin but brilliant, in her maize-coloured frock with much tulle about the shoulders, she went from place to place, fitting on her gloves, and casting her eye over it all.

To the hired butler (for Roger only kept maids) she spoke about the wine. Did he quite understand that Mr. Forsyte wished a dozen bottles of the champagne from Whiteley's to be put out? But if that were finished (she did not suppose it would be, most of the ladies would drink water, no doubt), but if it were, there was the champagne cup, and he must do the best he could with that.

She hated having to say this sort of thing to a butler, it was so infra dig.; but what could you do with father? Roger, indeed, after making himself consistently disagreeable about the dance, would come down presently, with his fresh colour and bumpy forehead, as though he had been its promoter; and he would smile, and probably take the prettiest woman in to supper; and at two o'clock, just as they were getting into the swing, he would go up secretly to the musicians and tell them to play 'God Save the Queen,' and go away.

Francie devoutly hoped he might soon get tired, and slip off to bed.

The three or four devoted girl friends who were staying in the house for this dance had partaken with her, in a small, abandoned room upstairs, of tea and cold chicken-legs, hurriedly served; the men had been sent out to dine at Eustace's Club, it being felt that they must be fed up.

Punctually on the stroke of nine arrived Mrs. Small alone. She made elaborate apologies for the absence of Timothy, omitting all mention of Aunt Hester, who, at the last minute, had said she could not be bothered. Francie received her effusively, and placed her on a rout seat, where she left her, pouting and solitary in lavender-coloured satin — the first time she had worn colour since Aunt Ann's death.

The devoted maiden friends came now from their rooms, each by magic arrangement in a differently coloured frock, but all with the same liberal allowance of tulle on the shoulders and at the bosom — for they were, by some fatality, lean to a girl. They were all taken up to Mrs. Small. None stayed with her more than a few seconds, but clustering together talked and twisted their programmes, looking secretly at the door for the first appearance of a man.

Then arrived in a group a number of Nicholases, always punctual — the fashion up Ladbroke Grove way; and close behind them Eustace and his men, gloomy and smelling rather of smoke.

Three or four of Francie's lovers now appeared, one after the other; she had made each promise to come early. They were all clean-shaven and sprightly, with that peculiar kind of young-man sprightliness which had recently invaded Kensington; they did not seem to mind each other's presence in the least, and wore their ties bunching out at the ends, white waistcoats, and socks with clocks. All had handkerchiefs concealed in their cuffs. They moved buoyantly, each armoured in professional gaiety, as though he had come to do great deeds. Their faces when they danced, far from wearing the traditional solemn look of the dancing Englishman, were irresponsible, charming, suave; they bounded, twirling their partners at great pace, without pedantic attention to the rhythm of the music.

At other dancers they looked with a kind of airy scorn — they, the light brigade, the heroes of a hundred Kensington ‘hops’— from whom alone could the right manner and smile and step be hoped.

After this the stream came fast; chaperones silting up along the wall facing the entrance, the volatile element swelling the eddy in the larger room.

Men were scarce, and wallflowers wore their peculiar, pathetic expression, a patient, sourish smile which seemed to say: “Oh, no! don’t mistake me, I know you are not coming up to me. I can hardly expect that!” And Francie would plead with one of her lovers, or with some callow youth: “Now, to please me, do let me introduce you to Miss Pink; such a nice girl, really!” and she would bring him up, and say: “Miss Pink — Mr. Gathercole. Can you spare him a dance?” Then Miss Pink, smiling her forced smile, colouring a little, answered: “Oh! I think so!” and screening her empty card, wrote on it the name of Gathercole, spelling it passionately in the district that he proposed, about the second extra.

But when the youth had murmured that it was hot, and passed, she relapsed into her attitude of hopeless expectation, into her patient, sourish smile.

Mothers, slowly fanning their faces, watched their daughters, and in their eyes could be read all the story of those daughters’ fortunes. As for themselves, to sit hour after hour, dead tired, silent, or talking spasmodically — what did it matter, so long as the girls were having a good time! But to see them neglected and passed by! Ah! they smiled, but their eyes stabbed like the eyes of an offended swan; they longed to pluck young Gathercole by the slack of his dandified breeches, and drag him to their daughters — the jackanapes!

And all the cruelties and hardness of life, its pathos and unequal chances, its conceit, self-forgetfulness, and patience, were presented on the battle-field of this Kensington ball-room.

Here and there, too, lovers — not lovers like Francie’s, a peculiar breed, but simply lovers — trembling, blushing, silent, sought each other by flying glances, sought to meet and touch in the mazes of the dance, and now and again dancing together, struck some beholder by the light in their eyes.

Not a second before ten o’clock came the Jameses — Emily, Rachel, Winifred (Dartie had been left behind, having on a former occasion drunk too much of Roger’s champagne), and Cicely, the youngest, making her debut; behind them, following in a hansom from the paternal mansion where they had dined, Soames and Irene.

All these ladies had shoulder-straps and no tulle — thus showing at once, by a bolder exposure of flesh, that they came from the more fashionable side of the Park.

Soames, sidling back from the contact of the dancers, took up a position against the wall. Guarding himself with his pale smile, he stood watching. Waltz after waltz began and ended, couple after couple brushed by with smiling lips, laughter, and snatches of talk; or with set lips, and eyes searching the throng; or again, with silent, parted lips, and eyes on each other. And the scent of festivity, the odour of flowers, and hair, of essences that women love, rose suffocatingly in the heat of the summer night.

Silent, with something of scorn in his smile, Soames seemed to notice nothing; but now and again his eyes, finding that which they sought, would fix themselves on a point in the shifting throng, and the smile die off his lips.

He danced with no one. Some fellows danced with their wives; his sense of ‘form’ had never permitted him to dance with Irene since their marriage, and the God of the Forsytes alone can tell whether this was a relief to him or not.

She passed, dancing with other men, her dress, iris-coloured, floating away from her feet. She danced well; he was tired of hearing women say with an acid smile: “How beautifully your wife dances, Mr. Forsyte — it’s quite a pleasure to watch her!” Tired of answering them with his sidelong glance: “You think so?”

A young couple close by flirted a fan by turns, making an unpleasant draught. Francie and one of her lovers stood near. They were talking of love.

He heard Roger’s voice behind, giving an order about supper to a servant. Everything was very second-class! He wished that he had not come! He had asked Irene whether she wanted him; she had answered with that maddening smile of hers “Oh, no!”

Why had he come? For the last quarter of an hour he had not even seen her. Here was George advancing with his

Quilpish face; it was too late to get out of his way.

“Have you seen ‘The Buccaneer’?” said this licensed wag; “he’s on the warpath — hair cut and everything!”

Soames said he had not, and crossing the room, half-empty in an interval of the dance, he went out on the balcony, and looked down into the street.

A carriage had driven up with late arrivals, and round the door hung some of those patient watchers of the London streets who spring up to the call of light or music; their faces, pale and upturned above their black and rusty figures, had an air of stolid watching that annoyed Soames. Why were they allowed to hang about; why didn’t the bobby move them on?

But the policeman took no notice of them; his feet were planted apart on the strip of crimson carpet stretched across the pavement; his face, under the helmet, wore the same stolid, watching look as theirs.

Across the road, through the railings, Soames could see the branches of trees shining, faintly stirring in the breeze, by the gleam of the street lamps; beyond, again, the upper lights of the houses on the other side, so many eyes looking down on the quiet blackness of the garden; and over all, the sky, that wonderful London sky, dusted with the innumerable reflection of countless lamps; a dome woven over between its stars with the refraction of human needs and human fancies — immense mirror of pomp and misery that night after night stretches its kindly mocking over miles of houses and gardens, mansions and squalor, over Forsytes, policemen, and patient watchers in the streets.

Soames turned away, and, hidden in the recess, gazed into the lighted room. It was cooler out there. He saw the new arrivals, June and her grandfather, enter. What had made them so late? They stood by the doorway. They looked fagged. Fancy Uncle Jolyon turning out at this time of night! Why hadn’t June come to Irene, as she usually did, and it occurred to him suddenly that he had seen nothing of June for a long time now.

Watching her face with idle malice, he saw it change, grow so pale that he thought she would drop, then flame out crimson. Turning to see at what she was looking, he saw his wife on Bosinney’s arm, coming from the conservatory at the end of the room. Her eyes were raised to his, as though answering some question he had asked, and he was gazing at her intently.

Soames looked again at June. Her hand rested on old Jolyon’s arm; she seemed to be making a request. He saw a surprised look on his uncle’s face; they turned and passed through the door out of his sight.

The music began again — a waltz — and, still as a statue in the recess of the window, his face unmoved, but no smile on his lips, Soames waited. Presently, within a yard of the dark balcony, his wife and Bosinney passed. He caught the perfume of the gardenias that she wore, saw the rise and fall of her bosom, the languor in her eyes, her parted lips, and a look on her face that he did not know. To the slow, swinging measure they danced by, and it seemed to him that they clung to each other; he saw her raise her eyes, soft and dark, to Bosinney’s, and drop them again.

Very white, he turned back to the balcony, and leaning on it, gazed down on the Square; the figures were still there looking up at the light with dull persistency, the policeman’s face, too, upturned, and staring, but he saw nothing of them. Below, a carriage drew up, two figures got in, and drove away. . . .

That evening June and old Jolyon sat down to dinner at the usual hour. The girl was in her customary high-necked frock, old Jolyon had not dressed.

At breakfast she had spoken of the dance at Uncle Roger’s, she wanted to go; she had been stupid enough, she said, not to think of asking anyone to take her. It was too late now.

Old Jolyon lifted his keen eyes. June was used to go to dances with Irene as a matter of course! and deliberately fixing his gaze on her, he asked: “Why don’t you get Irene?”

No! June did not want to ask Irene; she would only go if — if her grandfather wouldn’t mind just for once for a little time!

At her look, so eager and so worn, old Jolyon had grumblingly consented. He did not know what she wanted, he said, with going to a dance like this, a poor affair, he would wager; and she no more fit for it than a cat! What she wanted was sea air, and after his general meeting of the Globular Gold Concessions he was ready to take her. She didn’t want to go away? Ah! she would knock herself up! Stealing a mournful look at her, he went on with his breakfast.

June went out early, and wandered restlessly about in the heat. Her little light figure that lately had moved so languidly about its business, was all on fire. She bought herself some flowers. She wanted — she meant to look her best. He would be there! She knew well enough that he had a card. She would show him that she did not care. But deep down in her heart she resolved that evening to win him back. She came in flushed, and talked brightly all lunch; old Jolyon was there, and he was deceived.

In the afternoon she was overtaken by a desperate fit of sobbing. She strangled the noise against the pillows of her bed, but when at last it ceased she saw in the glass a swollen face with reddened eyes, and violet circles round them. She stayed in the darkened room till dinner time.

All through that silent meal the struggle went on within her.

She looked so shadowy and exhausted that old Jolyon told ‘Sankey’ to countermand the carriage, he would not have her going out. . . . She was to go to bed! She made no resistance. She went up to her room, and sat in the dark. At ten o’clock she rang for her maid.

“Bring some hot water, and go down and tell Mr. Forsyte that I feel perfectly rested. Say that if he’s too tired I can go to the dance by myself.”

The maid looked askance, and June turned on her imperiously. “Go,” she said, “bring the hot water at once!”

Her ball-dress still lay on the sofa, and with a sort of fierce care she arrayed herself, took the flowers in her hand, and went down, her small face carried high under its burden of hair. She could hear old Jolyon in his room as she passed.

Bewildered and vexed, he was dressing. It was past ten, they would not get there till eleven; the girl was mad. But he dared not cross her — the expression of her face at dinner haunted him.

With great ebony brushes he smoothed his hair till it shone like silver under the light; then he, too, came out on the gloomy staircase.

June met him below, and, without a word, they went to the carriage.

When, after that drive which seemed to last for ever, she entered Roger’s drawing-room, she disguised under a mask of resolution a very torment of nervousness and emotion. The feeling of shame at what might be called ‘running after him’ was smothered by the dread that he might not be there, that she might not see him after all, and by that dogged resolve — somehow, she did not know how — to win him back.

The sight of the ballroom, with its gleaming floor, gave her a feeling of joy, of triumph, for she loved dancing, and when dancing she floated, so light was she, like a strenuous, eager little spirit. He would surely ask her to dance, and if he danced with her it would all be as it was before. She looked about her eagerly.

The sight of Bosinney coming with Irene from the conservatory, with that strange look of utter absorption on his face, struck her too suddenly. They had not seen — no one should see — her distress, not even her grandfather.

She put her hand on Jolyon’s arm, and said very low:

“I must go home, Gran; I feel ill.”

He hurried her away, grumbling to himself that he had known how it would be.

To her he said nothing; only when they were once more in the carriage, which by some fortunate chance had lingered near the door, he asked her: “What is it, my darling?”

Feeling her whole slender body shaken by sobs, he was terribly alarmed. She must have Blank to-morrow. He would insist upon it. He could not have her like this. . . . There, there!

June mastered her sobs, and squeezing his hand feverishly, she lay back in her corner, her face muffled in a shawl.

He could only see her eyes, fixed and staring in the dark, but he did not cease to stroke her hand with his thin fingers.

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CHAPTER 18

EVENING AT RICHMOND

Other eyes besides the eyes of June and of Soames had seen 'those two' (as Euphemia had already begun to call them) coming from the conservatory; other eyes had noticed the look on Bosinney's face.

There are moments when Nature reveals the passion hidden beneath the careless calm of her ordinary moods — violent spring flashing white on almond-blossom through the purple clouds; a snowy, moonlit peak, with its single star, soaring up to the passionate blue; or against the flames of sunset, an old yew-tree standing dark guardian of some fiery secret.

There are moments, too, when in a picture-gallery, a work, noted by the casual spectator as '. . . . ..Titian — remarkably fine,' breaks through the defences of some Forsyte better lunched perhaps than his fellows, and holds him spellbound in a kind of ecstasy. There are things, he feels — there are things here which — well, which are things. Something unreasoning, unreasonable, is upon him; when he tries to define it with the precision of a practical man, it eludes him, slips away, as the glow of the wine he has drunk is slipping away, leaving him cross, and conscious of his liver. He feels that he has been extravagant, prodigal of something; virtue has gone out of him. He did not desire this glimpse of what lay under the three stars of his catalogue. God forbid that he should know anything about the forces of Nature! God forbid that he should admit for a moment that there are such things! Once admit that, and where was he? One paid a shilling for entrance, and another for the programme.

The look which June had seen, which other Forsytes had seen, was like the sudden flashing of a candle through a hole in some imaginary canvas, behind which it was being moved — the sudden flaming-out of a vague, erratic glow, shadowy and enticing. It brought home to onlookers the consciousness that dangerous forces were at work. For a moment they noticed it with pleasure, with interest, then felt they must not notice it at all.

It supplied, however, the reason of June's coming so late and disappearing again without dancing, without even shaking hands with her lover. She was ill, it was said, and no wonder.

But here they looked at each other guiltily. They had no desire to spread scandal, no desire to be ill-natured. Who would have? And to outsiders no word was breathed, unwritten law keeping them silent.

Then came the news that June had gone to the seaside with old Jolyon.

He had carried her off to Broadstairs, for which place there was just then a feeling, Yarmouth having lost caste, in spite of Nicholas, and no Forsyte going to the sea without intending to have an air for his money such as would render him bilious in a week. That fatally aristocratic tendency of the first Forsyte to drink Madeira had left his descendants undoubtedly accessible.

So June went to the sea. The family awaited developments; there was nothing else to do.

But how far — how far had 'those two' gone? How far were they going to go? Could they really be going at all? Nothing could surely come of it, for neither of them had any money. At the most a flirtation, ending, as all such attachments should, at the proper time.

Soames' sister, Winifred Dartie, who had imbibed with the breezes of Mayfair — she lived in Green Street — more fashionable principles in regard to matrimonial behaviour than were current, for instance, in Ladbroke Grove, laughed at the idea of there being anything in it. The 'little thing'— Irene was taller than herself, and it was real testimony to the solid worth of a Forsyte that she should always thus be a 'little thing'— the little thing was bored. Why shouldn't she amuse herself? Soames was rather tiring; and as to Mr. Bosinney — only that buffoon George would have called him the Buccaneer — she maintained that he was very chic.

This dictum — that Bosinney was chic — caused quit a sensation. It failed to convince. That he was 'good-looking in a way' they were prepared to admit, but that anyone could call a man with his pronounced cheekbones, curious eyes, and soft felt hats chic was only another instance of Winifred's extravagant way of running after something new.

It was that famous summer when extravagance was fashionable, when the very earth was extravagant, chestnut-trees spread with blossom, and flowers drenched in perfume, as they had never been before; when roses blew in every garden;

and for the swarming stars the nights had hardly space; when every day and all day long the sun, in full armour, swung his brazen shield above the Park, and people did strange things, lunching and dining in the open air. Unprecedented was the tale of cabs and carriages that streamed across the bridges of the shining river, bearing the upper-middle class in thousands to the green glories of Bushey, Richmond, Kew, and Hampton Court. Almost every family with any pretensions to be of the carriage-class paid one visit that year to the horse-chestnuts at Bushey, or took one drive amongst the Spanish chestnuts of Richmond Park. Bowling smoothly, if dustily, along, in a cloud of their own creation, they would stare fashionably at the antlered heads which the great slow deer raised out of a forest of bracken that promised to autumn lovers such cover as was never seen before. And now and again, as the amorous perfume of chestnut flowers and of fern was drifted too near, one would say to the other: “My dear! What a peculiar scent!”

And the lime-flowers that year were of rare prime, near honey-coloured. At the corners of London squares they gave out, as the sun went down, a perfume sweeter than the honey bees had taken — a perfume that stirred a yearning unnamable in the hearts of Forsytes and their peers, taking the cool after dinner in the precincts of those gardens to which they alone had keys.

And that yearning made them linger amidst the dim shapes of flower-beds in the failing daylight, made them turn, and turn, and turn again, as though lovers were waiting for them — waiting for the last light to die away under the shadow of the branches.

Some vague sympathy evoked by the scent of the limes, some sisterly desire to see for herself, some idea of demonstrating the soundness of her dictum that there was ‘nothing in it’; or merely the craving to drive down to Richmond, irresistible that summer, moved the mother of the little Darties (of little Publius, of Imogen, Maud, and Benedict) to write the following note to her sister-in-law:

‘DEAR IRENE, ‘June 30.

‘I hear that Soames is going to Henley tomorrow for the night. I thought it would be great fun if we made up a little party and drove down to, Richmond. Will you ask Mr. Bosinney, and I will get young Flippard.

‘Emily (they called their mother Emily — it was so chic) will lend us the carriage. I will call for you and your young man at seven o’clock.

‘Your affectionate sister, ‘WINIFRED DARTIE.

‘Montague believes the dinner at the Crown and Sceptre to be quite eatable.’

Montague was Dartie’s second and better known name — his first being Moses; for he was nothing if not a man of the world.

Her plan met with more opposition from Providence than so benevolent a scheme deserved. In the first place young Flippard wrote:

‘DEAR Mrs. DARTIE,

‘Awfully sorry. Engaged two deep.

‘Yours, ‘AUGUSTUS FLIPPARD.’

It was late to send into the by-ways and hedges to remedy this misfortune. With the promptitude and conduct of a mother, Winifred fell back on her husband. She had, indeed, the decided but tolerant temperament that goes with a good deal of profile, fair hair, and greenish eyes. She was seldom or never at a loss; or if at a loss, was always able to convert it into a gain.

Dartie, too, was in good feather. Erotic had failed to win the Lancashire Cup. Indeed, that celebrated animal, owned as he was by a pillar of the turf, who had secretly laid many thousands against him, had not even started. The forty-eight hours that followed his scratching were among the darkest in Dartie’s life.

Visions of James haunted him day and night. Black thoughts about Soames mingled with the faintest hopes. On the Friday night he got drunk, so greatly was he affected. But on Saturday morning the true Stock Exchange instinct triumphed within him. Owing some hundreds, which by no possibility could he pay, he went into town and put them all on Concertina for the Saltown Borough Handicap.

As he said to Major Scrotton, with whom he lunched at the Iseeum: “That little Jew boy, Nathans, had given him the tip. He didn’t care a cursh. He wash in — a mucker. If it didn’t come up — well then, damme, the old man would have to pay!"

A bottle of Pol Roger to his own cheek had given him a new contempt for James.

It came up. Concertina was squeezed home by her neck — a terrible squeak! But, as Dartie said: There was nothing like pluck!

He was by no means averse to the expedition to Richmond. He would 'stand' it himself! He cherished an admiration for Irene, and wished to be on more playful terms with her.

At half-past five the Park Lane footman came round to say: Mrs. Forsyte was very sorry, but one of the horses was coughing!

Undaunted by this further blow, Winifred at once despatched little Publius (now aged seven) with the nursery governess to Montpellier Square.

They would go down in hansoms and meet at the Crown and Sceptre at 7.45.

Dartie, on being told, was pleased enough. It was better than going down with your back to the horses! He had no objection to driving down with Irene. He supposed they would pick up the others at Montpellier Square, and swop hansoms there?

Informed that the meet was at the Crown and Sceptre, and that he would have to drive with his wife, he turned sulky, and said it was d —-d slow!

At seven o'clock they started, Dartie offering to bet the driver half-a-crown he didn't do it in the three-quarters of an hour.

Twice only did husband and wife exchange remarks on the way.

Dartie said: "It'll put Master Soames's nose out of joint to hear his wife's been drivin' in a hansom with Master Bosinney!"

Winifred replied: "Don't talk such nonsense, Monty!"

"Nonsense!" repeated Dartie. "You don't know women, my fine lady!"

On the other occasion he merely asked: "How am I looking? A bit puffy about the gills? That fizz old George is so fond of is a windy wine!"

He had been lunching with George Forsyte at the Haversnake.

Bosinney and Irene had arrived before them. They were standing in one of the long French windows overlooking the river.

Windows that summer were open all day long, and all night too, and day and night the scents of flowers and trees came in, the hot scent of parching grass, and the cool scent of the heavy dews.

To the eye of the observant Dartie his two guests did not appear to be making much running, standing there close together, without a word. Bosinney was a hungry-looking creature — not much go about him.

He left them to Winifred, however, and busied himself to order the dinner.

A Forsyte will require good, if not delicate feeding, but a Dartie will tax the resources of a Crown and Sceptre. Living as he does, from hand to mouth, nothing is too good for him to eat; and he will eat it. His drink, too, will need to be carefully provided; there is much drink in this country 'not good enough' for a Dartie; he will have the best. Paying for things vicariously, there is no reason why he should stint himself. To stint yourself is the mark of a fool, not of a Dartie.

The best of everything! No sounder principle on which a man can base his life, whose father-in-law has a very considerable income, and a partiality for his grandchildren.

With his not unable eye Dartie had spotted this weakness in James the very first year after little Publius's arrival (an error); he had profited by his perspicacity. Four little Darties were now a sort of perpetual insurance.

The feature of the feast was unquestionably the red mullet. This delectable fish, brought from a considerable distance in a state of almost perfect preservation, was first fried, then boned, then served in ice, with Madeira punch in place of sauce, according to a recipe known to a few men of the world.

Nothing else calls for remark except the payment of the bill by Dartie.

He had made himself extremely agreeable throughout the meal; his bold, admiring stare seldom abandoning Irene's face and figure. As he was obliged to confess to himself, he got no change out of her — she was cool enough, as cool as her shoulders looked under their veil of creamy lace. He expected to have caught her out in some little game with Bosinney; but not a bit of it, she kept up her end remarkably well. As for that architect chap, he was as glum as a bear with a sore head — Winifred could barely get a word out of him; he ate nothing, but he certainly took his liquor, and his face kept getting whiter, and his eyes looked queer.

It was all very amusing.

For Dartie himself was in capital form, and talked freely, with a certain poignancy, being no fool. He told two or three stories verging on the improper, a concession to the company, for his stories were not used to verging. He proposed Irene's health in a mock speech. Nobody drank it, and Winifred said: "Don't be such a clown, Monty!"

At her suggestion they went after dinner to the public terrace overlooking the river.

"I should like to see the common people making love," she said, "it's such fun!"

There were numbers of them walking in the cool, after the day's heat, and the air was alive with the sound of voices, coarse and loud, or soft as though murmuring secrets.

It was not long before Winifred's better sense — she was the only Forsyte present — secured them an empty bench. They sat down in a row. A heavy tree spread a thick canopy above their heads, and the haze darkened slowly over the river.

Dartie sat at the end, next to him Irene, then Bosinney, then Winifred. There was hardly room for four, and the man of the world could feel Irene's arm crushed against his own; he knew that she could not withdraw it without seeming rude, and this amused him; he devised every now and again a movement that would bring her closer still. He thought: 'That Buccaneer Johnny shan't have it all to himself! It's a pretty tight fit, certainly!'

From far down below on the dark river came drifting the tinkle of a mandoline, and voices singing the old round:

'A boat, a boat, unto the ferry, For we'll go over and be merry; And laugh, and quaff, and drink brown sherry!'

And suddenly the moon appeared, young and tender, floating up on her back from behind a tree; and as though she had breathed, the air was cooler, but down that cooler air came always the warm odour of the limes.

Over his cigar Dartie peered round at Bosinney, who was sitting with his arms crossed, staring straight in front of him, and on his face the look of a man being tortured.

And Dartie shot a glance at the face between, so veiled by the overhanging shadow that it was but like a darker piece of the darkness shaped and breathed on; soft, mysterious, enticing.

A hush had fallen on the noisy terrace, as if all the strollers were thinking secrets too precious to be spoken.

And Dartie thought: 'Women!'

The glow died above the river, the singing ceased; the young moon hid behind a tree, and all was dark. He pressed himself against Irene.

He was not alarmed at the shuddering that ran through the limbs he touched, or at the troubled, scornful look of her eyes. He felt her trying to draw herself away, and smiled.

It must be confessed that the man of the world had drunk quite as much as was good for him.

With thick lips parted under his well-curled moustaches, and his bold eyes aslant upon her, he had the malicious look of a satyr.

Along the pathway of sky between the hedges of the tree tops the stars clustered forth; like mortals beneath, they seemed to shift and swarm and whisper. Then on the terrace the buzz broke out once more, and Dartie thought: 'Ah! he's a poor, hungry-looking devil, that Bosinney!' and again he pressed himself against Irene.

The movement deserved a better success. She rose, and they all followed her.

The man of the world was more than ever determined to see what she was made of. Along the terrace he kept close at her elbow. He had within him much good wine. There was the long drive home, the long drive and the warm dark and the pleasant closeness of the hansom cab — with its insulation from the world devised by some great and good man. That hungry architect chap might drive with his wife — he wished him joy of her! And, conscious that his voice was not too steady, he was careful not to speak; but a smile had become fixed on his thick lips.

They strolled along toward the cabs awaiting them at the farther end. His plan had the merit of all great plans, an almost brutal simplicity he would merely keep at her elbow till she got in, and get in quickly after her.

But when Irene reached the cab she did not get in; she slipped, instead, to the horse's head. Dartie was not at the moment sufficiently master of his legs to follow. She stood stroking the horse's nose, and, to his annoyance, Bosinney was at her side first. She turned and spoke to him rapidly, in a low voice; the words 'That man' reached Dartie. He stood stubbornly by the cab step, waiting for her to come back. He knew a trick worth two of that!

Here, in the lamp-light, his figure (no more than medium height), well squared in its white evening waistcoat, his light overcoat flung over his arm, a pink flower in his button-hole, and on his dark face that look of confident, good-humoured insolence, he was at his best — a thorough man of the world.

Winifred was already in her cab. Dartie reflected that Bosinney would have a poorish time in that cab if he didn't look sharp! Suddenly he received a push which nearly overturned him in the road. Bosinney's voice hissed in his ear: "I am taking Irene back; do you understand?" He saw a face white with passion, and eyes that glared at him like a wild cat's.

"Eh?" he stammered. "What? Not a bit. You take my wife!"

"Get away!" hissed Bosinney —"or I'll throw you into the road!"

Dartie recoiled; he saw as plainly as possible that the fellow meant it. In the space he made Irene had slipped by, her dress brushed his legs. Bosinney stepped in after her.

"Go on!" he heard the Buccaneer cry. The cabman flicked his horse. It sprang forward.

Dartie stood for a moment dumbfounded; then, dashing at the cab where his wife sat, he scrambled in.

"Drive on!" he shouted to the driver, "and don't you lose sight of that fellow in front!"

Seated by his wife's side, he burst into imprecations. Calming himself at last with a supreme effort, he added: "A pretty mess you've made of it, to let the Buccaneer drive home with her; why on earth couldn't you keep hold of him? He's mad with love; any fool can see that!"

He drowned Winifred's rejoinder with fresh calls to the Almighty; nor was it until they reached Barnes that he ceased a Jeremiad, in the course of which he had abused her, her father, her brother, Irene, Bosinney, the name of Forsyte, his own children, and cursed the day when he had ever married.

Winifred, a woman of strong character, let him have his say, at the end of which he lapsed into sulky silence. His angry eyes never deserted the back of that cab, which, like a lost chance, haunted the darkness in front of him.

Fortunately he could not hear Bosinney's passionate pleading — that pleading which the man of the world's conduct had let loose like a flood; he could not see Irene shivering, as though some garment had been torn from her, nor her eyes, black and mournful, like the eyes of a beaten child. He could not hear Bosinney entreating, entreating, always entreating; could not hear her sudden, soft weeping, nor see that poor, hungry-looking devil, awed and trembling, humbly touching her hand.

In Montpellier Square their cabman, following his instructions to the letter, faithfully drew up behind the cab in front. The Darties saw Bosinney spring out, and Irene follow, and hasten up the steps with bent head. She evidently had her key in her hand, for she disappeared at once. It was impossible to tell whether she had turned to speak to Bosinney.

The latter came walking past their cab; both husband and wife had an admirable view of his face in the light of a street lamp. It was working with violent emotion.

"Good-night, Mr. Bosinney!" called Winifred.

Bosinney started, clawed off his hat, and hurried on. He had obviously forgotten their existence.

"There!" said Dartie, "did you see the beast's face? What did I say? Fine games!" He improved the occasion.

There had so clearly been a crisis in the cab that Winifred was unable to defend her theory.

She said: "I shall say nothing about it. I don't see any use in making a fuss!"

With that view Dartie at once concurred; looking upon James as a private preserve, he disapproved of his being disturbed by the troubles of others.

"Quite right," he said; "let Soames look after himself. He's jolly well able to!"

Thus speaking, the Darties entered their habitat in Green Street, the rent of which was paid by James, and sought a well-earned rest. The hour was midnight, and no Forsytes remained abroad in the streets to spy out Bosinney's wanderings; to see him return and stand against the rails of the Square garden, back from the glow of the street lamp; to see him stand there in the shadow of trees, watching the house where in the dark was hidden she whom he would have given the world to see for a single minute — she who was now to him the breath of the lime-trees, the meaning of the light and the darkness, the very beating of his own heart.

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Chapter 19

Diagnosis of a Forsyte

It is in the nature of a Forsyte to be ignorant that he is a Forsyte; but young Jolyon was well aware of being one. He had not known it till after the decisive step which had made him an outcast; since then the knowledge had been with him continually. He felt it throughout his alliance, throughout all his dealings with his second wife, who was emphatically not a Forsyte.

He knew that if he had not possessed in great measure the eye for what he wanted, the tenacity to hold on to it, the sense of the folly of wasting that for which he had given so big a price — in other words, the 'sense of property' he could never have retained her (perhaps never would have desired to retain her) with him through all the financial troubles, slights, and misconstructions of those fifteen years; never have induced her to marry him on the death of his first wife; never have lived it all through, and come up, as it were, thin, but smiling.

He was one of those men who, seated cross-legged like miniature Chinese idols in the cages of their own hearts, are ever smiling at themselves a doubting smile. Not that this smile, so intimate and eternal, interfered with his actions, which, like his chin and his temperament, were quite a peculiar blend of softness and determination.

He was conscious, too, of being a Forsyte in his work, that painting of water-colours to which he devoted so much energy, always with an eye on himself, as though he could not take so unpractical a pursuit quite seriously, and always with a certain queer uneasiness that he did not make more money at it.

It was, then, this consciousness of what it meant to be a Forsyte, that made him receive the following letter from old Jolyon, with a mixture of sympathy and disgust:

'SHELDRAKE HOUSE,

'BROADSTAIRS,

'July 1. 'MY DEAR JO,'

(The Dad's handwriting had altered very little in the thirty odd years that he remembered it.)

'We have been here now a fortnight, and have had good weather on the whole. The air is bracing, but my liver is out of order, and I shall be glad enough to get back to town. I cannot say much for June, her health and spirits are very indifferent, and I don't see what is to come of it. She says nothing, but it is clear that she is harping on this engagement, which is an engagement and no engagement, and — goodness knows what. I have grave doubts whether she ought to be allowed to return to London in the present state of affairs, but she is so self-willed that she might take it into her head to come up at any moment. The fact is someone ought to speak to Bosinney and ascertain what he means. I'm afraid of this myself, for I should certainly rap him over the knuckles, but I thought that you, knowing him at the Club, might put in a word, and get to ascertain what the fellow is about. You will of course in no way commit June. I shall be glad to hear from you in the course of a few days whether you have succeeded in gaining any information. The situation is very distressing to me, I worry about it at night.

With my love to Jolly and Holly. 'I am,

'Your affect. father,
'JOLYON FORSYTE.'

Young Jolyon pondered this letter so long and seriously that his wife noticed his preoccupation, and asked him what was the matter. He replied: "Nothing."

It was a fixed principle with him never to allude to June. She might take alarm, he did not know what she might think; he hastened, therefore, to banish from his manner all traces of absorption, but in this he was about as successful as his father would have been, for he had inherited all old Jolyon's transparency in matters of domestic finesse; and young Mrs. Jolyon, busying herself over the affairs of the house, went about with tightened lips, stealing at him unfathomable looks.

He started for the Club in the afternoon with the letter in his pocket, and without having made up his mind.

To sound a man as to 'his intentions' was peculiarly unpleasant to him; nor did his own anomalous position diminish this unpleasantness. It was so like his family, so like all the people they knew and mixed with, to enforce what they called their rights over a man, to bring him up to the mark; so like them to carry their business principles into their private relations.

And how that phrase in the letter —‘You will, of course, in no way commit June’— gave the whole thing away.

Yet the letter, with the personal grievance, the concern for June, the ‘rap over the knuckles,’ was all so natural. No wonder his father wanted to know what Bosinney meant, no wonder he was angry.

It was difficult to refuse! But why give the thing to him to do? That was surely quite unbecoming; but so long as a Forsyte got what he was after, he was not too particular about the means, provided appearances were saved.

How should he set about it, or how refuse? Both seemed impossible. So, young Jolyon!

He arrived at the Club at three o’clock, and the first person he saw was Bosinney himself, seated in a corner, staring out of the window.

Young Jolyon sat down not far off, and began nervously to reconsider his position. He looked covertly at Bosinney sitting there unconscious. He did not know him very well, and studied him attentively for perhaps the first time; an unusual looking man, unlike in dress, face, and manner to most of the other members of the Club — young Jolyon himself, however different he had become in mood and temper, had always retained the neat reticence of Forsyte appearance. He alone among Forsytes was ignorant of Bosinney’s nickname. The man was unusual, not eccentric, but unusual; he looked worn, too, haggard, hollow in the cheeks beneath those broad, high cheekbones, though without any appearance of ill-health, for he was strongly built, with curly hair that seemed to show all the vitality of a fine constitution.

Something in his face and attitude touched young Jolyon. He knew what suffering was like, and this man looked as if he were suffering.

He got up and touched his arm.

Bosinney started, but exhibited no sign of embarrassment on seeing who it was.

Young Jolyon sat down.

“I haven’t seen you for a long time,” he said. “How are you getting on with my cousin’s house?”

“It’ll be finished in about a week.”

“I congratulate you!”

“Thanks — I don’t know that it’s much of a subject for congratulation.”

“No?” queried young Jolyon; “I should have thought you’d be glad to get a long job like that off your hands; but I suppose you feel it much as I do when I part with a picture — a sort of child?”

He looked kindly at Bosinney.

“Yes,” said the latter more cordially, “it goes out from you and there’s an end of it. I didn’t know you painted.”

“Only water-colours; I can’t say I believe in my work.”

“Don’t believe in it? There — how can you do it? Work’s no use unless you believe in it!”

“Good,” said young Jolyon; “it’s exactly what I’ve always said. By-the-bye, have you noticed that whenever one says ‘Good,’ one always adds ‘it’s exactly what I’ve always said’! But if you ask me how I do it, I answer, because I’m a Forsyte.”

“A Forsyte! I never thought of you as one!”

“A Forsyte,” replied young Jolyon, “is not an uncommon animal. There are hundreds among the members of this Club. Hundreds out there in the streets; you meet them wherever you go!”

“And how do you tell them, may I ask?” said Bosinney.

“By their sense of property. A Forsyte takes a practical — one might say a commonsense — view of things, and a practical view of things is based fundamentally on a sense of property. A Forsyte, you will notice, never gives himself away.”

“Joking?”

Young Jolyon’s eye twinkled.

“Not much. As a Forsyte myself, I have no business to talk. But I’m a kind of thoroughbred mongrel; now, there’s no mistaking you: You’re as different from me as I am from my Uncle James, who is the perfect specimen of a Forsyte. His sense of property is extreme, while you have practically none. Without me in between, you would seem like a different species. I'm the missing link. We are, of course, all of us the slaves of property, and I admit that it's a question of degree, but what I call a 'Forsyte' is a man who is decidedly more than less a slave of property. He knows a good thing, he knows a safe thing, and his grip on property — it doesn't matter whether it be wives, houses, money, or reputation — is his hall-mark."

"Ah!" murmured Bosinney. "You should patent the word."

"I should like," said young Jolyon, "to lecture on it:

"Properties and quality of a Forsyte: This little animal, disturbed by the ridicule of his own sort, is unaffected in his motions by the laughter of strange creatures (you or I). Hereditarily disposed to myopia, he recognises only the persons of his own species, amongst which he passes an existence of competitive tranquillity."

"You talk of them," said Bosinney, "as if they were half England."

"They are," repeated young Jolyon, "half England, and the better half, too, the safe half, the three per cent. half, the half that counts. It's their wealth and security that makes everything possible; makes your art possible, makes literature, science, even religion, possible. Without Forsytes, who believe in none of these things, and habitats but turn them all to use, where should we be? My dear sir, the Forsytes are the middlemen, the commercials, the pillars of society, the cornerstones of convention; everything that is admirable!"

"I don't know whether I catch your drift," said Bosinney, "but I fancy there are plenty of Forsytes, as you call them, in my profession."

"Certainly," replied young Jolyon. "The great majority of architects, painters, or writers have no principles, like any other Forsytes. Art, literature, religion, survive by virtue of the few cranks who really believe in such things, and the many Forsytes who make a commercial use of them. At a low estimate, three-fourths of our Royal Academicians are Forsytes, seven-eighths of our novelists, a large proportion of the press. Of science I can't speak; they are magnificently represented in religion; in the House of Commons perhaps more numerous than anywhere; the aristocracy speaks for itself. But I'm not laughing. It is dangerous to go against the majority and what a majority!" He fixed his eyes on Bosinney: "It's dangerous to let anything carry you away — a house, a picture, a — woman!"

They looked at each other. — And, as though he had done that which no Forsyte did — given himself away, young Jolyon drew into his shell. Bosinney broke the silence.

"Why do you take your own people as the type?" said he.

"My people," replied young Jolyon, "are not very extreme, and they have their own private peculiarities, like every other family, but they possess in a remarkable degree those two qualities which are the real tests of a Forsyte — the power of never being able to give yourself up to anything soul and body, and the 'sense of property'."

Bosinney smiled: "How about the big one, for instance?"

"Do you mean Swithin?" asked young Jolyon. "Ah! in Swithin there's something primeval still. The town and middle-class life haven't digested him yet. All the old centuries of farm work and brute force have settled in him, and there they've stuck, for all he's so distinguished."

Bosinney seemed to ponder. "Well, you've hit your cousin Soames off to the life," he said suddenly. "He'll never blow his brains out."

Young Jolyon shot at him a penetrating glance.

"No," he said; "he won't. That's why he's to be reckoned with. Look out for their grip! It's easy to laugh, but don't mistake me. It doesn't do to despise a Forsyte; it doesn't do to disregard them!"

"Yet you've done it yourself!"

Young Jolyon acknowledged the hit by losing his smile.

"You forget," he said with a queer pride, "I can hold on, too — I'm a Forsyte myself. We're all in the path of great forces. The man who leaves the shelter of the wall — well — you know what I mean. I don't," he ended very low, as though uttering a threat, "recommend every man to-go-my-way. It depends."

The colour rushed into Bosinney's face, but soon receded, leaving it sallow-brown as before. He gave a short laugh, that left his lips fixed in a queer, fierce smile; his eyes mocked young Jolyon.

"Thanks," he said. "It's deuced kind of you. But you're not the only chaps that can hold on." He rose.

Young Jolyon looked after him as he walked away, and, resting his head on his hand, sighed.

In the drowsy, almost empty room the only sounds were the rustle of newspapers, the scraping of matches being struck. He stayed a long time without moving, living over again those days when he, too, had sat long hours watching the clock, waiting for the minutes to pass — long hours full of the torments of uncertainty, and of a fierce, sweet aching; and the slow, delicious agony of that season came back to him with its old poignancy. The sight of Bosinney, with his haggard face, and his restless eyes always wandering to the clock, had roused in him a pity, with which was mingled strange, irresistible envy.

He knew the signs so well. Whither was he going — to what sort of fate? What kind of woman was it who was drawing him to her by that magnetic force which no consideration of honour, no principle, no interest could withstand; from which the only escape was flight.

Flight! But why should Bosinney fly? A man fled when he was in danger of destroying hearth and home, when there were children, when he felt himself trampling down ideals, breaking something. But here, so he had heard, it was all broken to his hand.

He himself had not fled, nor would he fly if it were all to come over again. Yet he had gone further than Bosinney, had broken up his own unhappy home, not someone else's: And the old saying came back to him: 'A man's fate lies in his own heart.'

In his own heart! The proof of the pudding was in the eating — Bosinney had still to eat his pudding.

His thoughts passed to the woman, the woman whom he did not know, but the outline of whose story he had heard.

An unhappy marriage! No ill-treatment — only that indefinable malaise, that terrible blight which killed all sweetness under Heaven; and so from day to day, from night to night, from week to week, from year to year, till death should end it.

But young Jolyon, the bitterness of whose own feelings time had assuaged, saw Soames' side of the question too. Whence should a man like his cousin, saturated with all the prejudices and beliefs of his class, draw the insight or inspiration necessary to break up this life? It was a question of imagination, of projecting himself into the future beyond the unpleasant gossip, sneers, and tattle that followed on such separations, beyond the passing pangs that the lack of the sight of her would cause, beyond the grave disapproval of the worthy. But few men, and especially few men of Soames' class, had imagination enough for that. A deal of mortals in this world, and not enough imagination to go round! And sweet Heaven, what a difference between theory and practice; many a man, perhaps even Soames, held chivalrous views on such matters, who when the shoe pinched found a distinguishing factor that made of himself an exception.

Then, too, he distrusted his judgment. He had been through the experience himself, had tasted too the dregs the bitterness of an unhappy marriage, and how could he take the wide and dispassionate view of those who had never been within sound of the battle? His evidence was too first-hand — like the evidence on military matters of a soldier who has been through much active service, against that of civilians who have not suffered the disadvantage of seeing things too close. Most people would consider such a marriage as that of Soames and Irene quite fairly successful; he had money, she had beauty; it was a case for compromise. There was no reason why they should not jog along, even if they hated each other. It would not matter if they went their own ways a little so long as the decencies were observed — the sanctity of the marriage tie, of the common home, respected. Half the marriages of the upper classes were conducted on these lines: Do not offend the susceptibilities of Society; do not offend the susceptibilities of the Church. To avoid offending these is worth the sacrifice of any private feelings. The advantages of the stable home are visible, tangible, so many pieces of property; there is no risk in the statu quo. To break up a home is at the best a dangerous experiment, and selfish into the bargain.

This was the case for the defence, and young Jolyon sighed.

'The core of it all,' he thought, 'is property, but there are many people who would not like it put that way. To them it is "the sanctity of the marriage tie"; but the sanctity of the marriage tie is dependent on the sanctity of the family, and the sanctity of the family is dependent on the sanctity of property. And yet I imagine all these people are followers of One who never owned anything. It is curious!

And again young Jolyon sighed.

'Am I going on my way home to ask any poor devils I meet to share my dinner, which will then be too little for myself, or, at all events, for my wife, who is necessary to my health and happiness? It may be that after all Soames does well to exercise his rights and support by his practice the sacred principle of property which benefits us all, with the exception of those who suffer by the process.’

And so he left his chair, threaded his way through the maze of seats, took his hat, and languidly up the hot streets crowded with carriages, reeking with dusty odours, wended his way home.

Before reaching Wistaria Avenue he removed old Jolyon’s letter from his pocket, and tearing it carefully into tiny pieces, scattered them in the dust of the road.

He let himself in with his key, and called his wife’s name. But she had gone out, taking Jolly and Holly, and the house was empty; alone in the garden the dog Balthasar lay in the shade snapping at flies.

Young Jolyon took his seat there, too, under the pear-tree that bore no fruit.

❦

Chapter 20

Bosinney on Parole

The day after the evening at Richmond Soames returned from Henley by a morning train. Not constitutionally interested in amphibious sports, his visit had been one of business rather than pleasure, a client of some importance having asked him down.

He went straight to the City, but finding things slack, he left at three o'clock, glad of this chance to get home quietly. Irene did not expect him. Not that he had any desire to spy on her actions, but there was no harm in thus unexpectedly surveying the scene.

After changing to Park clothes he went into the drawing-room. She was sitting idly in the corner of the sofa, her favourite seat; and there were circles under her eyes, as though she had not slept.

He asked: "How is it you're in? Are you expecting somebody?"

"Yes that is, not particularly."

"Who?"

"Mr. Bosinney said he might come."

"Bosinney. He ought to be at work."

To this she made no answer.

"Well," said Soames, "I want you to come out to the Stores with me, and after that we'll go to the Park."

"I don't want to go out; I have a headache."

Soames replied: "If ever I want you to do anything, you've always got a headache. It'll do you good to come and sit under the trees."

She did not answer.

Soames was silent for some minutes; at last he said: "I don't know what your idea of a wife's duty is. I never have known!"

He had not expected her to reply, but she did.

"I have tried to do what you want; it's not my fault that I haven't been able to put my heart into it."

"Whose fault is it, then?" He watched her askance.

"Before we were married you promised to let me go if our marriage was not a success. Is it a success?"

Soames frowned.

"Success," he stammered —"it would be a success if you behaved yourself properly!"

"I have tried," said Irene. "Will you let me go?"

Soames turned away. Secretly alarmed, he took refuge in bluster.

"Let you go? You don't know what you're talking about. Let you go? How can I let you go? We're married, aren't we? Then, what are you talking about? For God's sake, don't let's have any of this sort of nonsense! Get your hat on, and come and sit in the Park."

"Then, you won't let me go?"

He felt her eyes resting on him with a strange, touching look.

"Let you go!" he said; "and what on earth would you do with yourself if I did? You've got no money!"

"I could manage somehow."

He took a swift turn up and down the room; then came and stood before her.

"Understand," he said, "once and for all, I won't have you say this sort of thing. Go and get your hat on!"

She did not move.

"I suppose," said Soames, "you don't want to miss Bosinney if he comes!"

Irene got up slowly and left the room. She came down with her hat on.

They went out.

In the Park, the motley hour of mid-afternoon, when foreigners and other pathetic folk drive, thinking themselves to be in fashion, had passed; the right, the proper, hour had come, was nearly gone, before Soames and Irene seated themselves under the Achilles statue.

It was some time since he had enjoyed her company in the Park. That was one of the past delights of the first two seasons of his married life, when to feel himself the possessor of this gracious creature before all London had been his greatest, though secret, pride. How many afternoons had he not sat beside her, extremely neat, with light grey gloves and faint, supercilious smile, nodding to acquaintances, and now and again removing his hat.

His light grey gloves were still on his hands, and on his lips his smile sardonic, but where the feeling in his heart?

The seats were emptying fast, but still he kept her there, silent and pale, as though to work out a secret punishment. Once or twice he made some comment, and she bent her head, or answered "Yes" with a tired smile.

Along the rails a man was walking so fast that people stared after him when he passed.

"Look at that ass!" said Soames; "he must be mad to walk like that in this heat!"

He turned; Irene had made a rapid movement.

"Hallo!" he said: "it's our friend the Buccaneer!"

And he sat still, with his sneering smile, conscious that Irene was sitting still, and smiling too.

"Will she bow to him?" he thought.

But she made no sign.

Bosinney reached the end of the rails, and came walking back amongst the chairs, quartering his ground like a pointer. When he saw them he stopped dead, and raised his hat.

The smile never left Soames' face; he also took off his hat.

Bosinney came up, looking exhausted, like a man after hard physical exercise; the sweat stood in drops on his brow, and Soames' smile seemed to say: "You've had a trying time, my friend . . . . ..What are you doing in the Park?" he asked. "We thought you despised such frivolity!"

Bosinney did not seem to hear; he made his answer to Irene: "I've been round to your place; I hoped I should find you in."

Somebody tapped Soames on the back, and spoke to him; and in the exchange of those platitudes over his shoulder, he missed her answer, and took a resolution.

"We're just going in," he said to Bosinney; "you'd better come back to dinner with us." Into that invitation he put a strange bravado, a stranger pathos: "You, can't deceive me," his look and voice seemed saying, "but see — I trust you — I'm not afraid of you!"

They started back to Montpellier Square together, Irene between them. In the crowded streets Soames went on in front. He did not listen to their conversation; the strange resolution of trustfulness he had taken seemed to animate even his secret conduct. Like a gambler, he said to himself: 'It's a card I dare not throw away — I must play it for what it's worth. I have not too many chances.'

He dressed slowly, heard her leave her room and go downstairs, and, for full five minutes after, dawdled about in his dressing-room. Then he went down, purposely shutting the door loudly to show that he was coming. He found them standing by the hearth, perhaps talking, perhaps not; he could not say.

He played his part out in the farce, the long evening through — his manner to his guest more friendly than it had ever been before; and when at last Bosinney went, he said: "You must come again soon; Irene likes to have you to talk about the house!" Again his voice had the strange bravado and the stranger pathos; but his hand was cold as ice.

Loyal to his resolution, he turned away from their parting, turned away from his wife as she stood under the hanging lamp to say good-night — away from the sight of her golden head shining so under the light, of her smiling mournful lips; away from the sight of Bosinney's eyes looking at her, so like a dog's looking at its master.

And he went to bed with the certainty that Bosinney was in love with his wife.

The summer night was hot, so hot and still that through every opened window came in but hotter air. For long hours he lay listening to her breathing.

She could sleep, but he must lie awake. And, lying awake, he hardened himself to play the part of the serene and trusting husband.

In the small hours he slipped out of bed, and passing into his dressing-room, leaned by the open window.

He could hardly breathe.

A night four years ago came back to him — the night but one before his marriage; as hot and stifling as this.

He remembered how he had lain in a long cane chair in the window of his sitting-room off Victoria Street. Down below in a side street a man had banged at a door, a woman had cried out; he remembered, as though it were now, the sound of the scuffle, the slam of the door, the dead silence that followed. And then the early water-cart, cleansing the reek of the streets, had approached through the strange-seeming, useless lamp-light; he seemed to hear again its rumble, nearer and nearer, till it passed and slowly died away.

He leaned far out of the dressing-room window over the little court below, and saw the first light spread. The outlines of dark walls and roofs were blurred for a moment, then came out sharper than before.

He remembered how that other night he had watched the lamps paling all the length of Victoria Street; how he had hurried on his clothes and gone down into the street, down past houses and squares, to the street where she was staying, and there had stood and looked at the front of the little house, as still and grey as the face of a dead man.

And suddenly it shot through his mind; like a sick man's fancy: What's he doing? — that fellow who haunts me, who was here this evening, who's in love with my wife — prowling out there, perhaps, looking for her as I know he was looking for her this afternoon; watching my house now, for all I can tell!

He stole across the landing to the front of the house, stealthily drew aside a blind, and raised a window.

The grey light clung about the trees of the square, as though Night, like a great downy moth, had brushed them with her wings. The lamps were still alight, all pale, but not a soul stirred — no living thing in sight.

Yet suddenly, very faint, far off in the deathly stillness, he heard a cry writhing, like the voice of some wandering soul barred out of heaven, and crying for its happiness. There it was again — again! Soames shut the window, shuddering.

Then he thought: 'Ah! it's only the peacocks, across the water.'

❦

CHAPTER 21

JUNE PAYS SOME CALLS

Jolyon stood in the narrow hall at Broadstairs, inhaling that odour of oilcloth and herrings which permeates all respectable seaside lodging-houses. On a chair — a shiny leather chair, displaying its horsehair through a hole in the top left-hand corner — stood a black despatch case. This he was filling with papers, with the Times, and a bottle of Eau-de Cologne. He had meetings that day of the 'Globular Gold Concessions' and the 'New Colliery Company, Limited,' to which he was going up, for he never missed a Board; to 'miss a Board' would be one more piece of evidence that he was growing old, and this his jealous Forsyte spirit could not bear.

His eyes, as he filled that black despatch case, looked as if at any moment they might blaze up with anger. So gleams the eye of a schoolboy, baited by a ring of his companions; but he controls himself, deterred by the fearful odds against him. And old Jolyon controlled himself, keeping down, with his masterful restraint now slowly wearing out, the irritation fostered in him by the conditions of his life.

He had received from his son an unpractical letter, in which by rambling generalities the boy seemed trying to get out of answering a plain question. 'I've seen Bosinney,' he said; 'he is not a criminal. The more I see of people the more I am convinced that they are never good or bad — merely comic, or pathetic. You probably don't agree with me!'

Old Jolyon did not; he considered it cynical to so express oneself; he had not yet reached that point of old age when even Forsytes, bereft of those illusions and principles which they have cherished carefully for practical purposes but never believed in, bereft of all corporeal enjoyment, stricken to the very heart by having nothing left to hope for — break through the barriers of reserve and say things they would never have believed themselves capable of saying.

Perhaps he did not believe in 'goodness' and 'badness' any more than his son; but as he would have said: He didn't know — couldn't tell; there might be something in it; and why, by an unnecessary expression of disbelief, deprive yourself of possible advantage?

Accustomed to spend his holidays among the mountains, though (like a true Forsyte) he had never attempted anything too adventurous or too foolhardy, he had been passionately fond of them. And when the wonderful view (mentioned in Baedeker —'fatiguing but repaying')— was disclosed to him after the effort of the climb, he had doubtless felt the existence of some great, dignified principle crowning the chaotic strivings, the petty precipices, and ironic little dark chasms of life. This was as near to religion, perhaps, as his practical spirit had ever gone.

But it was many years since he had been to the mountains. He had taken June there two seasons running, after his wife died, and had realized bitterly that his walking days were over.

To that old mountain — given confidence in a supreme order of things he had long been a stranger.

He knew himself to be old, yet he felt young; and this troubled him. It troubled and puzzled him, too, to think that he, who had always been so careful, should be father and grandfather to such as seemed born to disaster. He had nothing to say against Jo — who could say anything against the boy, an amiable chap? — but his position was deplorable, and this business of June's nearly as bad. It seemed like a fatality, and a fatality was one of those things no man of his character could either understand or put up with.

In writing to his son he did not really hope that anything would come of it. Since the ball at Roger's he had seen too clearly how the land lay — he could put two and two together quicker than most men — and, with the example of his own son before his eyes, knew better than any Forsyte of them all that the pale flame singes men's wings whether they will or no.

In the days before June's engagement, when she and Mrs. Soames were always together, he had seen enough of Irene to feel the spell she cast over men. She was not a flirt, not even a coquette — words dear to the heart of his generation, which loved to define things by a good, broad, inadequate word — but she was dangerous. He could not say why. Tell him of a quality innate in some women — a seductive power beyond their own control! He would but answer: 'Humbug!' She was dangerous, and there was an end of it. He wanted to close his eyes to that affair. If it was, it was; he did not want to hear any more about it — he only wanted to save June's position and her peace of mind. He still hoped she might once more become a comfort to himself.

And so he had written. He got little enough out of the answer. As to what young Jolyon had made of the interview, there was practically only the queer sentence: ‘I gather that he’s in the stream.’ The stream! What stream? What was this new-fangled way of talking?

He sighed, and folded the last of the papers under the flap of the bag; he knew well enough what was meant.

June came out of the dining-room, and helped him on with his summer coat. From her costume, and the expression of her little resolute face, he saw at once what was coming.

“I’m going with you,” she said.

“Nonsense, my dear; I go straight into the City. I can’t have you racketting about!”

“I must see old Mrs. Smeech.”

“Oh, your precious ‘lame ducks!” grumbled out old Jolyon. He did not believe her excuse, but ceased his opposition. There was no doing anything with that pertinacity of hers.

At Victoria he put her into the carriage which had been ordered for himself — a characteristic action, for he had no petty selfishnesses.

“Now, don’t you go tiring yourself, my darling,” he said, and took a cab on into the city.

June went first to a back-street in Paddington, where Mrs. Smeech, her ‘lame duck,’ lived — an aged person, connected with the charring interest; but after half an hour spent in hearing her habitually lamentable recital, and dragooning her into temporary comfort, she went on to Stanhope Gate. The great house was closed and dark.

She had decided to learn something at all costs. It was better to face the worst, and have it over. And this was her plan: To go first to Phil’s aunt, Mrs. Baynes, and, failing information there, to Irene herself. She had no clear notion of what she would gain by these visits.

At three o’clock she was in Lowndes Square. With a woman’s instinct when trouble is to be faced, she had put on her best frock, and went to the battle with a glance as courageous as old Jolyon’s itself. Her tremors had passed into eagerness.

Mrs. Baynes, Bosinney’s aunt (Louisa was her name), was in her kitchen when June was announced, organizing the cook, for she was an excellent housewife, and, as Baynes always said, there was ‘a lot in a good dinner.’ He did his best work after dinner. It was Baynes who built that remarkably fine row of tall crimson houses in Kensington which compete with so many others for the title of ‘the ugliest in London.’

On hearing June’s name, she went hurriedly to her bedroom, and, taking two large bracelets from a red morocco case in a locked drawer, put them on her white wrists — for she possessed in a remarkable degree that ‘sense of property,’ which, as we know, is the touchstone of Forsyteism, and the foundation of good morality.

Her figure, of medium height and broad build, with a tendency to embonpoint, was reflected by the mirror of her whitewood wardrobe, in a gown made under her own organization, of one of those half-tints, reminiscent of the distempered walls of corridors in large hotels. She raised her hands to her hair, which she wore a la Princesse de Galles, and touched it here and there, settling it more firmly on her head, and her eyes were full of an unconscious realism, as though she were looking in the face one of life’s sordid facts, and making the best of it. In youth her cheeks had been of cream and roses, but they were mottled now by middle-age, and again that hard, ugly directness came into her eyes as she dabbed a powder-puff across her forehead. Putting the puff down, she stood quite still before the glass, arranging a smile over her high, important nose, her, chin, (never large, and now growing smaller with the increase of her neck), her thin-lipped, down-drooping mouth. Quickly, not to lose the effect, she grasped her skirts strongly in both hands, and went downstairs.

She had been hoping for this visit for some time past. Whispers had reached her that things were not all right between her nephew and his fiancee. Neither of them had been near her for weeks. She had asked Phil to dinner many times; his invariable answer had been ‘Too busy.’

Her instinct was alarmed, and the instinct in such matters of this excellent woman was keen. She ought to have been a Forsyte; in young Jolyon’s sense of the word, she certainly had that privilege, and merits description as such.

She had married off her three daughters in a way that people said was beyond their deserts, for they had the professional plainness only to be found, as a rule, among the female kind of the more legal callings. Her name was upon the committees of numberless charities connected with the Church-dances, theatricals, or bazaars — and she never lent her name unless sure beforehand that everything had been thoroughly organized.

She believed, as she often said, in putting things on a commercial basis; the proper function of the Church, of charity, indeed, of everything, was to strengthen the fabric of ‘Society.’ Individual action, therefore, she considered immoral. Organization was the only thing, for by organization alone could you feel sure that you were getting a return for your money. Organization — and again, organization! And there is no doubt that she was what old Jolyon called her —“a ‘dab’ at that”— he went further, he called her “a humbug.”

The enterprises to which she lent her name were organized so admirably that by the time the takings were handed over, they were indeed skim milk divested of all cream of human kindness. But as she often justly remarked, sentiment was to be deprecated. She was, in fact, a little academic.

This great and good woman, so highly thought of in ecclesiastical circles, was one of the principal priestesses in the temple of Forsyteism, keeping alive day and night a sacred flame to the God of Property, whose altar is inscribed with those inspiring words: ‘Nothing for nothing, and really remarkably little for sixpence.’

When she entered a room it was felt that something substantial had come in, which was probably the reason of her popularity as a patroness. People liked something substantial when they had paid money for it; and they would look at her — surrounded by her staff in charity ballrooms, with her high nose and her broad, square figure, attired in an uniform covered with sequins — as though she were a general.

The only thing against her was that she had not a double name. She was a power in upper middle-class society, with its hundred sets and circles, all intersecting on the common battlefield of charity functions, and on that battlefield brushing skirts so pleasantly with the skirts of Society with the capital ‘S.’ She was a power in society with the smaller ‘s,’ that larger, more significant, and more powerful body, where the commercially Christian institutions, maxims, and ‘principle,’ which Mrs. Baynes embodied, were real life-blood, circulating freely, real business currency, not merely the sterilized imitation that flowed in the veins of smaller Society with the larger ‘S.’ People who knew her felt her to be sound — a sound woman, who never gave herself away, nor anything else, if she could possibly help it.

She had been on the worst sort of terms with Bosinney’s father, who had not infrequently made her the object of an unpardonable ridicule. She alluded to him now that he was gone as her ‘poor, dear, irreverend brother.’

She greeted June with the careful effusion of which she was a mistress, a little afraid of her as far as a woman of her eminence in the commercial and Christian world could be afraid — for so slight a girl June had a great dignity, the fearlessness of her eyes gave her that. And Mrs. Baynes, too, shrewdly recognized that behind the uncompromising frankness of June’s manner there was much of the Forsyte. If the girl had been merely frank and courageous, Mrs. Baynes would have thought her ‘cranky,’ and despised her; if she had been merely a Forsyte, like Francie — let us say — she would have patronized her from sheer weight of metal; but June, small though she was — Mrs. Baynes habitually admired quantity — gave her an uneasy feeling; and she placed her in a chair opposite the light.

There was another reason for her respect which Mrs. Baynes, too good a churchwoman to be worldly, would have been the last to admit — she often heard her husband describe old Jolyon as extremely well off, and was biassed towards his granddaughter for the soundest of all reasons. To-day she felt the emotion with which we read a novel describing a hero and an inheritance, nervously anxious lest, by some frightful lapse of the novelist, the young man should be left without it at the end.

Her manner was warm; she had never seen so clearly before how distinguished and desirable a girl this was. She asked after old Jolyon’s health. A wonderful man for his age; so upright, and young looking, and how old was he? Eighty-one! She would never have thought it! They were at the sea! Very nice for them; she supposed June heard from Phil every day? Her light grey eyes became more prominent as she asked this question; but the girl met the glance without flinching.

“No,” she said, “he never writes!”

Mrs. Baynes’s eyes dropped; they had no intention of doing so, but they did. They recovered immediately.

“Of course not. That’s Phil all over — he was always like that!”

“Was he?” said June.

The brevity of the answer caused Mrs. Baynes’s bright smile a moment’s hesitation; she disguised it by a quick movement, and spreading her skirts afresh, said: “Why, my dear — he’s quite the most harum-scarum person; one never pays the slightest attention to what he does!”

The conviction came suddenly to June that she was wasting her time; even were she to put a question point-blank, she would never get anything out of this woman.

‘Do you see him?’ she asked, her face crimsoning.

The perspiration broke out on Mrs. Baynes’ forehead beneath the powder.

“Oh, yes! I don’t remember when he was here last — indeed, we haven’t seen much of him lately. He’s so busy with your cousin’s house; I’m told it’ll be finished directly. We must organize a little dinner to celebrate the event; do come and stay the night with us!”

“Thank you,” said June. Again she thought: ‘I’m only wasting my time. This woman will tell me nothing.’

She got up to go. A change came over Mrs. Baynes. She rose too; her lips twitched, she fidgeted her hands. Something was evidently very wrong, and she did not dare to ask this girl, who stood there, a slim, straight little figure, with her decided face, her set jaw, and resentful eyes. She was not accustomed to be afraid of asking question’s — all organization was based on the asking of questions!

But the issue was so grave that her nerve, normally strong, was fairly shaken; only that morning her husband had said: “Old Mr. Forsyte must be worth well over a hundred thousand pounds!”

And this girl stood there, holding out her hand — holding out her hand!

The chance might be slipping away — she couldn’t tell — the chance of keeping her in the family, and yet she dared not speak.

Her eyes followed June to the door.

It closed.

Then with an exclamation Mrs. Baynes ran forward, wobbling her bulky frame from side to side, and opened it again.

Too late! She heard the front door click, and stood still, an expression of real anger and mortification on her face.

June went along the Square with her bird-like quickness. She detested that woman now whom in happier days she had been accustomed to think so kind. Was she always to be put off thus, and forced to undergo this torturing suspense?

She would go to Phil himself, and ask him what he meant. She had the right to know. She hurried on down Sloane Street till she came to Bosinney’s number. Passing the swing-door at the bottom, she ran up the stairs, her heart thumping painfully.

At the top of the third flight she paused for breath, and holding on to the bannisters, stood listening. No sound came from above.

With a very white face she mounted the last flight. She saw the door, with his name on the plate. And the resolution that had brought her so far evaporated.

The full meaning of her conduct came to her. She felt hot all over; the palms of her hands were moist beneath the thin silk covering of her gloves.

She drew back to the stairs, but did not descend. Leaning against the rail she tried to get rid of a feeling of being choked; and she gazed at the door with a sort of dreadful courage. No! she refused to go down. Did it matter what people thought of her? They would never know! No one would help her if she did not help herself! She would go through with it.

Forcing herself, therefore, to leave the support of the wall, she rang the bell. The door did not open, and all her shame and fear suddenly abandoned her; she rang again and again, as though in spite of its emptiness she could drag some response out of that closed room, some recompense for the shame and fear that visit had cost her. It did not open; she left off ringing, and, sitting down at the top of the stairs, buried her face in her hands.

Presently she stole down, out into the air. She felt as though she had passed through a bad illness, and had no desire now but to get home as quickly as she could. The people she met seemed to know where she had been, what she had been doing; and suddenly — over on the opposite side, going towards his rooms from the direction of Montpellier Square — she saw Bosinney himself.

She made a movement to cross into the traffic. Their eyes met, and he raised his hat. An omnibus passed, obscuring her view; then, from the edge of the pavement, through a gap in the traffic, she saw him walking on.

And June stood motionless, looking after him.

Chapter 22

Perfection of the House

'One mockturtle, clear; one oxtail; two glasses of port.'

In the upper room at French's, where a Forsyte could still get heavy English food, James and his son were sitting down to lunch.

Of all eating-places James liked best to come here; there was something unpretentious, well-flavoured, and filling about it, and though he had been to a certain extent corrupted by the necessity for being fashionable, and the trend of habits keeping pace with an income that would increase, he still hankered in quiet City moments after the tasty fleshpots of his earlier days. Here you were served by hairy English waiters in aprons; there was sawdust on the floor, and three round gilt looking-glasses hung just above the line of sight. They had only recently done away with the cubicles, too, in which you could have your chop, prime chump, with a floury-potato, without seeing your neighbours, like a gentleman.

He tucked the top corner of his napkin behind the third button of his waistcoat, a practice he had been obliged to abandon years ago in the West End. He felt that he should relish his soup — the entire morning had been given to winding up the estate of an old friend.

After filling his mouth with household bread, stale, he at once began: "How are you going down to Robin Hill? You going to take Irene? You'd better take her. I should think there'll be a lot that'll want seeing to."

Without looking up, Soames answered: "She won't go."

"Won't go? What's the meaning of that? She's going to live in the house, isn't she?"

Soames made no reply.

"I don't know what's coming to women nowadays," mumbled James; "I never used to have any trouble with them. She's had too much liberty. She's spoiled. . . . "

Soames lifted his eyes: "I won't have anything said against her," he said unexpectedly.

The silence was only broken now by the supping of James's soup.

The waiter brought the two glasses of port, but Soames stopped him.

"That's not the way to serve port," he said; "take them away, and bring the bottle."

Rousing himself from his reverie over the soup, James took one of his rapid shifting surveys of surrounding facts.

"Your mother's in bed," he said; "you can have the carriage to take you down. I should think Irene'd like the drive. This young Bosinney'll be there, I suppose, to show you over"

Soames nodded.

"I should like to go and see for myself what sort of a job he's made finishing off," pursued James. "I'll just drive round and pick you both up."

"I am going down by train," replied Soames. "If you like to drive round and see, Irene might go with you, I can't tell."

He signed to the waiter to bring the bill, which James paid.

They parted at St. Paul's, Soames branching off to the station, James taking his omnibus westwards.

He had secured the corner seat next the conductor, where his long legs made it difficult for anyone to get in, and at all who passed him he looked resentfully, as if they had no business to be using up his air.

He intended to take an opportunity this afternoon of speaking to Irene. A word in time saved nine; and now that she was going to live in the country there was a chance for her to turn over a new leaf! He could see that Soames wouldn't stand very much more of her goings on!

It did not occur to him to define what he meant by her 'goings on'; the expression was wide, vague, and suited to a Forsyte. And James had more than his common share of courage after lunch.

On reaching home, he ordered out the barouche, with special instructions that the groom was to go too. He wished to be kind to her, and to give her every chance.

When the door of No.62 was opened he could distinctly hear her singing, and said so at once, to prevent any chance of being denied entrance.

Yes, Mrs. Soames was in, but the maid did not know if she was seeing people.

James, moving with the rapidity that ever astonished the observers of his long figure and absorbed expression, went forthwith into the drawing-room without permitting this to be ascertained. He found Irene seated at the piano with her hands arrested on the keys, evidently listening to the voices in the hall. She greeted him without smiling.

“Your mother-in-law’s in bed,” he began, hoping at once to enlist her sympathy. “I’ve got the carriage here. Now, be a good girl, and put on your hat and come with me for a drive. It’ll do you good!”

Irene looked at him as though about to refuse, but, seeming to change her mind, went upstairs, and came down again with her hat on.

“Where are you going to take me?” she asked.

“We’ll just go down to Robin Hill,” said James, spluttering out his words very quick; “the horses want exercise, and I should like to see what they’ve been doing down there.”

Irene hung back, but again changed her mind, and went out to the carriage, James brooding over her closely, to make quite sure.

It was not before he had got her more than half way that he began: “Soames is very fond of you — he won’t have anything said against you; why don’t you show him more affection?”

Irene flushed, and said in a low voice: “I can’t show what I haven’t got.”

James looked at her sharply; he felt that now he had her in his own carriage, with his own horses and servants, he was really in command of the situation. She could not put him off; nor would she make a scene in public.

“I can’t think what you’re about,” he said. “He’s a very good husband!”

Irene’s answer was so low as to be almost inaudible among the sounds of traffic. He caught the words: “You are not married to him!”

“What’s that got to do with it? He’s given you everything you want. He’s always ready to take you anywhere, and now he’s built you this house in the country. It’s not as if you had anything of your own.”

“No.”

Again James looked at her; he could not make out the expression on her face. She looked almost as if she were going to cry, and yet. . . .

“I’m sure,” he muttered hastily, “we’ve all tried to be kind to you.”

Irene’s lips quivered; to his dismay James saw a tear steal down her cheek. He felt a choke rise in his own throat.

“We’re all fond of you,” he said, “if you’d only”— he was going to say, “behave yourself,” but changed it to —“if you’d only be more of a wife to him.”

Irene did not answer, and James, too, ceased speaking. There was something in her silence which disconcerted him; it was not the silence of obstinacy, rather that of acquiescence in all that he could find to say. And yet he felt as if he had not had the last word. He could not understand this.

He was unable, however, to long keep silence.

“I suppose that young Bosinney,” he said, “will be getting married to June now?”

Irene’s face changed. “I don’t know,” she said; “you should ask her.”

“Does she write to you?” No.

“How’s that?” said James. “I thought you and she were such great friends.”

Irene turned on him. “Again,” she said, “you should ask her!”

“Well,” flustered James, frightened by her look, “it’s very odd that I can’t get a plain answer to a plain question, but there it is.”

He sat ruminating over his rebuff, and burst out at last:

“Well, I’ve warned you. You won’t look ahead. Soames he doesn’t say much, but I can see he won’t stand a great deal more of this sort of thing. You’ll have nobody but yourself to blame, and, what’s more, you’ll get no sympathy from anybody.”

Irene bent her head with a little smiling bow. “I am very much obliged to you.”

James did not know what on earth to answer.

The bright hot morning had changed slowly to a grey, oppressive afternoon; a heavy bank of clouds, with the yellow tinge of coming thunder, had risen in the south, and was creeping up.

The branches of the trees dropped motionless across the road without the smallest stir of foliage. A faint odour of glue from the heated horses clung in the thick air; the coachman and groom, rigid and unbending, exchanged stealthy murmurs on the box, without ever turning their heads.

To James’ great relief they reached the house at last; the silence and impenetrability of this woman by his side, whom he had always thought so soft and mild, alarmed him.

The carriage put them down at the door, and they entered.

The hall was cool, and so still that it was like passing into a tomb; a shudder ran down James’s spine. He quickly lifted the heavy leather curtains between the columns into the inner court.

He could not restrain an exclamation of approval.

The decoration was really in excellent taste. The dull ruby tiles that extended from the foot of the walls to the verge of a circular clump of tall iris plants, surrounding in turn a sunken basin of white marble filled with water, were obviously of the best quality. He admired extremely the purple leather curtains drawn along one entire side, framing a huge white-tiled stove. The central partitions of the skylight had been slid back, and the warm air from outside penetrated into the very heart of the house.

He stood, his hands behind him, his head bent back on his high, narrow shoulders, spying the tracery on the columns and the pattern of the frieze which ran round the ivory-coloured walls under the gallery. Evidently, no pains had been spared. It was quite the house of a gentleman. He went up to the curtains, and, having discovered how they were worked, drew them asunder and disclosed the picture-gallery, ending in a great window taking up the whole end of the room. It had a black oak floor, and its walls, again, were of ivory white. He went on throwing open doors, and peeping in. Everything was in apple-pie order, ready for immediate occupation.

He turned round at last to speak to Irene, and saw her standing over in the garden entrance, with her husband and Bosinney.

Though not remarkable for sensibility, James felt at once that something was wrong. He went up to them, and, vaguely alarmed, ignorant of the nature of the trouble, made an attempt to smooth things over.

“How are you, Mr. Bosinney?” he said, holding out his hand. “You’ve been spending money pretty freely down here, I should say!”

Soames turned his back, and walked away.

James looked from Bosinney’s frowning face to Irene, and, in his agitation, spoke his thoughts aloud: “Well, I can’t tell what’s the matter. Nobody tells me anything!” And, making off after his son, he heard Bosinney’s short laugh, and his “Well, thank God! You look so. . . . ” Most unfortunately he lost the rest.

What had happened? He glanced back. Irene was very close to the architect, and her face not like the face he knew of her. He hastened up to his son.

Soames was pacing the picture-gallery.

“What’s the matter?” said James. “What’s all this?”

Soames looked at him with his supercilious calm unbroken, but James knew well enough that he was violently angry.

“Our friend,” he said, “has exceeded his instructions again, that’s all. So much the worse for him this time.”

He turned round and walked back towards the door. James followed hurriedly, edging himself in front. He saw Irene take her finger from before her lips, heard her say something in her ordinary voice, and began to speak before he reached them.

“There’s a storm coming on. We’d better get home. We can’t take you, I suppose, Mr. Bosinney? No, I suppose not. Then, good-bye!” He held out his hand. Bosinney did not take it, but, turning with a laugh, said:

“Good-bye, Mr. Forsyte. Don’t get caught in the storm!” and walked away.

“Well,” began James, “I don’t know. . . . ”

But the ‘sight of Irene’s face stopped him. Taking hold of his daughter-in-law by the elbow, he escorted her towards the carriage. He felt certain, quite certain, they had been making some appointment or other. . . .

Nothing in this world is more sure to upset a Forsyte than the discovery that something on which he has stipulated to spend a certain sum has cost more. And this is reasonable, for upon the accuracy of his estimates the whole policy of his life is ordered. If he cannot rely on definite values of property, his compass is amiss; he is adrift upon bitter waters without a helm.

After writing to Bosinney in the terms that have already been chronicled, Soames had dismissed the cost of the house from his mind. He believed that he had made the matter of the final cost so very plain that the possibility of its being again exceeded had really never entered his head. On hearing from Bosinney that his limit of twelve thousand pounds would be exceeded by something like four hundred, he had grown white with anger. His original estimate of the cost of the house completed had been ten thousand pounds, and he had often blamed himself severely for allowing himself to be led into repeated excesses. Over this last expenditure, however, Bosinney had put himself completely in the wrong. How on earth a fellow could make such an ass of himself Soames could not conceive; but he had done so, and all the rancour and hidden jealousy that had been burning against him for so long was now focussed in rage at this crowning piece of extravagance. The attitude of the confident and friendly husband was gone. To preserve property — his wife — he had assumed it, to preserve property of another kind he lost it now.

“Ah!” he had said to Bosinney when he could speak, “and I suppose you’re perfectly contented with yourself. But I may as well tell you that you’ve altogether mistaken your man!”

What he meant by those words he did not quite know at the time, but after dinner he looked up the correspondence between himself and Bosinney to make quite sure. There could be no two opinions about it — the fellow had made himself liable for that extra four hundred, or, at all events, for three hundred and fifty of it, and he would have to make it good.

He was looking at his wife’s face when he came to this conclusion. Seated in her usual seat on the sofa, she was altering the lace on a collar. She had not once spoken to him all the evening.

He went up to the mantelpiece, and contemplating his face in the mirror said: “Your friend the Buccaneer has made a fool of himself; he will have to pay for it!”

She looked at him scornfully, and answered: “I don’t know what you are talking about!”

“You soon will. A mere trifle, quite beneath your contempt — four hundred pounds.”

“Do you mean that you are going to make him pay that towards this hateful, house?”

“I do.”

“And you know he’s got nothing?”

“Yes.”

“Then you are meaner than I thought you.”

Soames turned from the mirror, and unconsciously taking a china cup from the mantelpiece, clasped his hands around it as though praying. He saw her bosom rise and fall, her eyes darkening with anger, and taking no notice of the taunt, he asked quietly:

“Are you carrying on a flirtation with Bosinney?”

“No, I am not!”

Her eyes met his, and he looked away. He neither believed nor disbelieved her, but he knew that he had made a mistake in asking; he never had known, never would know, what she was thinking. The sight of her inscrutable face, the thought of all the hundreds of evenings he had seen her sitting there like that soft and passive, but unreadable, unknown, enraged him beyond measure.

“I believe you are made of stone,” he said, clenching his fingers so hard that he broke the fragile cup. The pieces fell into the grate. And Irene smiled.

“You seem to forget,” she said, “that cup is not!”

Soames gripped her arm. “A good beating,” he said, “is the only thing that would bring you to your senses,” but turning on his heel, he left the room.

Chapter 23

Soames Sits on the Stairs

Soames went upstairs that night that he had gone too far. He was prepared to offer excuses for his words.

He turned out the gas still burning in the passage outside their room. Pausing, with his hand on the knob of the door, he tried to shape his apology, for he had no intention of letting her see that he was nervous.

But the door did not open, nor when he pulled it and turned the handle firmly. She must have locked it for some reason, and forgotten.

Entering his dressing-room where the gas was also light and burning low, he went quickly to the other door. That too was locked. Then he noticed that the camp bed which he occasionally used was prepared, and his sleeping-suit laid out upon it. He put his hand up to his forehead, and brought it away wet. It dawned on him that he was barred out.

He went back to the door, and rattling the handle stealthily, called: “Unlock the door, do you hear? Unlock the door!”

There was a faint rustling, but no answer.

“Do you hear? Let me in at once — I insist on being let in!”

He could catch the sound of her breathing close to the door, like the breathing of a creature threatened by danger.

There was something terrifying in this inexorable silence, in the impossibility of getting at her. He went back to the other door, and putting his whole weight against it, tried to burst it open. The door was a new one — he had had them renewed himself, in readiness for their coming in after the honeymoon. In a rage he lifted his foot to kick in the panel; the thought of the servants restrained him, and he felt suddenly that he was beaten.

Flinging himself down in the dressing-room, he took up a book.

But instead of the print he seemed to see his wife — with her yellow hair flowing over her bare shoulders, and her great dark eyes — standing like an animal at bay. And the whole meaning of her act of revolt came to him. She meant it to be for good.

He could not sit still, and went to the door again. He could still hear her, and he called: “Irene! Irene!”

He did not mean to make his voice pathetic.

In ominous answer, the faint sounds ceased. He stood with clenched hands, thinking.

Presently he stole round on tiptoe, and running suddenly at the other door, made a supreme effort to break it open. It creaked, but did not yield. He sat down on the stairs and buried his face in his hands.

For a long time he sat there in the dark, the moon through the skylight above laying a pale smear which lengthened slowly towards him down the stairway. He tried to be philosophical.

Since she had locked her doors she had no further claim as a wife, and he would console himself with other women.

It was but a spectral journey he made among such delights — he had no appetite for these exploits. He had never had much, and he had lost the habit. He felt that he could never recover it. His hunger could only be appeased by his wife, inexorable and frightened, behind these shut doors. No other woman could help him.

This conviction came to him with terrible force out there in the dark.

His philosophy left him; and surly anger took its place. Her conduct was immoral, inexcusable, worthy of any punishment within his power. He desired no one but her, and she refused him!

She must really hate him, then! He had never believed it yet. He did not believe it now. It seemed to him incredible. He felt as though he had lost for ever his power of judgment. If she, so soft and yielding as he had always judged her, could take this decided step — what could not happen?

Then he asked himself again if she were carrying on an intrigue with Bosinney. He did not believe that she was; he could not afford to believe such a reason for her conduct — the thought was not to be faced.

It would be unbearable to contemplate the necessity of making his marital relations public property. Short of the most convincing proofs he must still refuse to believe, for he did not wish to punish himself. And all the time at heart — he did believe.

The moonlight cast a greyish tinge over his figure, hunched against the staircase wall.

Bosinney was in love with her! He hated the fellow, and would not spare him now. He could and would refuse to pay a penny piece over twelve thousand and fifty pounds — the extreme limit fixed in the correspondence; or rather he would pay, he would pay and sue him for damages. He would go to Jobling and Boulter and put the matter in their hands. He would ruin the impecunious beggar! And suddenly — though what connection between the thoughts? — he reflected that Irene had no money either. They were both beggars. This gave him a strange satisfaction.

The silence was broken by a faint creaking through the wall. She was going to bed at last. Ah! Joy and pleasant dreams! If she threw the door open wide he would not go in now!

But his lips, that were twisted in a bitter smile, twitched; he covered his eyes with his hands. . . .

It was late the following afternoon when Soames stood in the dining-room window gazing gloomily into the Square.

The sunlight still showered on the plane-trees, and in the breeze their gay broad leaves shone and swung in rhyme to a barrel organ at the corner. It was playing a waltz, an old waltz that was out of fashion, with a fateful rhythm in the notes; and it went on and on, though nothing indeed but leaves danced to the tune.

The woman did not look too gay, for she was tired; and from the tall houses no one threw her down coppers. She moved the organ on, and three doors off began again.

It was the waltz they had played at Roger's when Irene had danced with Bosinney; and the perfume of the gardenias she had worn came back to Soames, drifted by the malicious music, as it had been drifted to him then, when she passed, her hair glistening, her eyes so soft, drawing Bosinney on and on down an endless ballroom.

The organ woman plied her handle slowly; she had been grinding her tune all day-grinding it in Sloane Street hard by, grinding it perhaps to Bosinney himself.

Soames turned, took a cigarette from the carven box, and walked back to the window. The tune had mesmerized him, and there came into his view Irene, her sunshade furled, hastening homewards down the Square, in a soft, rose-coloured blouse with drooping sleeves, that he did not know. She stopped before the organ, took out her purse, and gave the woman money.

Soames shrank back and stood where he could see into the hall.

She came in with her latch-key, put down her sunshade, and stood looking at herself in the glass. Her cheeks were flushed as if the sun had burned them; her lips were parted in a smile. She stretched her arms out as though to embrace herself, with a laugh that for all the world was like a sob.

Soames stepped forward.

“Very-pretty!” he said.

But as though shot she spun round, and would have passed him up the stairs. He barred the way.

“Why such a hurry?” he said, and his eyes fastened on a curl of hair fallen loose across her ear. . . .

He hardly recognised her. She seemed on fire, so deep and rich the colour of her cheeks, her eyes, her lips, and of the unusual blouse she wore.

She put up her hand and smoothed back the curl. She was breathing fast and deep, as though she had been running, and with every breath perfume seemed to come from her hair, and from her body, like perfume from an opening flower.

“I don't like that blouse,” he said slowly, “it's a soft, shapeless thing!”

He lifted his finger towards her breast, but she dashed his hand aside.

“Don't touch me!” she cried.

He caught her wrist; she wrenched it away.

“And where may you have been?” he asked.

“In heaven — out of this house!” With those words she fled upstairs.

Outside — in thanksgiving — at the very door, the organ-grinder was playing the waltz.

And Soames stood motionless. What prevented him from following her?

Was it that, with the eyes of faith, he saw Bosinney looking down from that high window in Sloane Street, straining his eyes for yet another glimpse of Irene’s vanished figure, cooling his flushed face, dreaming of the moment when she flung herself on his breast — the scent of her still in the air around, and the sound of her laugh that was like a sob?

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PART III

CHAPTER 24

MRS. MACANDER'S EVIDENCE

Many people, no doubt, including the editor of the 'Ultra Vivisectionist,' then in the bloom of its first youth, would say that Soames was less than a man not to have removed the locks from his wife's doors, and, after beating her soundly, resumed wedded happiness.

Brutality is not so deplorably diluted by humaneness as it used to be, yet a sentimental segment of the population may still be relieved to learn that he did none of these things. For active brutality is not popular with Forsytes; they are too circumspect, and, on the whole, too softhearted. And in Soames there was some common pride, not sufficient to make him do a really generous action, but enough to prevent his indulging in an extremely mean one, except, perhaps, in very hot blood. Above all this a true Forsyte refused to feel himself ridiculous. Short of actually beating his wife, he perceived nothing to be done; he therefore accepted the situation without another word.

Throughout the summer and autumn he continued to go to the office, to sort his pictures, and ask his friends to dinner.

He did not leave town; Irene refused to go away. The house at Robin Hill, finished though it was, remained empty and ownerless. Soames had brought a suit against the Buccaneer, in which he claimed from him the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds.

A firm of solicitors, Messrs. Freak and Able, had put in a defence on Bosinney's behalf. Admitting the facts, they raised a point on the correspondence which, divested of legal phraseology, amounted to this: To speak of 'a free hand in the terms of this correspondence' is an Irish bull.

By a chance, fortuitous but not improbable in the close borough of legal circles, a good deal of information came to Soames' ear anent this line of policy, the working partner in his firm, Bustard, happening to sit next at dinner at Walmisley's, the Taxing Master, to young Chankery, of the Common Law Bar.

The necessity for talking what is known as 'shop,' which comes on all lawyers with the removal of the ladies, caused Chankery, a young and promising advocate, to propound an impersonal conundrum to his neighbour, whose name he did not know, for, seated as he permanently was in the background, Bustard had practically no name.

He had, said Chankery, a case coming on with a 'very nice point.' He then explained, preserving every professional discretion, the riddle in Soames' case. Everyone, he said, to whom he had spoken, thought it a nice point. The issue was small unfortunately, 'though d —— d serious for his client he believed'— Walmisley's champagne was bad but plentiful. A Judge would make short work of it, he was afraid. He intended to make a big effort — the point was a nice one. What did his neighbour say?

Bustard, a model of secrecy, said nothing. He related the incident to Soames however with some malice, for this quiet man was capable of human feeling, ending with his own opinion that the point was 'a very nice one.'

In accordance with his resolve, our Forsyte had put his interests into the hands of Jobling and Boulter. From the moment of doing so he regretted that he had not acted for himself. On receiving a copy of Bosinney's defence he went over to their offices.

Boulter, who had the matter in hand, Jobling having died some years before, told him that in his opinion it was rather a nice point; he would like counsel's opinion on it.

Soames told him to go to a good man, and they went to Waterbuck, Q.C., marking him ten and one, who kept the papers six weeks and then wrote as follows:

'In my opinion the true interpretation of this correspondence depends very much on the intention of the parties, and will turn upon the evidence given at the trial. I am of opinion that an attempt should be made to secure from the architect an admission that he understood he was not to spend at the outside more than twelve thousand and fifty pounds. With regard to the expression, “a free hand in the terms of this correspondence,” to which my attention is directed, the point is a nice one; but I am of opinion that upon the whole the ruling in “Boileau v. The Blasted Cement Co., Ltd.,” will apply.’

Upon this opinion they acted, administering interrogatories, but to their annoyance Messrs. Freak and Able answered these in so masterly a fashion that nothing whatever was admitted and that without prejudice.

It was on October 1 that Soames read Waterbuck’s opinion, in the dining-room before dinner.

It made him nervous; not so much because of the case of ‘Boileau v. The Blasted Cement Co., Ltd.,’ as that the point had lately begun to seem to him, too, a nice one; there was about it just that pleasant flavour of subtlety so attractive to the best legal appetites. To have his own impression confirmed by Waterbuck, Q.C., would have disturbed any man.

He sat thinking it over, and staring at the empty grate, for though autumn had come, the weather kept as gloriously fine that jubilee year as if it were still high August. It was not pleasant to be disturbed; he desired too passionately to set his foot on Bosinney’s neck.

Though he had not seen the architect since the last afternoon at Robin Hill, he was never free from the sense of his presence — never free from the memory of his worn face with its high cheek bones and enthusiastic eyes. It would not be too much to say that he had never got rid of the feeling of that night when he heard the peacock’s cry at dawn — the feeling that Bosinney haunted the house. And every man’s shape that he saw in the dark evenings walking past, seemed that of him whom George had so appropriately named the Buccaneer.

Irene still met him, he was certain; where, or how, he neither knew, nor asked; deterred by a vague and secret dread of too much knowledge. It all seemed subterranean nowadays.

Sometimes when he questioned his wife as to where she had been, which he still made a point of doing, as every Forsyte should, she looked very strange. Her self-possession was wonderful, but there were moments when, behind the mask of her face, inscrutable as it had always been to him, lurked an expression he had never been used to see there.

She had taken to lunching out too; when he asked Bilson if her mistress had been in to lunch, as often as not she would answer: “No, sir.”

He strongly disapproved of her gadding about by herself, and told her so. But she took no notice. There was something that angered, amazed, yet almost amused him about the calm way in which she disregarded his wishes. It was really as if she were hugging to herself the thought of a triumph over him.

He rose from the perusal of Waterbuck, Q.C.‘s opinion, and, going upstairs, entered her room, for she did not lock her doors till bed-time — she had the decency, he found, to save the feelings of the servants. She was brushing her hair, and turned to him with strange fierceness.

“What do you want?” she said. “Please leave my room!”

He answered: “I want to know how long this state of things between us is to last? I have put up with it long enough.”

“Will you please leave my room?”

“Will you treat me as your husband?”

“No.”

“Then, I shall take steps to make you.”

“Do!”

He stared, amazed at the calmness of her answer. Her lips were compressed in a thin line; her hair lay in fluffy masses on her bare shoulders, in all its strange golden contrast to her dark eyes — those eyes alive with the emotions of fear, hate, contempt, and odd, haunting triumph.

“Now, please, will you leave my room?” He turned round, and went sulkily out.

He knew very well that he had no intention of taking steps, and he saw that she knew too — knew that he was afraid to.

It was a habit with him to tell her the doings of his day: how such and such clients had called; how he had arranged a mortgage for Parkes; how that long-standing suit of Fryer v. Forsyte was getting on, which, arising in the preternaturally careful disposition of his property by his great uncle Nicholas, who had tied it up so that no one could get at it at all, seemed likely to remain a source of income for several solicitors till the Day of Judgment.

And how he had called in at Jobson’s, and seen a Boucher sold, which he had just missed buying of Talleyrand and Sons in Pall Mall.

He had an admiration for Boucher, Watteau, and all that school. It was a habit with him to tell her all these matters, and he continued to do it even now, talking for long spells at dinner, as though by the volubility of words he could conceal from himself the ache in his heart.

Often, if they were alone, he made an attempt to kiss her when she said good-night. He may have had some vague notion that some night she would let him; or perhaps only the feeling that a husband ought to kiss his wife. Even if she hated him, he at all events ought not to put himself in the wrong by neglecting this ancient rite.

And why did she hate him? Even now he could not altogether believe it. It was strange to be hated! — the emotion was too extreme; yet he hated Bosinney, that Buccaneer, that prowling vagabond, that night-wanderer. For in his thoughts Soames always saw him lying in wait — wandering. Ah, but he must be in very low water! Young Burkitt, the architect, had seen him coming out of a third-rate restaurant, looking terribly down in the mouth!

During all the hours he lay awake, thinking over the situation, which seemed to have no end — unless she should suddenly come to her senses — never once did the thought of separating from his wife seriously enter his head. . . .

And the Forsytes! What part did they play in this stage of Soames' subterranean tragedy?

Truth to say, little or none, for they were at the sea.

From hotels, hydropathics, or lodging-houses, they were bathing daily; laying in a stock of ozone to last them through the winter.

Each section, in the vineyard of its own choosing, grew and culled and pressed and bottled the grapes of a pet sea-air.

The end of September began to witness their several returns.

In rude health and small omnibuses, with considerable colour in their cheeks, they arrived daily from the various termini. The following morning saw them back at their vocations.

On the next Sunday Timothy's was thronged from lunch till dinner.

Amongst other gossip, too numerous and interesting to relate, Mrs. Septimus Small mentioned that Soames and Irene had not been away.

It remained for a comparative outsider to supply the next evidence of interest.

It chanced that one afternoon late in September, Mrs. MacAnder, Winifred Dartie's greatest friend, taking a constitutional, with young Augustus Flippard, on her bicycle in Richmond Park, passed Irene and Bosinney walking from the bracken towards the Sheen Gate.

Perhaps the poor little woman was thirsty, for she had ridden long on a hard, dry road, and, as all London knows, to ride a bicycle and talk to young Flippard will try the toughest constitution; or perhaps the sight of the cool bracken grove, whence 'those two' were coming down, excited her envy. The cool bracken grove on the top of the hill, with the oak boughs for roof, where the pigeons were raising an endless wedding hymn, and the autumn, humming, whispered to the ears of lovers in the fern, while the deer stole by. The bracken grove of irretrievable delights, of golden minutes in the long marriage of heaven and earth! The bracken grove, sacred to stags, to strange tree-stump fauns leaping around the silver whiteness of a birch-tree nymph at summer dusk.

This lady knew all the Forsytes, and having been at June's 'at home,' was not at a loss to see with whom she had to deal. Her own marriage, poor thing, had not been successful, but having had the good sense and ability to force her husband into pronounced error, she herself had passed through the necessary divorce proceedings without incurring censure.

She was therefore a judge of all that sort of thing, and lived in one of those large buildings, where in small sets of apartments, are gathered incredible quantities of Forsytes, whose chief recreation out of business hours is the discussion of each other's affairs.

Poor little woman, perhaps she was thirsty, certainly she was bored, for Flippard was a wit. To see 'those two' in so unlikely a spot was quite a merciful 'pick-me-up.'

At the MacAnder, like all London, Time pauses.

This small but remarkable woman merits attention; her all-seeing eye and shrewd tongue were inscrutably the means of furthering the ends of Providence.

With an air of being in at the death, she had an almost distressing power of taking care of herself. She had done more, perhaps, in her way than any woman about town to destroy the sense of chivalry which still clogs the wheel of civilization. So smart she was, and spoken of endearingly as ‘the little MacAnder!’

Dressing tightly and well, she belonged to a Woman’s Club, but was by no means the neurotic and dismal type of member who was always thinking of her rights. She took her rights unconsciously, they came natural to her, and she knew exactly how to make the most of them without exciting anything but admiration amongst that great class to whom she was affiliated, not precisely perhaps by manner, but by birth, breeding, and the true, the secret gauge, a sense of property.

The daughter of a Bedfordshire solicitor, by the daughter of a clergyman, she had never, through all the painful experience of being married to a very mild painter with a cranky love of Nature, who had deserted her for an actress, lost touch with the requirements, beliefs, and inner feeling of Society; and, on attaining her liberty, she placed herself without effort in the very van of Forsyteism.

Always in good spirits, and ‘full of information,’ she was universally welcomed. She excited neither surprise nor disapprobation when encountered on the Rhine or at Zermatt, either alone, or travelling with a lady and two gentlemen; it was felt that she was perfectly capable of taking care of herself; and the hearts of all Forsytes warmed to that wonderful instinct, which enabled her to enjoy everything without giving anything away. It was generally felt that to such women as Mrs. MacAnder should we look for the perpetuation and increase of our best type of woman. She had never had any children.

If there was one thing more than another that she could not stand it was one of those soft women with what men called ‘charm’ about them, and for Mrs. Soames she always had an especial dislike.

Obscurely, no doubt, she felt that if charm were once admitted as the criterion, smartness and capability must go to the wall; and she hated — with a hatred the deeper that at times this so-called charm seemed to disturb all calculations — the subtle seductiveness which she could not altogether overlook in Irene.

She said, however, that she could see nothing in the woman — there was no ‘go’ about her — she would never be able to stand up for herself — anyone could take advantage of her, that was plain — she could not see in fact what men found to admire!

She was not really ill-natured, but, in maintaining her position after the trying circumstances of her married life, she had found it so necessary to be ‘full of information,’ that the idea of holding her tongue about ‘those two’ in the Park never occurred to her.

And it so happened that she was dining that very evening at Timothy’s, where she went sometimes to ‘cheer the old things up,’ as she was wont to put it. The same people were always asked to meet her: Winifred Dartie and her husband; Francie, because she belonged to the artistic circles, for Mrs. MacAnder was known to contribute articles on dress to ‘The Ladies Kingdom Come’; and for her to flirt with, provided they could be obtained, two of the Hayman boys, who, though they never said anything, were believed to be fast and thoroughly intimate with all that was latest in smart Society.

At twenty-five minutes past seven she turned out the electric light in her little hall, and wrapped in her opera cloak with the chinchilla collar, came out into the corridor, pausing a moment to make sure she had her latch-key. These little self-contained flats were convenient; to be sure, she had no light and no air, but she could shut it up whenever she liked and go away. There was no bother with servants, and she never felt tied as she used to when poor, dear Fred was always about, in his mooney way. She retained no rancour against poor, dear Fred, he was such a fool; but the thought of that actress drew from her, even now, a little, bitter, derisive smile.

Firmly snapping the door to, she crossed the corridor, with its gloomy, yellow-ochre walls, and its infinite vista of brown, numbered doors. The lift was going down; and wrapped to the ears in the high cloak, with every one of her auburn hairs in its place, she waited motionless for it to stop at her floor. The iron gates clanked open; she entered. There were already three occupants, a man in a great white waistcoat, with a large, smooth face like a baby’s, and two old ladies in black, with mittened hands.

Mrs. MacAnder smiled at them; she knew everybody; and all these three, who had been admirably silent before, began to talk at once. This was Mrs. MacAnder’s successful secret. She provoked conversation.

Throughout a descent of five stories the conversation continued, the lift boy standing with his back turned, his cynical face protruding through the bars.

At the bottom they separated, the man in the white waistcoat sentimentally to the billiard room, the old ladies to dine and say to each other: “A dear little woman!” “Such a rattle!” and Mrs. MacAnder to her cab.

When Mrs. MacAnder dined at Timothy’s, the conversation (although Timothy himself could never be induced to be present) took that wider, man-of-the-world tone current among Forsytes at large, and this, no doubt, was what put her at a premium there.

Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester found it an exhilarating change. “If only,” they said, “Timothy would meet her!” It was felt that she would do him good. She could tell you, for instance, the latest story of Sir Charles Fiste’s son at Monte Carlo; who was the real heroine of Tynemouth Eddy’s fashionable novel that everyone was holding up their hands over, and what they were doing in Paris about wearing bloomers. She was so sensible, too, knowing all about that vexed question, whether to send young Nicholas’ eldest into the navy as his mother wished, or make him an accountant as his father thought would be safer. She strongly deprecated the navy. If you were not exceptionally brilliant or exceptionally well connected, they passed you over so disgracefully, and what was it after all to look forward to, even if you became an admiral — a pittance! An accountant had many more chances, but let him be put with a good firm, where there was no risk at starting!

Sometimes she would give them a tip on the Stock Exchange; not that Mrs. Small or Aunt Hester ever took it. They had indeed no money to invest; but it seemed to bring them into such exciting touch with the realities of life. It was an event. They would ask Timothy, they said. But they never did, knowing in advance that it would upset him. Surreptitiously, however, for weeks after they would look in that paper, which they took with respect on account of its really fashionable proclivities, to see whether ‘Bright’s Rubies’ or ‘The Woollen Mackintosh Company’ were up or down. Sometimes they could not find the name of the company at all; and they would wait until James or Roger or even Swithin came in, and ask them in voices trembling with curiosity how that ‘Bolivia Lime and Speltrate’ was doing — they could not find it in the paper.

And Roger would answer: “What do you want to know for? Some trash! You’ll go burning your fingers — investing your money in lime, and things you know nothing about! Who told you?” and ascertaining what they had been told, he would go away, and, making inquiries in the City, would perhaps invest some of his own money in the concern.

It was about the middle of dinner, just in fact as the saddle of mutton had been brought in by Smither, that Mrs. MacAnder, looking airily round, said: “Oh! and whom do you think I passed to-day in Richmond Park? You’ll never guess — Mrs. Soames and — Mr. Bosinney. They must have been down to look at the house!”

Winifred Dartie coughed, and no one said a word. It was the piece of evidence they had all unconsciously been waiting for.

To do Mrs. MacAnder justice, she had been to Switzerland and the Italian lakes with a party of three, and had not heard of Soames’ rupture with his architect. She could not tell, therefore, the profound impression her words would make.

Upright and a little flushed, she moved her small, shrewd eyes from face to face, trying to gauge the effect of her words. On either side of her a Hayman boy, his lean, taciturn, hungry face turned towards his plate, ate his mutton steadily.

These two, Giles and Jesse, were so alike and so inseparable that they were known as the Dromios. They never talked, and seemed always completely occupied in doing nothing. It was popularly supposed that they were cramming for an important examination. They walked without hats for long hours in the Gardens attached to their house, books in their hands, a fox-terrier at their heels, never saying a word, and smoking all the time. Every morning, about fifty yards apart, they trotted down Campden Hill on two lean hacks, with legs as long as their own, and every morning about an hour later, still fifty yards apart, they cantered up again. Every evening, wherever they had dined, they might be observed about half-past ten, leaning over the balustrade of the Alhambra promenade.

They were never seen otherwise than together; in this way passing their lives, apparently perfectly content.

Inspired by some dumb stirring within them of the feelings of gentlemen, they turned at this painful moment to Mrs. MacAnder, and said in precisely the same voice: “Have you seen the . . .?”

Such was her surprise at being thus addressed that she put down her fork; and Smither, who was passing, promptly removed her plate. Mrs. MacAnder, however, with presence of mind, said instantly: “I must have a little more of that nice mutton.”

But afterwards in the drawing — room she sat down by Mrs. Small, determined to get to the bottom of the matter. And she began:

"What a charming woman, Mrs. Soames; such a sympathetic temperament! Soames is a really lucky man!"

Her anxiety for information had not made sufficient allowance for that inner Forsyte skin which refuses to share its troubles with outsiders.

Mrs. Septimus Small, drawing herself up with a creak and rustle of her whole person, said, shivering in her dignity:

"My dear, it is a subject we do not talk about!"

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CHAPTER 25

NIGHT IN THE PARK

Although with her infallible instinct Mrs. Small had said the very thing to make her guest 'more intriguee than ever,' it is difficult to see how else she could truthfully have spoken.

It was not a subject which the Forsytes could talk about even among themselves — to use the word Soames had invented to characterize to himself the situation, it was 'subterranean.'

Yet, within a week of Mrs. MacAnder's encounter in Richmond Park, to all of them — save Timothy, from whom it was carefully kept — to James on his domestic beat from the Poultry to Park Lane, to George the wild one, on his daily adventure from the bow window at the Haversnake to the billiard room at the 'Red Pottle,' was it known that 'those two' had gone to extremes.

George (it was he who invented many of those striking expressions still current in fashionable circles) voiced the sentiment more accurately than any one when he said to his brother Eustace that 'the Buccaneer' was 'going it'; he expected Soames was about 'fed up.'

It was felt that he must be, and yet, what could be done? He ought perhaps to take steps; but to take steps would be deplorable.

Without an open scandal which they could not see their way to recommending, it was difficult to see what steps could be taken. In this impasse, the only thing was to say nothing to Soames, and nothing to each other; in fact, to pass it over.

By displaying towards Irene a dignified coldness, some impression might be made upon her; but she was seldom now to be seen, and there seemed a slight difficulty in seeking her out on purpose to show her coldness. Sometimes in the privacy of his bedroom James would reveal to Emily the real suffering that his son's misfortune caused him.

"I can't tell," he would say; "it worries me out of my life. There'll be a scandal, and that'll do him no good. I shan't say anything to him. There might be nothing in it. What do you think? She's very artistic, they tell me. What? Oh, you're a 'regular Juley! Well, I don't know; I expect the worst. This is what comes of having no children. I knew how it would be from the first. They never told me they didn't mean to have any children — nobody tells me anything!"

On his knees by the side of the bed, his eyes open and fixed with worry, he would breathe into the counterpane. Clad in his nightshirt, his neck poked forward, his back rounded, he resembled some long white bird.

"Our Father-," he repeated, turning over and over again the thought of this possible scandal.

Like old Jolyon, he, too, at the bottom of his heart set the blame of the tragedy down to family interference. What business had that lot — he began to think of the Stanhope Gate branch, including young Jolyon and his daughter, as 'that lot'— to introduce a person like this Bosinney into the family? (He had heard George's soubriquet, 'The Buccaneer,' but he could make nothing of that — the young man was an architect.)

He began to feel that his brother Jolyon, to whom he had always looked up and on whose opinion he had relied, was not quite what he had expected.

Not having his eldest brother's force of character, he was more sad than angry. His great comfort was to go to Winifred's, and take the little Darties in his carriage over to Kensington Gardens, and there, by the Round Pond, he could often be seen walking with his eyes fixed anxiously on little Publius Dartie's sailing-boat, which he had himself freighted with a penny, as though convinced that it would never again come to shore; while little Publius — who, James delighted to say, was not a bit like his father skipping along under his lee, would try to get him to bet another that it never would, having found that it always did. And James would make the bet; he always paid — sometimes as many as three or four pennies in the afternoon, for the game seemed never to pall on little Publius — and always in paying he said: "Now, that's for your money-box. Why, you're getting quite a rich man!" The thought of his little grandson's growing wealth was a real pleasure to him. But little Publius knew a sweet-shop, and a trick worth two of that.

And they would walk home across the Park, James' figure, with high shoulders and absorbed and worried face, exercising its tall, lean protectorship, pathetically unregarded, over the robust child-figures of Imogen and little Publius.

But those Gardens and that Park were not sacred to James. Forsytes and tramps, children and lovers, rested and wandered day after day, night after night, seeking one and all some freedom from labour, from the reek and turmoil of the streets.

The leaves browned slowly, lingering with the sun and summer-like warmth of the nights.

On Saturday, October 5, the sky that had been blue all day deepened after sunset to the bloom of purple grapes. There was no moon, and a clear dark, like some velvety garment, was wrapped around the trees, whose thinned branches, resembling plumes, stirred not in the still, warm air. All London had poured into the Park, draining the cup of summer to its dregs.

Couple after couple, from every gate, they streamed along the paths and over the burnt grass, and one after another, silently out of the lighted spaces, stole into the shelter of the feathery trees, where, blotted against some trunk, or under the shadow of shrubs, they were lost to all but themselves in the heart of the soft darkness.

To fresh-comers along the paths, these forerunners formed but part of that passionate dusk, whence only a strange murmur, like the confused beating of hearts, came forth. But when that murmur reached each couple in the lamp-light their voices wavered, and ceased; their arms enlaced, their eyes began seeking, searching, probing the blackness. Suddenly, as though drawn by invisible hands, they, too, stepped over the railing, and, silent as shadows, were gone from the light.

The stillness, enclosed in the far, inexorable roar of the town, was alive with the myriad passions, hopes, and loves of multitudes of struggling human atoms; for in spite of the disapproval of that great body of Forsytes, the Municipal Council — to whom Love had long been considered, next to the Sewage Question, the gravest danger to the community — a process was going on that night in the Park, and in a hundred other parks, without which the thousand factories, churches, shops, taxes, and drains, of which they were custodians, were as arteries without blood, a man without a heart.

The instincts of self-forgetfulness, of passion, and of love, hiding under the trees, away from the trustees of their remorseless enemy, the ‘sense of property,’ were holding a stealthy revel, and Soames, returning from Bayswater for he had been alone to dine at Timothy’s walking home along the water, with his mind upon that coming lawsuit, had the blood driven from his heart by a low laugh and the sound of kisses. He thought of writing to the Times the next morning, to draw the attention of the Editor to the condition of our parks. He did not, however, for he had a horror of seeing his name in print.

But starved as he was, the whispered sounds in the stillness, the half-seen forms in the dark, acted on him like some morbid stimulant. He left the path along the water and stole under the trees, along the deep shadow of little plantations, where the boughs of chestnut trees hung their great leaves low, and there was blacker refuge, shaping his course in circles which had for their object a stealthy inspection of chairs side by side, against tree-trunks, of enlaced lovers, who stirred at his approach.

Now he stood still on the rise overlooking the Serpentine, where, in full lamp-light, black against the silver water, sat a couple who never moved, the woman’s face buried on the man’s neck — a single form, like a carved emblem of passion, silent and unashamed.

And, stung by the sight, Soames hurried on deeper into the shadow of the trees.

In this search, who knows what he thought and what he sought? Bread for hunger — light in darkness? Who knows what he expected to find — impersonal knowledge of the human heart — the end of his private subterranean tragedy — for, again, who knew, but that each dark couple, unnamed, unnameable, might not be he and she?

But it could not be such knowledge as this that he was seeking — the wife of Soames Forsyte sitting in the Park like a common wench! Such thoughts were inconceivable; and from tree to tree, with his noiseless step, he passed.

Once he was sworn at; once the whisper, “If only it could always be like this!” sent the blood flying again from his heart, and he waited there, patient and dogged, for the two to move. But it was only a poor thin slip of a shop-girl in her draggled blouse who passed him, clinging to her lover’s arm.

A hundred other lovers too whispered that hope in the stillness of the trees, a hundred other lovers clung to each other.

But shaking himself with sudden disgust, Soames returned to the path, and left that seeking for he knew not what.

CHAPTER 26

MEETING AT THE BOTANICAL

Young Jolyon, whose circumstances were not those of a Forsyte, found at times a difficulty in sparing the money needful for those country jaunts and researches into Nature, without having prosecuted which no watercolour artist ever puts brush to paper.

He was frequently, in fact, obliged to take his colour-box into the Botanical Gardens, and there, on his stool, in the shade of a monkey-puzzler or in the lee of some India-rubber plant, he would spend long hours sketching.

An Art critic who had recently been looking at his work had delivered himself as follows:

"In a way your drawings are very good; tone and colour, in some of them certainly quite a feeling for Nature. But, you see, they're so scattered; you'll never get the public to look at them. Now, if you'd taken a definite subject, such as 'London by Night,' or 'The Crystal Palace in the Spring,' and made a regular series, the public would have known at once what they were looking at. I can't lay too much stress upon that. All the men who are making great names in Art, like Crum Stone or Bleeder, are making them by avoiding the unexpected; by specializing and putting their works all in the same pigeon-hole, so that the public know pat once where to go. And this stands to reason, for if a man's a collector he doesn't want people to smell at the canvas to find out whom his pictures are by; he wants them to be able to say at once, 'A capital Forsyte!' It is all the more important for you to be careful to choose a subject that they can lay hold of on the spot, since there's no very marked originality in your style."

Young Jolyon, standing by the little piano, where a bowl of dried rose leaves, the only produce of the garden, was deposited on a bit of faded damask, listened with his dim smile.

Turning to his wife, who was looking at the speaker with an angry expression on her thin face, he said:

"You see, dear?"

"I do not," she answered in her staccato voice, that still had a little foreign accent; "your style has originality."

The critic looked at her, smiled' deferentially, and said no more. Like everyone else, he knew their history.

The words bore good fruit with young Jolyon; they were contrary to all that he believed in, to all that he theoretically held good in his Art, but some strange, deep instinct moved him against his will to turn them to profit.

He discovered therefore one morning that an idea had come to him for making a series of watercolour drawings of London. How the idea had arisen he could not tell; and it was not till the following year, when he had completed and sold them at a very fair price, that in one of his impersonal moods, he found himself able to recollect the Art critic, and to discover in his own achievement another proof that he was a Forsyte.

He decided to commence with the Botanical Gardens, where he had already made so many studies, and chose the little artificial pond, sprinkled now with an autumn shower of red and yellow leaves, for though the gardeners longed to sweep them off, they could not reach them with their brooms. The rest of the gardens they swept bare enough, removing every morning Nature's rain of leaves; piling them in heaps, whence from slow fires rose the sweet, acrid smoke that, like the cuckoo's note for spring, the scent of lime trees for the summer, is the true emblem of the fall. The gardeners' tidy souls could not abide the gold and green and russet pattern on the grass. The gravel paths must lie unstained, ordered, methodical, without knowledge of the realities of life, nor of that slow and beautiful decay which flings crowns underfoot to star the earth with fallen glories, whence, as the cycle rolls, will leap again wild spring.

Thus each leaf that fell was marked from the moment when it fluttered a good-bye and dropped, slow turning, from its twig.

But on that little pond the leaves floated in peace, and praised Heaven with their hues, the sunlight haunting over them.

And so young Jolyon found them.

Coming there one morning in the middle of October, he was disconcerted to find a bench about twenty paces from his stand occupied, for he had a proper horror of anyone seeing him at work.

A lady in a velvet jacket was sitting there, with her eyes fixed on the ground. A flowering laurel, however, stood between, and, taking shelter behind this, young Jolyon prepared his easel.

His preparations were leisurely; he caught, as every true artist should, at anything that might delay for a moment the effort of his work, and he found himself looking furtively at this unknown dame.

Like his father before him, he had an eye for a face. This face was charming!

He saw a rounded chin nestling in a cream ruffle, a delicate face with large dark eyes and soft lips. A black 'picture' hat concealed the hair; her figure was lightly poised against the back of the bench, her knees were crossed; the tip of a patent-leather shoe emerged beneath her skirt. There was something, indeed, inexpressibly dainty about the person of this lady, but young Jolyon's attention was chiefly riveted by the look on her face, which reminded him of his wife. It was as though its owner had come into contact with forces too strong for her. It troubled him, arousing vague feelings of attraction and chivalry. Who was she? And what doing there, alone?

Two young gentlemen of that peculiar breed, at once forward and shy, found in the Regent's Park, came by on their way to lawn tennis, and he noted with disapproval their furtive stares of admiration. A loitering gardener halted to do something unnecessary to a clump of pampas grass; he, too, wanted an excuse for peeping. A gentleman, old, and, by his hat, a professor of horticulture, passed three times to scrutinize her long and stealthily, a queer expression about his lips.

With all these men young Jolyon felt the same vague irritation. She looked at none of them, yet was he certain that every man who passed would look at her like that.

Her face was not the face of a sorceress, who in every look holds out to men the offer of pleasure; it had none of the 'devil's beauty' so highly prized among the first Forsytes of the land; neither was it of that type, no less adorable, associated with the box of chocolate; it was not of the spiritually passionate, or passionately spiritual order, peculiar to house-decoration and modern poetry; nor did it seem to promise to the playwright material for the production of the interesting and neurasthenic figure, who commits suicide in the last act.

In shape and colouring, in its soft persuasive passivity, its sensuous purity, this woman's face reminded him of Titian's 'Heavenly Love,' a reproduction of which hung over the sideboard in his dining-room. And her attraction seemed to be in this soft passivity, in the feeling she gave that to pressure she must yield.

For what or whom was she waiting, in the silence, with the trees dropping here and there a leaf, and the thrushes strutting close on grass, touched with the sparkle of the autumn rime? Then her charming face grew eager, and, glancing round, with almost a lover's jealousy, young Jolyon saw Bosinney striding across the grass.

Curiously he watched the meeting, the look in their eyes, the long clasp of their hands. They sat down close together, linked for all their outward discretion. He heard the rapid murmur of their talk; but what they said he could not catch.

He had rowed in the galley himself! He knew the long hours of waiting and the lean minutes of a half-public meeting; the tortures of suspense that haunt the unhallowed lover.

It required, however, but a glance at their two faces to see that this was none of those affairs of a season that distract men and women about town; none of those sudden appetites that wake up ravening, and are surfeited and asleep again in six weeks. This was the real thing! This was what had happened to himself! Out of this anything might come!

Bosinney was pleading, and she so quiet, so soft, yet immovable in her passivity, sat looking over the grass.

Was he the man to carry her off, that tender, passive being, who would never stir a step for herself? Who had given him all herself, and would die for him, but perhaps would never run away with him!

It seemed to young Jolyon that he could hear her saying: "But, darling, it would ruin you!" For he himself had experienced to the full the gnawing fear at the bottom of each woman's heart that she is a drag on the man she loves.

And he peeped at them no more; but their soft, rapid talk came to his ears, with the stuttering song of some bird who seemed trying to remember the notes of spring: Joy — tragedy? Which — which?

And gradually their talk ceased; long silence followed.

'And where does Soames come in?' young Jolyon thought. 'People think she is concerned about the sin of deceiving her husband! Little they know of women! She's eating, after starvation — taking her revenge! And Heaven help her — for he'll take his.'

He heard the swish of silk, and, spying round the laurel, saw them walking away, their hands stealthily joined. . . .

At the end of July old Jolyon had taken his grand-daughter to the mountains; and on that visit (the last they ever paid) June recovered to a great extent her health and spirits. In the hotels, filled with British Forsytes — for old Jolyon could not bear a 'set of Germans,' as he called all foreigners — she was looked upon with respect — the only grand-daughter of that fine-looking, and evidently wealthy, old Mr. Forsyte. She did not mix freely with people — to mix freely with people was not June's habit — but she formed some friendships, and notably one in the Rhone Valley, with a French girl who was dying of consumption.

Determining at once that her friend should not die, she forgot, in the institution of a campaign against Death, much of her own trouble.

Old Jolyon watched the new intimacy with relief and disapproval; for this additional proof that her life was to be passed amongst 'lame ducks' worried him. Would she never make a friendship or take an interest in something that would be of real benefit to her?

'Taking up with a parcel of foreigners,' he called it. He often, however, brought home grapes or roses, and presented them to 'Mam'zelle' with an ingratiating twinkle.

Towards the end of September, in spite of June's disapproval, Mademoiselle Vigor breathed her last in the little hotel at St. Luc, to which they had moved her; and June took her defeat so deeply to heart that old Jolyon carried her away to Paris. Here, in contemplation of the 'Venus de Milo' and the 'Madeleine,' she shook off her depression, and when, towards the middle of October, they returned to town, her grandfather believed that he had effected a cure.

No sooner, however, had they established themselves in Stanhope Gate than he perceived to his dismay a return of her old absorbed and brooding manner. She would sit, staring in front of her, her chin on her hand, like a little Norse spirit, grim and intent, while all around in the electric light, then just installed, shone the great, drawing-room brocaded up to the frieze, full of furniture from Baple and Pullbred's. And in the huge gilt mirror were reflected those Dresden china groups of young men in tight knee breeches, at the feet of full-bosomed ladies nursing on their laps pet lambs, which old Jolyon had bought when he was a bachelor and thought so highly of in these days of degenerate taste. He was a man of most open mind, who, more than any Forsyte of them all, had moved with the times, but he could never forget that he had bought these groups at Jobson's, and given a lot of money for them. He often said to June, with a sort of disillusioned contempt:

"You don't care about them! They're not the gimcrack things you and your friends like, but they cost me seventy pounds!" He was not a man who allowed his taste to be warped when he knew for solid reasons that it was sound.

One of the first things that June did on getting home was to go round to Timothy's. She persuaded herself that it was her duty to call there, and cheer him with an account of all her travels; but in reality she went because she knew of no other place where, by some random speech, or roundabout question, she could glean news of Bosinney.

They received her most cordially: And how was her dear grandfather? He had not been to see them since May. Her Uncle Timothy was very poorly, he had had a lot of trouble with the chimney-sweep in his bedroom; the stupid man had let the soot down the chimney! It had quite upset her uncle.

June sat there a long time, dreading, yet passionately hoping, that they would speak of Bosinney.

But paralyzed by unaccountable discretion, Mrs. Septimus Small let fall no word, neither did she question June about him. In desperation the girl asked at last whether Soames and Irene were in town — she had not yet been to see anyone.

It was Aunt Hester who replied: Oh, yes, they were in town, they had not been away at all. There was some little difficulty about the house, she believed. June had heard, no doubt! She had better ask her Aunt Juley!

June turned to Mrs. Small, who sat upright in her chair, her hands clasped, her face covered with innumerable pouts. In answer to the girl's look she maintained a strange silence, and when she spoke it was to ask June whether she had worn night-socks up in those high hotels where it must be so cold of a night.

June answered that she had not, she hated the stuffy things; and rose to leave.

Mrs. Small's infallibly chosen silence was far more ominous to her than anything that could have been said.

Before half an hour was over she had dragged the truth from Mrs. Baynes in Lowndes Square, that Soames was bringing an action against Bosinney over the decoration of the house.

Instead of disturbing her, the news had a strangely calming effect; as though she saw in the prospect of this struggle new hope for herself. She learnt that the case was expected to come on in about a month, and there seemed little or no prospect of Bosinney's success.

"And whatever he'll do I can't think," said Mrs. Baynes; "it's very dreadful for him, you know — he's got no money — he's very hard up. And we can't help him, I'm sure. I'm told the money-lenders won't lend if you have no security, and he has none — none at all."

Her embonpoint had increased of late; she was in the full swing of autumn organization, her writing-table literally strewn with the menus of charity functions. She looked meaningly at June, with her round eyes of parrot-grey.

The sudden flush that rose on the girl's intent young face — she must have seen spring up before her a great hope — the sudden sweetness of her smile, often came back to Lady Baynes in after years (Baynes was knighted when he built that public Museum of Art which has given so much employment to officials, and so little pleasure to those working classes for whom it was designed).

The memory of that change, vivid and touching, like the breaking open of a flower, or the first sun after long winter, the memory, too, of all that came after, often intruded itself, unaccountably, inopportunely on Lady Baynes, when her mind was set upon the most important things.

This was the very afternoon of the day that young Jolyon witnessed the meeting in the Botanical Gardens, and on this day, too, old Jolyon paid a visit to his solicitors, Forsyte, Bustard, and Forsyte, in the Poultry. Soames was not in, he had gone down to Somerset House; Bustard was buried up to the hilt in papers and that inaccessible apartment, where he was judiciously placed, in order that he might do as much work as possible; but James was in the front office, biting a finger, and lugubriously turning over the pleadings in Forsyte v. Bosinney.

This sound lawyer had only a sort of luxurious dread of the 'nice point,' enough to set up a pleasurable feeling of fuss; for his good practical sense told him that if he himself were on the Bench he would not pay much attention to it. But he was afraid that this Bosinney would go bankrupt and Soames would have to find the money after all, and costs into the bargain. And behind this tangible dread there was always that intangible trouble, lurking in the background, intricate, dim, scandalous, like a bad dream, and of which this action was but an outward and visible sign.

He raised his head as old Jolyon came in, and muttered: "How are you, Jolyon? Haven't seen you for an age. You've been to Switzerland, they tell me. This young Bosinney, he's got himself into a mess. I knew how it would be!" He held out the papers, regarding his elder brother with nervous gloom.

Old Jolyon read them in silence, and while he read them James looked at the floor, biting his fingers the while.

Old Jolyon pitched them down at last, and they fell with a thump amongst a mass of affidavits in 're Buncombe, deceased,' one of the many branches of that parent and profitable tree, 'Fryer v. Forsyte.'

"I don't know what Soames is about," he said, "to make a fuss over a few hundred pounds. I thought he was a man of property."

James' long upper lip twitched angrily; he could not bear his son to be attacked in such a spot.

"It's not the money," he began, but meeting his brother's glance, direct, shrewd, judicial, he stopped.

There was a silence.

"I've come in for my Will," said old Jolyon at last, tugging at his moustache.

James' curiosity was roused at once. Perhaps nothing in this life was more stimulating to him than a Will; it was the supreme deal with property, the final inventory of a man's belongings, the last word on what he was worth. He sounded the bell.

"Bring in Mr. Jolyon's Will," he said to an anxious, dark-haired clerk.

"You going to make some alterations?" And through his mind there flashed the thought: 'Now, am I worth as much as he?'

Old Jolyon put the Will in his breast pocket, and James twisted his long legs regretfully.

"You've made some nice purchases lately, they tell me," he said.

"I don't know where you get your information from," answered old Jolyon sharply. "When's this action coming on? Next month? I can't tell what you've got in your minds. You must manage your own affairs; but if you take my advice, you'll settle it out of Court. Good-bye!" With a cold handshake he was gone.

James, his fixed grey-blue eye corkscrewing round some secret anxious image, began again to bite his finger.

Old Jolyon took his Will to the offices of the New Colliery Company, and sat down in the empty Board Room to read it through. He answered 'Down-by-the-starn' Hemmings so tartly when the latter, seeing his Chairman seated there, entered with the new Superintendent's first report, that the Secretary withdrew with regretful dignity; and sending for the transfer clerk, blew him up till the poor youth knew not where to look.

It was not — by George — as he (Down-by-the-starn) would have him know, for a whippersnapper of a young fellow like him, to come down to that office, and think that he was God Almighty. He (Down-by-the-starn) had been head of that office for more years than a boy like him could count, and if he thought that when he had finished all his work, he could sit there doing nothing, he did not know him, Hemmings (Down-by-the-starn), and so forth.

On the other side of the green baize door old Jolyon sat at the long, mahogany-and-leather board table, his thick, loose-jointed, tortoiseshell eye-glasses perched on the bridge of his nose, his gold pencil moving down the clauses of his Will.

It was a simple affair, for there were none of those vexatious little legacies and donations to charities, which fritter away a man's possessions, and damage the majestic effect of that little paragraph in the morning papers accorded to Forsytes who die with a hundred thousand pounds.

A simple affair. Just a bequest to his son of twenty thousand, and 'as to the residue of my property of whatsoever kind whether realty or personalty, or partaking of the nature of either — upon trust to pay the proceeds rents annual produce dividends or interest thereof and thereon to my said grand-daughter June Forsyte or her assigns during her life to be for her sole use and benefit and without, etc . . . and from and after her death or decease upon trust to convey assign transfer or make over the said last-mentioned lands hereditaments premises trust moneys stocks funds investments and securities or such as shall then stand for and represent the same unto such person or persons whether one or more for such intents purposes and uses and generally in such manner way and form in all respects as the said June Forsyte notwithstanding coverture shall by her last Will and Testament or any writing or writings in the nature of a Will testament or testamentary disposition to be by her duly made signed and published direct appoint or make over give and dispose of the same And in default etc. . . . Provided always . . . ' and so on, in seven folios of brief and simple phraseology.

The Will had been drawn by James in his palmy days. He had foreseen almost every contingency.

Old Jolyon sat a long time reading this Will; at last he took half a sheet of paper from the rack, and made a prolonged pencil note; then buttoning up the Will, he caused a cab to be called and drove to the offices of Paramor and Herring, in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Jack Herring was dead, but his nephew was still in the firm, and old Jolyon was closeted with him for half an hour.

He had kept the hansom, and on coming out, gave the driver the address — 3, Wistaria Avenue.

He felt a strange, slow satisfaction, as though he had scored a victory over James and the man of property. They should not poke their noses into his affairs any more; he had just cancelled their trusteeships of his Will; he would take the whole of his business out of their hands, and put it into the hands of young Herring, and he would move the business of his Companies too. If that young Soames were such a man of property, he would never miss a thousand a year or so; and under his great white moustache old Jolyon grimly smiled. He felt that what he was doing was in the nature of retributive justice, richly deserved.

Slowly, surely, with the secret inner process that works the destruction of an old tree, the poison of the wounds to his happiness, his will, his pride, had corroded the comely edifice of his philosophy. Life had worn him down on one side, till, like that family of which he was the head, he had lost balance.

To him, borne northwards towards his son's house, the thought of the new disposition of property, which he had just set in motion, appeared vaguely in the light of a stroke of punishment, levelled at that family and that Society, of which James and his son seemed to him the representatives. He had made a restitution to young Jolyon, and restitution to young Jolyon satisfied his secret craving for revenge-revenge against Time, sorrow, and interference, against all that incalculable sum of disapproval that had been bestowed by the world for fifteen years on his only son. It presented itself as the one possible way of asserting once more the domination of his will; of forcing James, and Soames, and the family, and all those hidden masses of Forsytes — a great stream rolling against the single dam of his obstinacy — to recognise once and for all that he would be master. It was sweet to think that at last he was going to make the boy a richer man by far than that son of James, that 'man of property.' And it was sweet to give to Jo, for he loved his son.

Neither young Jolyon nor his wife were in (young Jolyon indeed was not back from the Botanical), but the little maid told him that she expected the master at any moment:

“He’s always at ‘ome to tea, sir, to play with the children.”

Old Jolyon said he would wait; and sat down patiently enough in the faded, shabby drawing room, where, now that the summer chintzes were removed, the old chairs and sofas revealed all their threadbare deficiencies. He longed to send for the children; to have them there beside him, their supple bodies against his knees; to hear Jolly’s: “Hallo, Gran!” and see his rush; and feel Holly’s soft little hand stealing up against his cheek. But he would not. There was solemnity in what he had come to do, and until it was over he would not play. He amused himself by thinking how with two strokes of his pen he was going to restore the look of caste so conspicuously absent from everything in that little house; how he could fill these rooms, or others in some larger mansion, with triumphs of art from Baple and Pullbred’s; how he could send little Jolly to Harrow and Oxford (he no longer had faith in Eton and Cambridge, for his son had been there); how he could procure little Holly the best musical instruction, the child had a remarkable aptitude.

As these visions crowded before him, causing emotion to swell his heart, he rose, and stood at the window, looking down into the little walled strip of garden, where the pear-tree, bare of leaves before its time, stood with gaunt branches in the slow-gathering mist of the autumn afternoon. The dog Balthasar, his tail curled tightly over a piebald, furry back, was walking at the farther end, sniffing at the plants, and at intervals placing his leg for support against the wall.

And old Jolyon mused.

What pleasure was there left but to give? It was pleasant to give, when you could find one who would be thankful for what you gave — one of your own flesh and blood! There was no such satisfaction to be had out of giving to those who did not belong to you, to those who had no claim on you! Such giving as that was a betrayal of the individualistic convictions and actions of his life, of all his enterprise, his labour, and his moderation, of the great and proud fact that, like tens of thousands of Forsytes before him, tens of thousands in the present, tens of thousands in the future, he had always made his own, and held his own, in the world.

And, while he stood there looking down on the smut-covered foliage of the laurels, the black-stained grass-plot, the progress of the dog Balthasar, all the suffering of the fifteen years during which he had been baulked of legitimate enjoyment mingled its gall with the sweetness of the approaching moment.

Young Jolyon came at last, pleased with his work, and fresh from long hours in the open air. On hearing that his father was in the drawing room, he inquired hurriedly whether Mrs. Forsyte was at home, and being informed that she was not, heaved a sigh of relief. Then putting his painting materials carefully in the little coat-closet out of sight, he went in.

With characteristic decision old Jolyon came at once to the point. “I’ve been altering my arrangements, Jo,” he said. “You can cut your coat a bit longer in the future — I’m settling a thousand a year on you at once. June will have fifty thousand at my death; and you the rest. That dog of yours is spoiling the garden. I shouldn’t keep a dog, if I were you!”

The dog Balthasar, seated in the centre of the lawn, was examining his tail.

Young Jolyon looked at the animal, but saw him dimly, for his eyes were misty.

“Yours won’t come short of a hundred thousand, my boy,” said old Jolyon; “I thought you’d better know. I haven’t much longer to live at my age. I shan’t allude to it again. How’s your wife? And — give her my love.”

Young Jolyon put his hand on his father’s shoulder, and, as neither spoke, the episode closed.

Having seen his father into a hansom, young Jolyon came back to the drawing-room and stood, where old Jolyon had stood, looking down on the little garden. He tried to realize all that this meant to him, and, Forsyte that he was, vistas of property were opened out in his brain; the years of half rations through which he had passed had not sapped his natural instincts. In extremely practical form, he thought of travel, of his wife’s costume, the children’s education, a pony for Jolly, a thousand things; but in the midst of all he thought, too, of Bosinney and his mistress, and the broken song of the thrush. Joy — tragedy! Which? Which?

The old past — the poignant, suffering, passionate, wonderful past, that no money could buy, that nothing could restore in all its burning sweetness — had come back before him.

When his wife came in he went straight up to her and took her in his arms; and for a long time he stood without speaking, his eyes closed, pressing her to him, while she looked at him with a wondering, adoring, doubting look in her eyes.

CHAPTER 27

VOYAGE INTO THE INFERNO

The morning after a certain night on which Soames at last asserted his rights and acted like a man, he breakfasted alone.

He breakfasted by gaslight, the fog of late November wrapping the town as in some monstrous blanket till the trees of the Square even were barely visible from the dining-room window.

He ate steadily, but at times a sensation as though he could not swallow attacked him. Had he been right to yield to his overmastering hunger of the night before, and break down the resistance which he had suffered now too long from this woman who was his lawful and solemnly constituted helpmate?

He was strangely haunted by the recollection of her face, from before which, to soothe her, he had tried to pull her hands — of her terrible smothered sobbing, the like of which he had never heard, and still seemed to hear; and he was still haunted by the odd, intolerable feeling of remorse and shame he had felt, as he stood looking at her by the flame of the single candle, before silently slinking away.

And somehow, now that he had acted like this, he was surprised at himself.

Two nights before, at Winifred Dartie's, he had taken Mrs. MacAnder into dinner. She had said to him, looking in his face with her sharp, greenish eyes: "And so your wife is a great friend of that Mr. Bosinney's?"

Not deigning to ask what she meant, he had brooded over her words.

They had roused in him a fierce jealousy, which, with the peculiar perversion of this instinct, had turned to fiercer desire.

Without the incentive of Mrs. MacAnder's words he might never have done what he had done. Without their incentive and the accident of finding his wife's door for once unlocked, which had enabled him to steal upon her asleep.

Slumber had removed his doubts, but the morning brought them again. One thought comforted him: No one would know — it was not the sort of thing that she would speak about.

And, indeed, when the vehicle of his daily business life, which needed so imperatively the grease of clear and practical thought, started rolling once more with the reading of his letters, those nightmare-like doubts began to assume less extravagant importance at the back of his mind. The incident was really not of great moment; women made a fuss about it in books; but in the cool judgment of right-thinking men, of men of the world, of such as he recollected often received praise in the Divorce Court, he had but done his best to sustain the sanctity of marriage, to prevent her from abandoning her duty, possibly, if she were still seeing Bosinney, from. . . .

No, he did not regret it.

Now that the first step towards reconciliation had been taken, the rest would be comparatively — comparatively. . . .

He, rose and walked to the window. His nerve had been shaken. The sound of smothered sobbing was in his ears again. He could not get rid of it.

He put on his fur coat, and went out into the fog; having to go into the City, he took the underground railway from Sloane Square station.

In his corner of the first-class compartment filled with City men the smothered sobbing still haunted him, so he opened the Times with the rich crackle that drowns all lesser sounds, and, barricaded behind it, set himself steadily to con the news.

He read that a Recorder had charged a grand jury on the previous day with a more than usually long list of offences. He read of three murders, five manslaughters, seven arsons, and as many as eleven rapes — a surprisingly high number — in addition to many less conspicuous crimes, to be tried during a coming Sessions; and from one piece of news he went on to another, keeping the paper well before his face.

And still, inseparable from his reading, was the memory of Irene's tear-stained face, and the sounds from her broken heart.

The day was a busy one, including, in addition to the ordinary affairs of his practice, a visit to his brokers, Messrs. Grin and Grinning, to give them instructions to sell his shares in the New Colliery Co., Ltd., whose business he suspected, rather than knew, was stagnating (this enterprise afterwards slowly declined, and was ultimately sold for a song to an American syndicate); and a long conference at Waterbuck, Q.C.'s chambers, attended by Boulter, by Fiske, the junior counsel, and Waterbuck, Q.C., himself.

The case of Forsyte v. Bosinney was expected to be reached on the morrow, before Mr. Justice Bentham.

Mr. Justice Bentham, a man of common-sense rather than too great legal knowledge, was considered to be about the best man they could have to try the action. He was a 'strong' Judge.

Waterbuck, Q.C., in pleasing conjunction with an almost rude neglect of Boulter and Fiske paid to Soames a good deal of attention, by instinct or the sounder evidence of rumour, feeling him to be a man of property.

He held with remarkable consistency to the opinion he had already expressed in writing, that the issue would depend to a great extent on the evidence given at the trial, and in a few well directed remarks he advised Soames not to be too careful in giving that evidence. "A little bluffness, Mr. Forsyte," he said, "a little bluffness," and after he had spoken he laughed firmly, closed his lips tight, and scratched his head just below where he had pushed his wig back, for all the world like the gentleman-farmer for whom he loved to be taken. He was considered perhaps the leading man in breach of promise cases.

Soames used the underground again in going home.

The fog was worse than ever at Sloane Square station. Through the still, thick blur, men groped in and out; women, very few, grasped their reticules to their bosoms and handkerchiefs to their mouths; crowned with the weird excrescence of the driver, haloed by a vague glow of lamp-light that seemed to drown in vapour before it reached the pavement, cabs loomed dim-shaped ever and again, and discharged citizens, bolting like rabbits to their burrows.

And these shadowy figures, wrapped each in his own little shroud of fog, took no notice of each other. In the great warren, each rabbit for himself, especially those clothed in the more expensive fur, who, afraid of carriages on foggy days, are driven underground.

One figure, however, not far from Soames, waited at the station door.

Some buccaneer or lover, of whom each Forsyte thought: 'Poor devil! looks as if he were having a bad time!' Their kind hearts beat a stroke faster for that poor, waiting, anxious lover in the fog; but they hurried by, well knowing that they had neither time nor money to spare for any suffering but their own.

Only a policeman, patrolling slowly and at intervals, took an interest in that waiting figure, the brim of whose slouch hat half hid a face reddened by the cold, all thin, and haggard, over which a hand stole now and again to smooth away anxiety, or renew the resolution that kept him waiting there. But the waiting lover (if lover he were) was used to policemen's scrutiny, or too absorbed in his anxiety, for he never flinched. A hardened case, accustomed to long trysts, to anxiety, and fog, and cold, if only his mistress came at last. Foolish lover! Fogs last until the spring; there is also snow and rain, no comfort anywhere; gnawing fear if you bring her out, gnawing fear if you bid her stay at home!

"Serve him right; he should arrange his affairs better!"

So any respectable Forsyte. Yet, if that sounder citizen could have listened at the waiting lover's heart, out there in the fog and the cold, he would have said again: "Yes, poor devil he's having a bad time!"

Soames got into his cab, and, with the glass down, crept along Sloane Street, and so along the Brompton Road, and home. He reached his house at five.

His wife was not in. She had gone out a quarter of an hour before. Out at such a time of night, into this terrible fog! What was the meaning of that?

He sat by the dining-room fire, with the door open, disturbed to the soul, trying to read the evening paper. A book was no good — in daily papers alone was any narcotic to such worry as his. From the customary events recorded in the journal he drew some comfort. 'Suicide of an actress'—'Grave indisposition of a Statesman' (that chronic sufferer)—'Divorce of an army officer'—'Fire in a colliery'— he read them all. They helped him a little — prescribed by the greatest of all doctors, our natural taste.

It was nearly seven when he heard her come in.

The incident of the night before had long lost its importance under stress of anxiety at her strange sortie into the fog. But now that Irene was home, the memory of her broken-hearted sobbing came back to him, and he felt nervous at the thought of facing her.

She was already on the stairs; her grey fur coat hung to her knees, its high collar almost hid her face, she wore a thick veil.

She neither turned to look at him nor spoke. No ghost or stranger could have passed more silently.

Bilson came to lay dinner, and told him that Mrs. Forsyte was not coming down; she was having the soup in her room.

For once Soames did not 'change'; it was, perhaps, the first time in his life that he had sat down to dinner with soiled cuffs, and, not even noticing them, he brooded long over his wine. He sent Bilson to light a fire in his picture-room, and presently went up there himself.

Turning on the gas, he heaved a deep sigh, as though amongst these treasures, the backs of which confronted him in stacks, around the little room, he had found at length his peace of mind. He went straight up to the greatest treasure of them all, an undoubted Turner, and, carrying it to the easel, turned its face to the light. There had been a movement in Turners, but he had not been able to make up his mind to part with it. He stood for a long time, his pale, clean-shaven face poked forward above his stand-up collar, looking at the picture as though he were adding it up; a wistful expression came into his eyes; he found, perhaps, that it came to too little. He took it down from the easel to put it back against the wall; but, in crossing the room, stopped, for he seemed to hear sobbing.

It was nothing — only the sort of thing that had been bothering him in the morning. And soon after, putting the high guard before the blazing fire, he stole downstairs.

Fresh for the morrow! was his thought. It was long before he went to sleep. . . .

It is now to George Forsyte that the mind must turn for light on the events of that fog-engulfed afternoon.

The wittiest and most sportsmanlike of the Forsytes had passed the day reading a novel in the paternal mansion at Princes' Gardens. Since a recent crisis in his financial affairs he had been kept on parole by Roger, and compelled to reside 'at home.'

Towards five o'clock he went out, and took train at South Kensington Station (for everyone to-day went Underground). His intention was to dine, and pass the evening playing billiards at the Red Pottle — that unique hostel, neither club, hotel, nor good gilt restaurant.

He got out at Charing Cross, choosing it in preference to his more usual St. James's Park, that he might reach Jermyn Street by better lighted ways.

On the platform his eyes — for in combination with a composed and fashionable appearance, George had sharp eyes, and was always on the look-out for fillips to his sardonic humour — his eyes were attracted by a man, who, leaping from a first-class compartment, staggered rather than walked towards the exit.

'So ho, my bird!' said George to himself; 'why, it's "the Buccaneer!"' and he put his big figure on the trail. Nothing afforded him greater amusement than a drunken man.

Bosinney, who wore a slouch hat, stopped in front of him, spun around, and rushed back towards the carriage he had just left. He was too late. A porter caught him by the coat; the train was already moving on.

George's practised glance caught sight of the face of a lady clad in a grey fur coat at the carriage window. It was Mrs. Soames — and George felt that this was interesting!

And now he followed Bosinney more closely than ever — up the stairs, past the ticket collector into the street. In that progress, however, his feelings underwent a change; no longer merely curious and amused, he felt sorry for the poor fellow he was shadowing. 'The Buccaneer' was not drunk, but seemed to be acting under the stress of violent emotion; he was talking to himself, and all that George could catch were the words "Oh, God!" Nor did he appear to know what he was doing, or where going; but stared, hesitated, moved like a man out of his mind; and from being merely a joker in search of amusement, George felt that he must see the poor chap through.

He had 'taken the knock'—'taken the knock!' And he wondered what on earth Mrs. Soames had been saying, what on earth she had been telling him in the railway carriage. She had looked bad enough herself! It made George sorry to think of her travelling on with her trouble all alone.

He followed close behind Bosinney's elbow — tall, burly figure, saying nothing, dodging warily — and shadowed him out into the fog.

There was something here beyond a jest! He kept his head admirably, in spite of some excitement, for in addition to compassion, the instincts of the chase were roused within him.

Bosinney walked right out into the thoroughfare — a vast muffled blackness, where a man could not see six paces before him; where, all around, voices or whistles mocked the sense of direction; and sudden shapes came rolling slow upon them; and now and then a light showed like a dim island in an infinite dark sea.

And fast into this perilous gulf of night walked Bosinney, and fast after him walked George. If the fellow meant to put his 'twopenny' under a 'bus, he would stop it if he could! Across the street and back the hunted creature strode, not groping as other men were groping in that gloom, but driven forward as though the faithful George behind wielded a knout; and this chase after a haunted man began to have for George the strangest fascination.

But it was now that the affair developed in a way which ever afterwards caused it to remain green in his mind. Brought to a stand-still in the fog, he heard words which threw a sudden light on these proceedings. What Mrs. Soames had said to Bosinney in the train was now no longer dark. George understood from those mutterings that Soames had exercised his rights over an estranged and unwilling wife in the greatest — the supreme act of property.

His fancy wandered in the fields of this situation; it impressed him; he guessed something of the anguish, the sexual confusion and horror in Bosinney's heart. And he thought: 'Yes, it's a bit thick! I don't wonder the poor fellow is half-cracked!'

He had run his quarry to earth on a bench under one of the lions in Trafalgar Square, a monster sphynx astray like themselves in that gulf of darkness. Here, rigid and silent, sat Bosinney, and George, in whose patience was a touch of strange brotherliness, took his stand behind. He was not lacking in a certain delicacy — a sense of form — that did not permit him to intrude upon this tragedy, and he waited, quiet as the lion above, his fur collar hitched above his ears concealing the fleshy redness of his cheeks, concealing all but his eyes with their sardonic, compassionate stare. And men kept passing back from business on the way to their clubs — men whose figures shrouded in cocoons of fog came into view like spectres, and like spectres vanished. Then even in his compassion George's Quilpish humour broke forth in a sudden longing to pluck these spectres by the sleeve, and say:

"Hi, you Johnnies! You don't often see a show like this! Here's a poor devil whose mistress has just been telling him a pretty little story of her husband; walk up, walk up! He's taken the knock, you see."

In fancy he saw them gaping round the tortured lover; and grinned as he thought of some respectable, newly-married spectre enabled by the state of his own affections to catch an inkling of what was going on within Bosinney; he fancied he could see his mouth getting wider and wider, and the fog going down and down. For in George was all that contempt of the of the married middle-class — peculiar to the wild and sportsmanlike spirits in its ranks.

But he began to be bored. Waiting was not what he had bargained for.

'After all,' he thought, 'the poor chap will get over it; not the first time such a thing has happened in this little city!' But now his quarry again began muttering words of violent hate and anger. And following a sudden impulse George touched him on the shoulder.

Bosinney spun round.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

George could have stood it well enough in the light of the gas lamps, in the light of that everyday world of which he was so hardy a connoisseur; but in this fog, where all was gloomy and unreal, where nothing had that matter-of-fact value associated by Forsytes with earth, he was a victim to strange qualms, and as he tried to stare back into the eyes of this maniac, he thought:

'If I see a bobby, I'll hand him over; he's not fit to be at large.'

But waiting for no answer, Bosinney strode off into the fog, and George followed, keeping perhaps a little further off, yet more than ever set on tracking him down.

'He can't go on long like this,' he thought. 'It's God's own miracle he's not been run over already.' He brooded no more on policemen, a sportsman's sacred fire alive again within him.

Into a denser gloom than ever Bosinney held on at a furious pace; but his pursuer perceived more method in his madness — he was clearly making his way westwards.

‘He’s really going for Soames!’ thought George. The idea was attractive. It would be a sporting end to such a chase. He had always disliked his cousin.

The shaft of a passing cab brushed against his shoulder and made him leap aside. He did not intend to be killed for the Buccaneer, or anyone. Yet, with hereditary tenacity, he stuck to the trail through vapour that blotted out everything but the shadow of the hunted man and the dim moon of the nearest lamp.

Then suddenly, with the instinct of a town-stroller, George knew himself to be in Piccadilly. Here he could find his way blindfold; and freed from the strain of geographical uncertainty, his mind returned to Bosinney’s trouble.

Down the long avenue of his man-about-town experience, bursting, as it were, through a smirch of doubtful amours, there stalked to him a memory of his youth. A memory, poignant still, that brought the scent of hay, the gleam of moonlight, a summer magic, into the reek and blackness of this London fog — the memory of a night when in the darkest shadow of a lawn he had overheard from a woman’s lips that he was not her sole possessor. And for a moment George walked no longer in black Piccadilly, but lay again, with hell in his heart, and his face to the sweet-smelling, dewy grass, in the long shadow of poplars that hid the moon.

A longing seized him to throw his arm round the Buccaneer, and say, “Come, old boy. Time cures all. Let’s go and drink it off!”

But a voice yelled at him, and he started back. A cab rolled out of blackness, and into blackness disappeared. And suddenly George perceived that he had lost Bosinney. He ran forward and back, felt his heart clutched by a sickening fear, the dark fear which lives in the wings of the fog. Perspiration started out on his brow. He stood quite still, listening with all his might.

“And then,” as he confided to Dartie the same evening in the course of a game of billiards at the Red Pottle, “I lost him.”

Dartie twirled complacently at his dark moustache. He had just put together a neat break of twenty-three — failing at a ‘Jenny.’ “And who was she?” he asked.

George looked slowly at the ‘man of the world’s’ fattish, sallow face, and a little grim smile lurked about the curves of his cheeks and his heavy-lidded eyes.

‘No, no, my fine fellow,’ he thought, ‘I’m not going to tell you.’ For though he mixed with Dartie a good deal, he thought him a bit of a cad.

“Oh, some little love-lady or other,” he said, and chalked his cue.

“A love-lady!” exclaimed Dartie — he used a more figurative expression. “I made sure it was our friend Soa. . . . ”

“Did you?” said George curtly. “Then damme you’ve made an error.”

He missed his shot. He was careful not to allude to the subject again till, towards eleven o’clock, having, in his poetic phraseology, ‘looked upon the drink when it was yellow,’ he drew aside the blind, and gazed out into the street. The murky blackness of the fog was but faintly broken by the lamps of the ‘Red Pottle,’ and no shape of mortal man or thing was in sight.

“I can’t help thinking of that poor Buccaneer,” he said. “He may be wandering out there now in that fog. If he’s not a corpse,” he added with strange dejection.

“Corpse!” said Dartie, in whom the recollection of his defeat at Richmond flared up. “He’s all right. Ten to one if he wasn’t tight!”

George turned on him, looking really formidable, with a sort of savage gloom on his big face.

“Dry up!” he said. “Don’t I tell you he’s ‘taken the knock!’”

◆

Chapter 28

The Trial

In the morning of his case, which was second in the list, Soames was again obliged to start without seeing Irene, and it was just as well, for he had not as yet made up his mind what attitude to adopt towards her.

He had been requested to be in court by half-past ten, to provide against the event of the first action (a breach of promise) collapsing, which however it did not, both sides showing a courage that afforded Waterbuck, Q.C., an opportunity for improving his already great reputation in this class of case. He was opposed by Ram, the other celebrated breach of promise man. It was a battle of giants.

The court delivered judgment just before the luncheon interval. The jury left the box for good, and Soames went out to get something to eat. He met James standing at the little luncheon-bar, like a pelican in the wilderness of the galleries, bent over a sandwich with a glass of sherry before him. The spacious emptiness of the great central hall, over which father and son brooded as they stood together, was marred now and then for a fleeting moment by barristers in wig and gown hurriedly bolting across, by an occasional old lady or rusty-coated man, looking up in a frightened way, and by two persons, bolder than their generation, seated in an embrasure arguing. The sound of their voices arose, together with a scent as of neglected wells, which, mingling with the odour of the galleries, combined to form the savour, like nothing but the emanation of a refined cheese, so indissolubly connected with the administration of British Justice.

It was not long before James addressed his son.

“When’s your case coming on? I suppose it’ll be on directly. I shouldn’t wonder if this Bosinney’d say anything; I should think he’d have to. He’ll go bankrupt if it goes against him.” He took a large bite at his sandwich and a mouthful of sherry. “Your mother,” he said, “wants you and Irene to come and dine to-night.”

A chill smile played round Soames’ lips; he looked back at his father. Anyone who had seen the look, cold and furtive, thus interchanged, might have been pardoned for not appreciating the real understanding between them. James finished his sherry at a draught.

“How much?” he asked.

On returning to the court Soames took at once his rightful seat on the front bench beside his solicitor. He ascertained where his father was seated with a glance so sidelong as to commit nobody.

James, sitting back with his hands clasped over the handle of his umbrella, was brooding on the end of the bench immediately behind counsel, whence he could get away at once when the case was over. He considered Bosinney’s conduct in every way outrageous, but he did not wish to run up against him, feeling that the meeting would be awkward.

Next to the Divorce Court, this court was, perhaps, the favourite emporium of justice, libel, breach of promise, and other commercial actions being frequently decided there. Quite a sprinkling of persons unconnected with the law occupied the back benches, and the hat of a woman or two could be seen in the gallery.

The two rows of seats immediately in front of James were gradually filled by barristers in wigs, who sat down to make pencil notes, chat, and attend to their teeth; but his interest was soon diverted from these lesser lights of justice by the entrance of Waterbuck, Q.C., with the wings of his silk gown rustling, and his red, capable face supported by two short, brown whiskers. The famous Q.C. looked, as James freely admitted, the very picture of a man who could heckle a witness.

For all his experience, it so happened that he had never seen Waterbuck, Q.C., before, and, like many Forsytes in the lower branch of the profession, he had an extreme admiration for a good cross-examiner. The long, lugubrious folds in his cheeks relaxed somewhat after seeing him, especially as he now perceived that Soames alone was represented by silk.

Waterbuck, Q.C., had barely screwed round on his elbow to chat with his Junior before Mr. Justice Bentham himself appeared — a thin, rather hen-like man, with a little stoop, clean-shaven under his snowy wig. Like all the rest of the court, Waterbuck rose, and remained on his feet until the judge was seated. James rose but slightly; he was already comfortable, and had no opinion of Bentham, having sat next but one to him at dinner twice at the Bumley Tomms’. Bumley Tomm was rather a poor thing, though he had been so successful. James himself had given him his first brief. He was excited, too, for he had just found out that Bosinney was not in court.

‘Now, what’s he mean by that?’ he kept on thinking.

The case having been called on, Waterbuck, Q.C., pushing back his papers, hitched his gown on his shoulder, and, with a semi-circular look around him, like a man who is going to bat, arose and addressed the Court.

The facts, he said, were not in dispute, and all that his Lordship would be asked was to interpret the correspondence which had taken place between his client and the defendant, an architect, with reference to the decoration of a house. He would, however, submit that this correspondence could only mean one very plain thing. After briefly reciting the history of the house at Robin Hill, which he described as a mansion, and the actual facts of expenditure, he went on as follows:

“My client, Mr. Soames Forsyte, is a gentleman, a man of property, who would be the last to dispute any legitimate claim that might be made against him, but he has met with such treatment from his architect in the matter of this house, over which he has, as your lordship has heard, already spent some twelve — some twelve thousand pounds, a sum considerably in advance of the amount he had originally contemplated, that as a matter of principle — and this I cannot too strongly emphasize — as a matter of principle, and in the interests of others, he has felt himself compelled to bring this action. The point put forward in defence by the architect I will suggest to your lordship is not worthy of a moment’s serious consideration.” He then read the correspondence.

His client, “a man of recognised position,” was prepared to go into the box, and to swear that he never did authorize, that it was never in his mind to authorize, the expenditure of any money beyond the extreme limit of twelve thousand and fifty pounds, which he had clearly fixed; and not further to waste the time of the court, he would at once call Mr. Forsyte.

Soames then went into the box. His whole appearance was striking in its composure. His face, just supercilious enough, pale and clean-shaven, with a little line between the eyes, and compressed lips; his dress in unostentatious order, one hand neatly gloved, the other bare. He answered the questions put to him in a somewhat low, but distinct voice. His evidence under cross-examination savoured of taciturnity.

Had he not used the expression, “a free hand”? No.

“Come, come!”

The expression he had used was ‘a free hand in the terms of this correspondence.’

“Would you tell the Court that that was English?”

“Yes!”

“What do you say it means?”

“What it says!”

“Are you prepared to deny that it is a contradiction in terms?”

“Yes.”

“You are not an Irishman?”

“No.”

“Are you a well-educated man?”

“Yes.”

“And yet you persist in that statement?”

“Yes.”

Throughout this and much more cross-examination, which turned again and again around the ‘nice point,’ James sat with his hand behind his ear, his eyes fixed upon his son.

He was proud of him! He could not but feel that in similar circumstances he himself would have been tempted to enlarge his replies, but his instinct told him that this taciturnity was the very thing. He sighed with relief, however, when Soames, slowly turning, and without any change of expression, descended from the box.

When it came to the turn of Bosinney’s Counsel to address the Judge, James redoubled his attention, and he searched the Court again and again to see if Bosinney were not somewhere concealed.

Young Chankery began nervously; he was placed by Bosinney’s absence in an awkward position. He therefore did his best to turn that absence to account.

He could not but fear — he said — that his client had met with an accident. He had fully expected him there to give evidence; they had sent round that morning both to Mr. Bosinney's office and to his rooms (though he knew they were one and the same, he thought it was as well not to say so), but it was not known where he was, and this he considered to be ominous, knowing how anxious Mr. Bosinney had been to give his evidence. He had not, however, been instructed to apply for an adjournment, and in default of such instruction he conceived it his duty to go on. The plea on which he somewhat confidently relied, and which his client, had he not unfortunately been prevented in some way from attending, would have supported by his evidence, was that such an expression as a 'free hand' could not be limited, fettered, and rendered unmeaning, by any verbiage which might follow it. He would go further and say that the correspondence showed that whatever he might have said in his evidence, Mr. Forsyte had in fact never contemplated repudiating liability on any of the work ordered or executed by his architect. The defendant had certainly never contemplated such a contingency, or, as was demonstrated by his letters, he would never have proceeded with the work — a work of extreme delicacy, carried out with great care and efficiency, to meet and satisfy the fastidious taste of a connoisseur, a rich man, a man of property. He felt strongly on this point, and feeling strongly he used, perhaps, rather strong words when he said that this action was of a most unjustifiable, unexpected, indeed — unprecedented character. If his Lordship had had the opportunity that he himself had made it his duty to take, to go over this very fine house and see the great delicacy and beauty of the decorations executed by his client — an artist in his most honourable profession — he felt convinced that not for one moment would his Lordship tolerate this, he would use no stronger word than daring attempt to evade legitimate responsibility.

Taking the text of Soames' letters, he lightly touched on 'Boileau v. The Blasted Cement Company, Limited.' "It is doubtful," he said, "what that authority has decided; in any case I would submit that it is just as much in my favour as in my friend's." He then argued the 'nice point' closely. With all due deference he submitted that Mr. Forsyte's expression nullified itself. His client not being a rich man, the matter was a serious one for him; he was a very talented architect, whose professional reputation was undoubtedly somewhat at stake. He concluded with a perhaps too personal appeal to the Judge, as a lover of the arts, to show himself the protector of artists, from what was occasionally — he said occasionally — the too iron hand of capital. "What," he said, "will be the position of the artistic professions, if men of property like this Mr. Forsyte refuse, and are allowed to refuse, to carry out the obligations of the commissions which they have given." He would now call his client, in case he should at the last moment have found himself able to be present.

The name Philip Baynes Bosinney was called three times by the Ushers, and the sound of the calling echoed with strange melancholy throughout the Court and Galleries.

The crying of this name, to which no answer was returned, had upon James a curious effect: it was like calling for your lost dog about the streets. And the creepy feeling that it gave him, of a man missing, grated on his sense of comfort and security-on his cosiness. Though he could not have said why, it made him feel uneasy.

He looked now at the clock — a quarter to three! It would be all over in a quarter of an hour. Where could the young fellow be?

It was only when Mr. Justice Bentham delivered judgment that he got over the turn he had received.

Behind the wooden erection, by which he was fenced from more ordinary mortals, the learned Judge leaned forward. The electric light, just turned on above his head, fell on his face, and mellowed it to an orange hue beneath the snowy crown of his wig; the amplitude of his robes grew before the eye; his whole figure, facing the comparative dusk of the Court, radiated like some majestic and sacred body. He cleared his throat, took a sip of water, broke the nib of a quill against the desk, and, folding his bony hands before him, began.

To James he suddenly loomed much larger than he had ever thought Bentham would loom. It was the majesty of the law; and a person endowed with a nature far less matter-of-fact than that of James might have been excused for failing to pierce this halo, and disinter therefrom the somewhat ordinary Forsyte, who walked and talked in every-day life under the name of Sir Walter Bentham.

He delivered judgment in the following words:

"The facts in this case are not in dispute. On May 15 last the defendant wrote to the plaintiff, requesting to be allowed to withdraw from his professional position in regard to the decoration of the plaintiff's house, unless he were given 'a free hand.' The plaintiff, on May 17, wrote back as follows: 'In giving you, in accordance with your request, this free hand, I wish you to clearly understand that the total cost of the house as handed over to me completely decorated, inclusive of your fee (as arranged between us) must not exceed twelve thousand pounds.' To this letter the defendant replied on May 18: 'If you think that in such a delicate matter as decoration I can bind myself to the exact pound, I am afraid you are mistaken.' On May 19 the plaintiff wrote as follows: 'I did not mean to say that if you should exceed the sum named in my letter to you by ten or twenty or even fifty pounds there would be any difficulty between us. You have a free hand in the terms of this correspondence, and I hope you will see your way to completing the decorations.' On May 20 the defendant replied thus shortly: 'Very well.'

"In completing these decorations, the defendant incurred liabilities and expenses which brought the total cost of this house up to the sum of twelve thousand four hundred pounds, all of which expenditure has been defrayed by the plaintiff. This action has been brought by the plaintiff to recover from the defendant the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds expended by him in excess of a sum of twelve thousand and fifty pounds, alleged by the plaintiff to have been fixed by this correspondence as the maximum sum that the defendant had authority to expend.

"The question for me to decide is whether or no the defendant is liable to refund to the plaintiff this sum. In my judgment he is so liable.

"What in effect the plaintiff has said is this 'I give you a free hand to complete these decorations, provided that you keep within a total cost to me of twelve thousand pounds. If you exceed that sum by as much as fifty pounds, I will not hold you responsible; beyond that point you are no agent of mine, and I shall repudiate liability.' It is not quite clear to me whether, had the plaintiff in fact repudiated liability under his agent's contracts, he would, under all the circumstances, have been successful in so doing; but he has not adopted this course. He has accepted liability, and fallen back upon his rights against the defendant under the terms of the latter's engagement.

"In my judgment the plaintiff is entitled to recover this sum from the defendant.

"It has been sought, on behalf of the defendant, to show that no limit of expenditure was fixed or intended to be fixed by this correspondence. If this were so, I can find no reason for the plaintiff's importation into the correspondence of the figures of twelve thousand pounds and subsequently of fifty pounds. The defendant's contention would render these figures meaningless. It is manifest to me that by his letter of May 20 he assented to a very clear proposition, by the terms of which he must be held to be bound.

"For these reasons there will be judgment for the plaintiff for the amount claimed with costs."

James sighed, and stooping, picked up his umbrella which had fallen with a rattle at the words 'importation into this correspondence.'

Untangling his legs, he rapidly left the Court; without waiting for his son, he snapped up a hansom cab (it was a clear, grey afternoon) and drove straight to Timothy's where he found Swithin; and to him, Mrs. Septimus Small, and Aunt Hester, he recounted the whole proceedings, eating two muffins not altogether in the intervals of speech.

"Soames did very well," he ended; "he's got his head screwed on the right way. This won't please Jolyon. It's a bad business for that young Bosinney; he'll go bankrupt, I shouldn't wonder," and then after a long pause, during which he had stared disquietly into the fire, he added:

"He wasn't there — now why?"

There was a sound of footsteps. The figure of a thick-set man, with the ruddy brown face of robust health, was seen in the back drawing-room. The forefinger of his upraised hand was outlined against the black of his frock coat. He spoke in a grudging voice.

"Well, James," he said, "I can't — I can't stop," and turning round, he walked out.

It was Timothy.

James rose from his chair. "There!" he said, "there! I knew there was something wro. . . . " He checked himself, and was silent, staring before him, as though he had seen a portent.

❦

Chapter 29

Soames Breaks the News

In leaving the Court Soames did not go straight home. He felt disinclined for the City, and drawn by need for sympathy in his triumph, he, too, made his way, but slowly and on foot, to Timothy's in the Bayswater Road.

His father had just left; Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester, in possession of the whole story, greeted him warmly. They were sure he was hungry after all that evidence. Smither should toast him some more muffins, his dear father had eaten them all. He must put his legs up on the sofa; and he must have a glass of prune brandy too. It was so strengthening.

Swithin was still present, having lingered later than his wont, for he felt in want of exercise. On hearing this suggestion, he 'pished.' A pretty pass young men were coming to! His own liver was out of order, and he could not bear the thought of anyone else drinking prune brandy.

He went away almost immediately, saying to Soames: "And how's your wife? You tell her from me that if she's dull, and likes to come and dine with me quietly, I'll give her such a bottle of champagne as she doesn't get every day." Staring down from his height on Soames he contracted his thick, puffy, yellow hand as though squeezing within it all this small fry, and throwing out his chest he waddled slowly away.

Mrs. Small and Aunt Hester were left horrified. Swithin was so droll!

They themselves were longing to ask Soames how Irene would take the result, yet knew that they must not; he would perhaps say something of his own accord, to throw some light on this, the present burning question in their lives, the question that from necessity of silence tortured them almost beyond bearing; for even Timothy had now been told, and the effect on his health was little short of alarming. And what, too, would June do? This, also, was a most exciting, if dangerous speculation!

They had never forgotten old Jolyon's visit, since when he had not once been to see them; they had never forgotten the feeling it gave all who were present, that the family was no longer what it had been — that the family was breaking up.

But Soames gave them no help, sitting with his knees crossed, talking of the Barbizon school of painters, whom he had just discovered. These were the coming men, he said; he should not wonder if a lot of money were made over them; he had his eye on two pictures by a man called Corot, charming things; if he could get them at a reasonable price he was going to buy them — they would, he thought, fetch a big price some day.

Interested as they could not but be, neither Mrs. Septimus Small nor Aunt Hester could entirely acquiesce in being thus put off.

It was interesting — most interesting — and then Soames was so clever that they were sure he would do something with those pictures if anybody could; but what was his plan now that he had won his case; was he going to leave London at once, and live in the country, or what was he going to do?

Soames answered that he did not know, he thought they should be moving soon. He rose and kissed his aunts.

No sooner had Aunt Juley received this emblem of departure than a change came over her, as though she were being visited by dreadful courage; every little roll of flesh on her face seemed trying to escape from an invisible, confining mask.

She rose to the full extent of her more than medium height, and said: "It has been on my mind a long time, dear, and if nobody else will tell you, I have made up my mind that. . . . "

Aunt Hester interrupted her: "Mind, Julia, you do it. . . . " she gasped —"on your own responsibility!"

Mrs. Small went on as though she had not heard: "I think you ought to know, dear, that Mrs. MacAnder saw Irene walking in Richmond Park with Mr. Bosinney."

Aunt Hester, who had also risen, sank back in her chair, and turned her face away. Really Juley was too — she should not do such things when she — Aunt Hester, was in the room; and, breathless with anticipation, she waited for what Soames would answer.

He had flushed the peculiar flush which always centred between his eyes; lifting his hand, and, as it were, selecting a finger, he bit a nail delicately; then, drawling it out between set lips, he said: "Mrs. MacAnder is a cat!"

Without waiting for any reply, he left the room.

When he went into Timothy's he had made up his mind what course to pursue on getting home. He would go up to Irene and say:

"Well, I've won my case, and there's an end of it! I don't want to be hard on Bosinney; I'll see if we can't come to some arrangement; he shan't be pressed. And now let's turn over a new leaf! We'll let the house, and get out of these fogs. We'll go down to Robin Hill at once. I— I never meant to be rough with you! Let's shake hands — and —" Perhaps she would let him kiss her, and forget!

When he came out of Timothy's his intentions were no longer so simple. The smouldering jealousy and suspicion of months blazed up within him. He would put an end to that sort of thing once and for all; he would not have her drag his name in the dirt! If she could not or would not love him, as was her duty and his right — she should not play him tricks with anyone else! He would tax her with it; threaten to divorce her! That would make her behave; she would never face that. But — but — what if she did? He was staggered; this had not occurred to him.

What if she did? What if she made him a confession? How would he stand then? He would have to bring a divorce!

A divorce! Thus close, the word was paralyzing, so utterly at variance with all the principles that had hitherto guided his life. Its lack of compromise appalled him; he felt — like the captain of a ship, going to the side of his vessel, and, with his own hands throwing over the most precious of his bales. This jettisoning of his property with his own hand seemed uncanny to Soames. It would injure him in his profession: He would have to get rid of the house at Robin Hill, on which he had spent so much money, so much anticipation — and at a sacrifice. And she! She would no longer belong to him, not even in name! She would pass out of his life, and he — he should never see her again!

He traversed in the cab the length of a street without getting beyond the thought that he should never see her again!

But perhaps there was nothing to confess, even now very likely there was nothing to confess. Was it wise to push things so far? Was it wise to put himself into a position where he might have to eat his words? The result of this case would ruin Bosinney; a ruined man was desperate, but — what could he do? He might go abroad, ruined men always went abroad. What could they do — if indeed it was 'they'— without money? It would be better to wait and see how things turned out. If necessary, he could have her watched. The agony of his jealousy (for all the world like the crisis of an aching tooth) came on again; and he almost cried out. But he must decide, fix on some course of action before he got home. When the cab drew up at the door, he had decided nothing.

He entered, pale, his hands moist with perspiration, dreading to meet her, burning to meet her, ignorant of what he was to say or do.

The maid Bilson was in the hall, and in answer to his question: "Where is your mistress?" told him that Mrs. Forsyte had left the house about noon, taking with her a trunk and bag.

Snatching the sleeve of his fur coat away from her grasp, he confronted her:

"What?" he exclaimed; "what's that you said?" Suddenly recollecting that he must not betray emotion, he added: "What message did she leave?" and noticed with secret terror the startled look of the maid's eyes.

"Mrs. Forsyte left no message, sir."

"No message; very well, thank you, that will do. I shall be dining out."

The maid went downstairs, leaving him still in his fur coat, idly turning over the visiting cards in the porcelain bowl that stood on the carved oak rug chest in the hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Bareham Culcher. Mrs. Septimus Small. Mrs. Baynes. Mr. Solomon Thornworthy. Lady Bellis. Miss Hermione Bellis. Miss Winifred Bellis. Miss Ella Bellis.

Who the devil were all these people? He seemed to have forgotten all familiar things. The words 'no message — a trunk, and a bag,' played a hide-and-seek in his brain. It was incredible that she had left no message, and, still in his fur coat, he ran upstairs two steps at a time, as a young married man when he comes home will run up to his wife's room.

Everything was dainty, fresh, sweet-smelling; everything in perfect order. On the great bed with its lilac silk quilt, was the bag she had made and embroidered with her own hands to hold her sleeping things; her slippers ready at the foot; the sheets even turned over at the head as though expecting her.

On the table stood the silver-mounted brushes and bottles from her dressing bag, his own present. There must, then, be some mistake. What bag had she taken? He went to the bell to summon Bilson, but remembered in time that he must assume knowledge of where Irene had gone, take it all as a matter of course, and grope out the meaning for himself.

He locked the doors, and tried to think, but felt his brain going round; and suddenly tears forced themselves into his eyes.

Hurriedly pulling off his coat, he looked at himself in the mirror.

He was too pale, a greyish tinge all over his face; he poured out water, and began feverishly washing.

Her silver-mounted brushes smelt faintly of the perfumed lotion she used for her hair; and at this scent the burning sickness of his jealousy seized him again.

Struggling into his fur, he ran downstairs and out into the street.

He had not lost all command of himself, however, and as he went down Sloane Street he framed a story for use, in case he should not find her at Bosinney's. But if he should? His power of decision again failed; he reached the house without knowing what he should do if he did find her there.

It was after office hours, and the street door was closed; the woman who opened it could not say whether Mr. Bosinney were in or no; she had not seen him that day, not for two or three days; she did not attend to him now, nobody attended to him, he. . . .

Soames interrupted her, he would go up and see for himself. He went up with a dogged, white face.

The top floor was unlighted, the door closed, no one answered his ringing, he could hear no sound. He was obliged to descend, shivering under his fur, a chill at his heart. Hailing a cab, he told the man to drive to Park Lane.

On the way he tried to recollect when he had last given her a cheque; she could not have more than three or four pounds, but there were her jewels; and with exquisite torture he remembered how much money she could raise on these; enough to take them abroad; enough for them to live on for months! He tried to calculate; the cab stopped, and he got out with the calculation unmade.

The butler asked whether Mrs. Soames was in the cab, the master had told him they were both expected to dinner.

Soames answered: "No. Mrs. Forsyte has a cold."

The butler was sorry.

Soames thought he was looking at him inquisitively, and remembering that he was not in dress clothes, asked: "Anybody here to dinner, Warmson?"

"Nobody but Mr. and Mrs. Dartie, sir."

Again it seemed to Soames that the butler was looking curiously at him. His composure gave way.

"What are you looking at?" he said. "What's the matter with me, eh?"

The butler blushed, hung up the fur coat, murmured something that sounded like: "Nothing, sir, I'm sure, sir," and stealthily withdrew.

Soames walked upstairs. Passing the drawing-room without a look, he went straight up to his mother's and father's bedroom.

James, standing sideways, the concave lines of his tall, lean figure displayed to advantage in shirt-sleeves and evening waistcoat, his head bent, the end of his white tie peeping askew from underneath one white Dundreary whisker, his eyes peering with intense concentration, his lips pouting, was hooking the top hooks of his wife's bodice. Soames stopped; he felt half-choked, whether because he had come upstairs too fast, or for some other reason. He — he himself had never — never been asked to. . . .

He heard his father's voice, as though there were a pin in his mouth, saying: "Who's that? Who's there? What d'you want?" His mother's: "Here, Felice, come and hook this; your master'll never get done."

He put his hand up to his throat, and said hoarsely:

"It's I— Soames!"

He noticed gratefully the affectionate surprise in Emily's: "Well, my dear boy?" and James', as he dropped the hook: "What, Soames! What's brought you up? Aren't you well?"

He answered mechanically: "I'm all right," and looked at them, and it seemed impossible to bring out his news.

James, quick to take alarm, began: “You don’t look well. I expect you’ve taken a chill — it’s liver, I shouldn’t wonder. Your mother’ll give you. . . . ”

But Emily broke in quietly: “Have you brought Irene?”

Soames shook his head.

“No,” he stammered, “she — she’s left me!”

Emily deserted the mirror before which she was standing. Her tall, full figure lost its majesty and became very human as she came running over to Soames.

“My dear boy! My dear boy!”

She put her lips to his forehead, and stroked his hand.

James, too, had turned full towards his son; his face looked older.

“Left you?” he said. “What d’you mean — left you? You never told me she was going to leave you.”

Soames answered surlily: “How could I tell? What’s to be done?”

James began walking up and down; he looked strange and stork-like without a coat. “What’s to be done!” he muttered. “How should I know what’s to be done? What’s the good of asking me? Nobody tells me anything, and then they come and ask me what’s to be done; and I should like to know how I’m to tell them! Here’s your mother, there she stands; she doesn’t say anything. What I should say you’ve got to do is to follow her..”

Soames smiled; his peculiar, supercilious smile had never before looked pitiable.

“I don’t know where she’s gone,” he said.

“Don’t know where she’s gone!” said James. “How d’you mean, don’t know where she’s gone? Where d’you suppose she’s gone? She’s gone after that young Bosinney, that’s where she’s gone. I knew how it would be.”

Soames, in the long silence that followed, felt his mother pressing his hand. And all that passed seemed to pass as though his own power of thinking or doing had gone to sleep.

His father’s face, dusky red, twitching as if he were going to cry, and words breaking out that seemed rent from him by some spasm in his soul.

“There’ll be a scandal; I always said so.” Then, no one saying anything: “And there you stand, you and your mother!”

And Emily’s voice, calm, rather contemptuous: “Come, now, James! Soames will do all that he can.”

And James, staring at the floor, a little brokenly: “Well, I can’t help you; I’m getting old. Don’t you be in too great a hurry, my boy.”

And his mother’s voice again: “Soames will do all he can to get her back. We won’t talk of it. It’ll all come right, I dare say.”

And James: “Well, I can’t see how it can come right. And if she hasn’t gone off with that young Bosinney, my advice to you is not to listen to her, but to follow her and get her back.”

Once more Soames felt his mother stroking his hand, in token of her approval, and as though repeating some form of sacred oath, he muttered between his teeth: “I will!”

All three went down to the drawing-room together. There, were gathered the three girls and Dartie; had Irene been present, the family circle would have been complete.

James sank into his armchair, and except for a word of cold greeting to Dartie, whom he both despised and dreaded, as a man likely to be always in want of money, he said nothing till dinner was announced. Soames, too, was silent; Emily alone, a woman of cool courage, maintained a conversation with Winifred on trivial subjects. She was never more composed in her manner and conversation than that evening.

A decision having been come to not to speak of Irene’s flight, no view was expressed by any other member of the family as to the right course to be pursued; there can be little doubt, from the general tone adopted in relation to events as they afterwards turned out, that James’s advice: “Don’t you listen to her, follow-her and get her back!” would, with here and there an exception, have been regarded as sound, not only in Park Lane, but amongst the Nicholases, the Rogers, and at Timothy’s. Just as it would surely have been endorsed by that wider body of Forsytes all over London, who were merely excluded from judgment by ignorance of the story.

In spite then of Emily's efforts, the dinner was served by Warmson and the footman almost in silence. Dartie was sulky, and drank all he could get; the girls seldom talked to each other at any time. James asked once where June was, and what she was doing with herself in these days. No one could tell him. He sank back into gloom. Only when Winifred recounted how little Publius had given his bad penny to a beggar, did he brighten up.

"Ah!" he said, "that's a clever little chap. I don't know what'll become of him, if he goes on like this. An intelligent little chap, I call him!" But it was only a flash.

The courses succeeded one another solemnly, under the electric light, which glared down onto the table, but barely reached the principal ornament of the walls, a so-called 'Sea Piece by Turner,' almost entirely composed of cordage and drowning men.

Champagne was handed, and then a bottle of James' prehistoric port, but as by the chill hand of some skeleton.

At ten o'clock Soames left; twice in reply to questions, he had said that Irene was not well; he felt he could no longer trust himself. His mother kissed him with her large soft kiss, and he pressed her hand, a flush of warmth in his cheeks. He walked away in the cold wind, which whistled desolately round the corners of the streets, under a sky of clear steel-blue, alive with stars; he noticed neither their frosty greeting, nor the crackle of the curled-up plane-leaves, nor the night-women hurrying in their shabby furs, nor the pinched faces of vagabonds at street corners. Winter was come! But Soames hastened home, oblivious; his hands trembled as he took the late letters from the gilt wire cage into which they had been thrust through the slit in the door.'

None from Irene!

He went into the dining-room; the fire was bright there, his chair drawn up to it, slippers ready, spirit case, and carven cigarette box on the table; but after staring at it all for a minute or two, he turned out the light and went upstairs. There was a fire too in his dressing-room, but her room was dark and cold. It was into this room that Soames went.

He made a great illumination with candles, and for a long time continued pacing up and down between the bed and the door. He could not get used to the thought that she had really left him, and as though still searching for some message, some reason, some reading of all the mystery of his married life, he began opening every recess and drawer.

There were her dresses; he had always liked, indeed insisted, that she should be well-dressed — she had taken very few; two or three at most, and drawer after drawer; full of linen and silk things, was untouched.

Perhaps after all it was only a freak, and she had gone to the seaside for a few days' change. If only that were so, and she were really coming back, he would never again do as he had done that fatal night before last, never again run that risk — though it was her duty, her duty as a wife; though she did belong to him — he would never again run that risk; she was evidently not quite right in her head!

He stooped over the drawer where she kept her jewels; it was not locked, and came open as he pulled; the jewel box had the key in it. This surprised him until he remembered that it was sure to be empty. He opened it.

It was far from empty. Divided, in little green velvet compartments, were all the things he had given her, even her watch, and stuck into the recess that contained — the watch was a three-cornered note addressed 'Soames Forsyte,' in Irene's handwriting:

'I think I have taken nothing that you or your people have given me.' And that was all.

He looked at the clasps and bracelets of diamonds and pearls, at the little flat gold watch with a great diamond set in sapphires, at the chains and rings, each in its nest, and the tears rushed up in his eyes and dropped upon them.

Nothing that she could have done, nothing that she had done, brought home to him like this the inner significance of her act. For the moment, perhaps, he understood nearly all there was to understand — understood that she loathed him, that she had loathed him for years, that for all intents and purposes they were like people living in different worlds, that there was no hope for him, never had been; even, that she had suffered — that she was to be pitied.

In that moment of emotion he betrayed the Forsyte in him — forgot himself, his interests, his property — was capable of almost anything; was lifted into the pure ether of the selfless and unpractical.

Such moments pass quickly.

And as though with the tears he had purged himself of weakness, he got up, locked the box, and slowly, almost trembling, carried it with him into the other room.

CHAPTER 30

JUNE'S VICTORY

June had waited for her chance, scanning the duller columns of the journals, morning and evening with an assiduity which at first puzzled old Jolyon; and when her chance came, she took it with all the promptitude and resolute tenacity of her character.

She will always remember best in her life that morning when at last she saw amongst the reliable Cause List of the Times newspaper, under the heading of Court XIII, Mr. Justice Bentham, the case of Forsyte v. Bosinney.

Like a gambler who stakes his last piece of money, she had prepared to hazard her all upon this throw; it was not her nature to contemplate defeat. How, unless with the instinct of a woman in love, she knew that Bosinney's discomfiture in this action was assured, cannot be told — on this assumption, however, she laid her plans, as upon a certainty.

Half past eleven found her at watch in the gallery of Court XIII., and there she remained till the case of Forsyte v. Bosinney was over. Bosinney's absence did not disquiet her; she had felt instinctively that he would not defend himself. At the end of the judgment she hastened down, and took a cab to his rooms.

She passed the open street-door and the offices on the three lower floors without attracting notice; not till she reached the top did her difficulties begin.

Her ring was not answered; she had now to make up her mind whether she would go down and ask the caretaker in the basement to let her in to await Mr. Bosinney's return, or remain patiently outside the door, trusting that no one would, come up. She decided on the latter course.

A quarter of an hour had passed in freezing vigil on the landing, before it occurred to her that Bosinney had been used to leave the key of his rooms under the door-mat. She looked and found it there. For some minutes she could not decide to make use of it; at last she let herself in and left the door open that anyone who came might see she was there on business.

This was not the same June who had paid the trembling visit five months ago; those months of suffering and restraint had made her less sensitive; she had dwelt on this visit so long, with such minuteness, that its terrors were discounted beforehand. She was not there to fail this time, for if she failed no one could help her.

Like some mother beast on the watch over her young, her little quick figure never stood still in that room, but wandered from wall to wall, from window to door, fingering now one thing, now another. There was dust everywhere, the room could not have been cleaned for weeks, and June, quick to catch at anything that should buoy up her hope, saw in it a sign that he had been obliged, for economy's sake, to give up his servant.

She looked into the bedroom; the bed was roughly made, as though by the hand of man. Listening intently, she darted in, and peered into his cupboards. A few shirts and collars, a pair of muddy boots — the room was bare even of garments.

She stole back to the sitting-room, and now she noticed the absence of all the little things he had set store by. The clock that had been his mother's, the field-glasses that had hung over the sofa; two really valuable old prints of Harrow, where his father had been at school, and last, not least, the piece of Japanese pottery she herself had given him. All were gone; and in spite of the rage roused within her championing soul at the thought that the world should treat him thus, their disappearance augured happily for the success of her plan.

It was while looking at the spot where the piece of Japanese pottery had stood that she felt a strange certainty of being watched, and, turning, saw Irene in the open doorway.

The two stood gazing at each other for a minute in silence; then June walked forward and held out her hand. Irene did not take it.

When her hand was refused, June put it behind her. Her eyes grew steady with anger; she waited for Irene to speak; and thus waiting, took in, with who-knows-what rage of jealousy, suspicion, and curiosity, every detail of her friend's face and dress and figure.

Irene was clothed in her long grey fur; the travelling cap on her head left a wave of gold hair visible above her forehead. The soft fullness of the coat made her face as small as a child's.

Unlike June’s cheeks, her cheeks had no colour in them, but were ivory white and pinched as if with cold. Dark circles lay round her eyes. In one hand she held a bunch of violets.

She looked back at June, no smile on her lips; and with those great dark eyes fastened on her, the girl, for all her startled anger, felt something of the old spell.

She spoke first, after all.

“What have you come for?” But the feeling that she herself was being asked the same question, made her add: “This horrible case. I came to tell him — he has lost it.”

Irene did not speak, her eyes never moved from June’s face, and the girl cried:

“Don’t stand there as if you were made of stone!”

Irene laughed: “I wish to God I were!”

But June turned away: “Stop!” she cried, “don’t tell me! I don’t want to hear! I don’t want to hear what you’ve come for. I don’t want to hear!” And like some uneasy spirit, she began swiftly walking to and fro. Suddenly she broke out:

“I was here first. We can’t both stay here together!”

On Irene’s face a smile wandered up, and died out like a flicker of firelight. She did not move. And then it was that June perceived under the softness and immobility of this figure something desperate and resolved; something not to be turned away, something dangerous. She tore off her hat, and, putting both hands to her brow, pressed back the bronze mass of her hair.

“You have no right here!” she cried defiantly.

Irene answered: “I have no right anywhere!

“What do you mean?”

“I have left Soames. You always wanted me to!”

June put her hands over her ears.

“Don’t! I don’t want to hear anything — I don’t want to know anything. It’s impossible to fight with you! What makes you stand like that? Why don’t you go?”

Irene’s lips moved; she seemed to be saying: “Where should I go?”

June turned to the window. She could see the face of a clock down in the street. It was nearly four. At any moment he might come! She looked back across her shoulder, and her face was distorted with anger.

But Irene had not moved; in her gloved hands she ceaselessly turned and twisted the little bunch of violets.

The tears of rage and disappointment rolled down June’s cheeks.

“How could you come?” she said. “You have been a false friend to me!”

Again Irene laughed. June saw that she had played a wrong card, and broke down.

“Why have you come?” she sobbed. “You’ve ruined my life, and now you want to ruin his!”

Irene’s mouth quivered; her eyes met June’s with a look so mournful that the girl cried out in the midst of her sobbing, “No, no!”

But Irene’s head bent till it touched her breast. She turned, and went quickly out, hiding her lips with the little bunch of violets.

June ran to the door. She heard the footsteps going down and down. She called out: “Come back, Irene! Come back!”

The footsteps died away. . . .

Bewildered and torn, the girl stood at the top of the stairs. Why had Irene gone, leaving her mistress of the field? What did it mean? Had she really given him up to her? Or had she . . .? And she was the prey of a gnawing uncertainty. . . . Bosinney did not come. . . .

About six o’clock that afternoon old Jolyon returned from Wistaria Avenue, where now almost every day he spent some hours, and asked if his grand-daughter were upstairs. On being told that she had just come in, he sent up to her room to request her to come down and speak to him.

He had made up his mind to tell her that he was reconciled with her father. In future bygones must be bygones. He would no longer live alone, or practically alone, in this great house; he was going to give it up, and take one in the country for his son, where they could all go and live together. If June did not like this, she could have an allowance and live by herself. It wouldn't make much difference to her, for it was a long time since she had shown him any affection.

But when June came down, her face was pinched and piteous; there was a strained, pathetic look in her eyes. She snuggled up in her old attitude on the arm of his chair, and what he said compared but poorly with the clear, authoritative, injured statement he had thought out with much care. His heart felt sore, as the great heart of a mother-bird feels sore when its youngling flies and bruises its wing. His words halted, as though he were apologizing for having at last deviated from the path of virtue, and succumbed, in defiance of sounder principles, to his more natural instincts.

He seemed nervous lest, in thus announcing his intentions, he should be setting his granddaughter a bad example; and now that he came to the point, his way of putting the suggestion that, if she didn't like it, she could live by herself and lump it, was delicate in the extreme.'

"And if, by any chance, my darling," he said, "you found you didn't get on — with them, why, I could make that all right. You could have what you liked. We could find a little flat in London where you could set up, and I could be running to continually. But the children," he added, "are dear little things!"

Then, in the midst of this grave, rather transparent, explanation of changed policy, his eyes twinkled. "This'll astonish Timothy's weak nerves. That precious young thing will have something to say about this, or I'm a Dutchman!"

June had not yet spoken. Perched thus on the arm of his chair, with her head above him, her face was invisible. But presently he felt her warm cheek against his own, and knew that, at all events, there was nothing very alarming in her attitude towards his news. He began to take courage.

"You'll like your father," he said —"an amiable chap. Never was much push about him, but easy to get on with. You'll find him artistic and all that."

And old Jolyon bethought him of the dozen or so water-colour drawings all carefully locked up in his bedroom; for now that his son was going to become a man of property he did not think them quite such poor things as heretofore.

"As to your — your stepmother," he said, using the word with some little difficulty, "I call her a refined woman — a bit of a Mrs. Gummidge, I shouldn't wonder — but very fond of Jo. And the children," he repeated — indeed, this sentence ran like music through all his solemn self-justification —"are sweet little things!"

If June had known, those words but reincarnated that tender love for little children, for the young and weak, which in the past had made him desert his son for her tiny self, and now, as the cycle rolled, was taking him from her.

But he began to get alarmed at her silence, and asked impatiently: "Well, what do you say?"

June slid down to his knee, and she in her turn began her tale. She thought it would all go splendidly; she did not see any difficulty, and she did not care a bit what people thought.

Old Jolyon wriggled. H'm! then people would think! He had thought that after all these years perhaps they wouldn't! Well, he couldn't help it! Nevertheless, he could not approve of his granddaughter's way of putting it — she ought to mind what people thought!

Yet he said nothing. His feelings were too mixed, too inconsistent for expression.

No — went on June he did not care; what business was it of theirs? There was only one thing — and with her cheek pressing against his knee, old Jolyon knew at once that this something was no trifle: As he was going to buy a house in the country, would he not — to please her — buy that splendid house of Soames' at Robin Hill? It was finished, it was perfectly beautiful, and no one would live in it now. They would all be so happy there.

Old Jolyon was on the alert at once. Wasn't the 'man of property' going to live in his new house, then? He never alluded to Soames now but under this title.

"No"— June said —"he was not; she knew that he was not!"

How did she know?

She could not tell him, but she knew. She knew nearly for certain! It was most unlikely; circumstances had changed! Irene's words still rang in her head: "I have left Soames. Where should I go?"

But she kept silence about that.

If her grandfather would only buy it and settle that wretched claim that ought never to have been made on Phil! It would be the very best thing for everybody, and everything — everything might come straight.

And June put her lips to his forehead, and pressed them close.

But old Jolyon freed himself from her caress, his face wore the judicial look which came upon it when he dealt with affairs. He asked: What did she mean? There was something behind all this — had she been seeing Bosinney?

June answered: “No; but I have been to his rooms.”

“Been to his rooms? Who took you there?”

June faced him steadily. “I went alone. He has lost that case. I don’t care whether it was right or wrong. I want to help him; and I will!”

Old Jolyon asked again: “Have you seen him?” His glance seemed to pierce right through the girl’s eyes into her soul.

Again June answered: “No; he was not there. I waited, but he did not come.”

Old Jolyon made a movement of relief. She had risen and looked down at him; so slight, and light, and young, but so fixed, and so determined; and disturbed, vexed, as he was, he could not frown away that fixed look. The feeling of being beaten, of the reins having slipped, of being old and tired, mastered him.

“Ah!” he said at last, “you’ll get yourself into a mess one of these days, I can see. You want your own way in everything.”

Visited by one of his strange bursts of philosophy, he added: “Like that you were born; and like that you’ll stay until you die!”

And he, who in his dealings with men of business, with Boards, with Forsytes of all descriptions, with such as were not Forsytes, had always had his own way, looked at his indomitable grandchild sadly — for he felt in her that quality which above all others he unconsciously admired.

“Do you know what they say is going on?” he said slowly.

June crimsoned.

“Yes — no! I know — and I don’t know — I don’t care!” and she stamped her foot.

“I believe,” said old Jolyon, dropping his eyes, “that you’d have him if he were dead!”

There was a long silence before he spoke again.

“But as to buying this house — you don’t know what you’re talking about!”

June said that she did. She knew that he could get it if he wanted. He would only have to give what it cost.

“What it cost! You know nothing about it. I won’t go to Soames — I’ll have nothing more to do with that young man.”

“But you needn’t; you can go to Uncle James. If you can’t buy the house, will you pay his lawsuit claim? I know he is terribly hard up — I’ve seen it. You can stop it out of my money!”

A twinkle came into old Jolyon’s eyes.

“Stop it out of your money! A pretty way. And what will you do, pray, without your money?”

But secretly, the idea of wresting the house from James and his son had begun to take hold of him. He had heard on Forsyte ‘Change much comment, much rather doubtful praise of this house. It was ‘too artistic,’ but a fine place. To take from the ‘man of property’ that on which he had set his heart, would be a crowning triumph over James, practical proof that he was going to make a man of property of Jo, to put him back in his proper position, and there to keep him secure. Justice once for all on those who had chosen to regard his son as a poor, penniless outcast.

He would see, he would see! It might be out of the question; he was not going to pay a fancy price, but if it could be done, why, perhaps he would do it!

And still more secretly he knew that he could not refuse her.

But he did not commit himself. He would think it over — he said to June.

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Chapter 31

Bosinney's Departure

Old Jolyon was not given to hasty decisions; it is probable that he would have continued to think over the purchase of the house at Robin Hill, had not June's face told him that he would have no peace until he acted.

At breakfast next morning she asked him what time she should order the carriage.

"Carriage!" he said, with some appearance of innocence; "what for? I'm not going out!"

She answered: "If you don't go early, you won't catch Uncle James before he goes into the City."

"James! what about your Uncle James?"

"The house," she replied, in such a voice that he no longer pretended ignorance.

"I've not made up my mind," he said.

"You must! You must! Oh! Gran — think of me!"

Old Jolyon grumbled out: "Think of you — I'm always thinking of you, but you don't think of yourself; you don't think what you're letting yourself in for. Well, order the carriage at ten!"

At a quarter past he was placing his umbrella in the stand at Park Lane — he did not choose to relinquish his hat and coat; telling Warmson that he wanted to see his master, he went, without being announced, into the study, and sat down.

James was still in the dining-room talking to Soames, who had come round again before breakfast. On hearing who his visitor was, he muttered nervously: "Now, what's he want, I wonder?"

He then got up.

"Well," he said to Soames, "don't you go doing anything in a hurry. The first thing is to find out where she is — I should go to Stainer's about it; they're the best men, if they can't find her, nobody can." And suddenly moved to strange softness, he muttered to himself, "Poor little thing, I can't tell what she was thinking about!" and went out blowing his nose.

Old Jolyon did not rise on seeing his brother, but held out his hand, and exchanged with him the clasp of a Forsyte.

James took another chair by the table, and leaned his head on his hand.

"Well," he said, "how are you? We don't see much of you nowadays!"

Old Jolyon paid no attention to the remark.

"How's Emily?" he asked; and waiting for no reply, went on "I've come to see you about this affair of young Bosinney's. I'm told that new house of his is a white elephant."

"I don't know anything about a white elephant," said James, "I know he's lost his case, and I should say he'll go bankrupt."

Old Jolyon was not slow to seize the opportunity this gave him.

"I shouldn't wonder a bit!" he agreed; "and if he goes bankrupt, the 'man of property'— that is, Soames'll be out of pocket. Now, what I was thinking was this: If he's not going to live there. . . . "

Seeing both surprise and suspicion in James' eye, he quickly went on: "I don't want to know anything; I suppose Irene's put her foot down — it's not material to me. But I'm thinking of a house in the country myself, not too far from London, and if it suited me I don't say that I mightn't look at it, at a price."

James listened to this statement with a strange mixture of doubt, suspicion, and relief, merging into a dread of something behind, and tinged with the remains of his old undoubted reliance upon his elder brother's good faith and judgment. There was anxiety, too, as to what old Jolyon could have heard and how he had heard it; and a sort of hopefulness arising from the thought that if June's connection with Bosinney were completely at an end, her grandfather would hardly seem anxious to help the young fellow. Altogether he was puzzled; as he did not like either to show this, or to commit himself in any way, he said:

"They tell me you're altering your Will in favour of your son."

He had not been told this; he had merely added the fact of having seen old Jolyon with his son and grandchildren to the fact that he had taken his Will away from Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte. The shot went home.

"Who told you that?" asked old Jolyon.

"I'm sure I don't know," said James; "I can't remember names — I know somebody told me Soames spent a lot of money on this house; he's not likely to part with it except at a good price."

"Well," said old Jolyon, "if, he thinks I'm going to pay a fancy price, he's mistaken. I've not got the money to throw away that he seems to have. Let him try and sell it at a forced sale, and see what he'll get. It's not every man's house, I hear!"

James, who was secretly also of this opinion, answered: "It's a gentleman's house. Soames is here now if you'd like to see him."

"No," said old Jolyon, "I haven't got as far as that; and I'm not likely to, I can see that very well if I'm met in this manner!"

James was a little cowed; when it came to the actual figures of a commercial transaction he was sure of himself, for then he was dealing with facts, not with men; but preliminary negotiations such as these made him nervous — he never knew quite how far he could go.

"Well," he said, "I know nothing about it. Soames, he tells me nothing; I should think he'd entertain it — it's a question of price."

"Oh!" said old Jolyon, "don't let him make a favour of it!" He placed his hat on his head in dudgeon.

The door was opened and Soames came in.

"There's a policeman out here," he said with his half smile, "for Uncle Jolyon."

Old Jolyon looked at him angrily, and James said: "A policeman? I don't know anything about a policeman. But I suppose you know something about him," he added to old Jolyon with a look of suspicion: "I suppose you'd better see him!"

In the hall an Inspector of Police stood stolidly regarding with heavy-lidded pale-blue eyes the fine old English furniture picked up by James at the famous Mavrojano sale in Portman Square. "You'll find my brother in there," said James.

The Inspector raised his fingers respectfully to his peaked cap, and entered the study.

James saw him go in with a strange sensation.

"Well," he said to Soames, "I suppose we must wait and see what he wants. Your uncle's been here about the house!"

He returned with Soames into the dining-room, but could not rest.

"Now what does he want?" he murmured again.

"Who?" replied Soames: "the Inspector? They sent him round from Stanhope Gate, that's all I know. That 'nonconformist' of Uncle Jolyon's has been pilfering, I shouldn't wonder!"

But in spite of his calmness, he too was ill at ease.

At the end of ten minutes old Jolyon came in. He walked up to the table, and stood there perfectly silent pulling at his long white moustaches. James gazed up at him with opening mouth; he had never seen his brother look like this.

Old Jolyon raised his hand, and said slowly:

"Young Bosinney has been run over in the fog and killed."

Then standing above his brother and his nephew, and looking down at him with his deep eyes:

"There's — some — talk — of — suicide," he said.

James' jaw dropped. "Suicide! What should he do that for?"

Old Jolyon answered sternly: "God knows, if you and your son don't!"

But James did not reply.

For all men of great age, even for all Forsytes, life has had bitter experiences. The passer-by, who sees them wrapped in cloaks of custom, wealth, and comfort, would never suspect that such black shadows had fallen on their roads. To every man of great age — to Sir Walter Bentham himself — the idea of suicide has once at least been present in the ante-room of his soul; on the threshold, waiting to enter, held out from the inmost chamber by some chance reality, some vague fear, some painful hope. To Forsytes that final renunciation of property is hard. Oh! it is hard! Seldom — perhaps never — can they achieve, it; and yet, how near have they not sometimes been!

So even with James! Then in the medley of his thoughts, he broke out: “Why I saw it in the paper yesterday: ‘Run over in the fog!’ They didn’t know his name!” He turned from one face to the other in his confusion of soul; but instinctively all the time he was rejecting that rumour of suicide. He dared not entertain this thought, so against his interest, against the interest of his son, of every Forsyte. He strove against it; and as his nature ever unconsciously rejected that which it could not with safety accept, so gradually he overcame this fear. It was an accident! It must have been!

Old Jolyon broke in on his reverie.

“Death was instantaneous. He lay all day yesterday at the hospital. There was nothing to tell them who he was. I am going there now; you and your son had better come too.”

No one opposing this command he led the way from the room.

The day was still and clear and bright, and driving over to Park Lane from Stanhope Gate, old Jolyon had had the carriage open. Sitting back on the padded cushions, finishing his cigar, he had noticed with pleasure the keen crispness of the air, the bustle of the cabs and people; the strange, almost Parisian, alacrity that the first fine day will bring into London streets after a spell of fog or rain. And he had felt so happy; he had not felt like it for months. His confession to June was off his mind; he had the prospect of his son’s, above all, of his grandchildren’s company in the future —(he had appointed to meet young Jolyon at the Hotch Potch that very manning to — discuss it again); and there was the pleasurable excitement of a coming encounter, a coming victory, over James and the ‘man of property’ in the matter of the house.

He had the carriage closed now; he had no heart to look on gaiety; nor was it right that Forsytes should be seen driving with an Inspector of Police.

In that carriage the Inspector spoke again of the death:

“It was not so very thick — Just there. The driver says the gentleman must have had time to see what he was about, he seemed to walk right into it. It appears that he was very hard up, we found several pawn tickets at his rooms, his account at the bank is overdrawn, and there’s this case in to-day’s papers;” his cold blue eyes travelled from one to another of the three Forsytes in the carriage.

Old Jolyon watching from his corner saw his brother’s face change, and the brooding, worried, look deepen on it. At the Inspector’s words, indeed, all James’ doubts and fears revived. Hard-up — pawn-tickets — an overdrawn account! These words that had all his life been a far-off nightmare to him, seemed to make uncannily real that suspicion of suicide which must on no account be entertained. He sought his son’s eye; but lynx-eyed, taciturn, immovable, Soames gave no answering look. And to old Jolyon watching, divining the league of mutual defence between them, there came an overmastering desire to have his own son at his side, as though this visit to the dead man’s body was a battle in which otherwise he must single-handed meet those two. And the thought of how to keep June’s name out of the business kept whirring in his brain. James had his son to support him! Why should he not send for Jo?

Taking out his card-case, he pencilled the following message:

‘Come round at once. I’ve sent the carriage for you.’

On getting out he gave this card to his coachman, telling him to drive — as fast as possible to the Hotch Potch Club, and if Mr. Jolyon Forsyte were there to give him the card and bring him at once. If not there yet, he was to wait till he came.

He followed the others slowly up the steps, leaning on his umbrella, and stood a moment to get his breath. The Inspector said: “This is the mortuary, sir. But take your time.”

In the bare, white-walled room, empty of all but a streak of sunshine smeared along the dustless floor, lay a form covered by a sheet. With a huge steady hand the Inspector took the hem and turned it back. A sightless face gazed up at them, and on either side of that sightless defiant face the three Forsytes gazed down; in each one of them the secret emotions, fears, and pity of his own nature rose and fell like the rising, falling waves of life, whose wish those white walls barred out now for ever from Bosinney. And in each one of them the trend of his nature, the odd essential spring, which moved him in fashions minutely, unalterably different from those of every other human being, forced him to a different attitude of thought. Far from the others, yet inscrutably close, each stood thus, alone with death, silent, his eyes lowered.

The Inspector asked softly:

"You identify the gentleman, sir?"

Old Jolyon raised his head and nodded. He looked at his brother opposite, at that long lean figure brooding over the dead man, with face dusky red, and strained grey eyes; and at the figure of Soames white and still by his father's side. And all that he had felt against those two was gone like smoke in the long white presence of Death. Whence comes it, how comes it — Death? Sudden reverse of all that goes before; blind setting forth on a path that leads to where? Dark quenching of the fire! The heavy, brutal crushing — out that all men must go through, keeping their eyes clear and brave unto the end! Small and of no import, insects though they are! And across old Jolyon's face there flitted a gleam, for Soames, murmuring to the Inspector, crept noiselessly away.

Then suddenly James raised his eyes. There was a queer appeal in that suspicious troubled look: "I know I'm no match for you," it seemed to say. And, hunting for handkerchief he wiped his brow; then, bending sorrowful and lank over the dead man, he too turned and hurried out.

Old Jolyon stood, still as death, his eyes fixed on the body. Who shall tell of what he was thinking? Of himself, when his hair was brown like the hair of that young fellow dead before him? Of himself, with his battle just beginning, the long, long battle he had loved; the battle that was over for this young man almost before it had begun? Of his grand-daughter, with her broken hopes? Of that other woman? Of the strangeness, and the pity of it? And the irony, inscrutable, and bitter of that end? Justice! There was no justice for men, for they were ever in the dark!

Or perhaps in his philosophy he thought: Better to be out of, it all! Better to have done with it, like this poor youth. . . .

Some one touched him on the arm.

A tear started up and wetted his eyelash. "Well," he said, "I'm no good here. I'd better be going. You'll come to me as soon as you can, Jo," and with his head bowed he went away.

It was young Jolyon's turn to take his stand beside the dead man, round whose fallen body he seemed to see all the Forsytes breathless, and prostrated. The stroke had fallen too swiftly.

The forces underlying every tragedy — forces that take no denial, working through cross currents to their ironical end, had met and fused with a thunder-clap, flung out the victim, and flattened to the ground all those that stood around.

Or so at all events young Jolyon seemed to see them, lying around Bosinney's body.

He asked the Inspector to tell him what had happened, and the latter, like a man who does not every day get such a chance, again detailed such facts as were known.

"There's more here, sir, however," he said, "than meets the eye. I don't believe in suicide, nor in pure accident, myself. It's more likely I think that he was suffering under great stress of mind, and took no notice of things about him. Perhaps you can throw some light on these."

He took from his pocket a little packet and laid it on the table. Carefully undoing it, he revealed a lady's handkerchief, pinned through the folds with a pin of discoloured Venetian gold, the stone of which had fallen from the socket. A scent of dried violets rose to young Jolyon's nostrils.

"Found in his breast pocket," said the Inspector; "the name has been cut away!"

Young Jolyon with difficulty answered: "I'm afraid I cannot help you!" But vividly there rose before him the face he had seen light up, so tremulous and glad, at Bosinney's coming! Of her he thought more than of his own daughter, more than of them all — of her with the dark, soft glance, the delicate passive face, waiting for the dead man, waiting even at that moment, perhaps, still and patient in the sunlight.

He walked sorrowfully away from the hospital towards his father's house, reflecting that this death would break up the Forsyte family. The stroke had indeed slipped past their defences into the very wood of their tree. They might flourish to all appearance as before, preserving a brave show before the eyes of London, but the trunk was dead, withered by the same flash that had stricken down Bosinney. And now the saplings would take its place, each one a new custodian of the sense of property.

Good forest of Forsytes! thought young Jolyon — soundest timber of our land!

Concerning the cause of this death — his family would doubtless reject with vigour the suspicion of suicide, which was so compromising! They would take it as an accident, a stroke of fate. In their hearts they would even feel it an intervention of Providence, a retribution — had not Bosinney endangered their two most priceless possessions, the pocket and the hearth? And they would talk of ‘that unfortunate accident of young Bosinney’s,’ but perhaps they would not talk — silence might be better!

As for himself, he regarded the bus-driver’s account of the accident as of very little value. For no one so madly in love committed suicide for want of money; nor was Bosinney the sort of fellow to set much store by a financial crisis. And so he too rejected this theory of suicide, the dead man’s face rose too clearly before him. Gone in the heyday of his summer — and to believe thus that an accident had cut Bosinney off in the full sweep of his passion was more than ever pitiful to young Jolyon.

Then came a vision of Soames’ home as it now was, and must be hereafter. The streak of lightning had flashed its clear uncanny gleam on bare bones with grinning spaces between, the disguising flesh was gone. . . .

In the dining-room at Stanhope Gate old Jolyon was sitting alone when his son came in. He looked very wan in his great armchair. And his eyes travelling round the walls with their pictures of still life, and the masterpiece ‘Dutch fishing-boats at Sunset’ seemed as though passing their gaze over his life with its hopes, its gains, its achievements.

“Ah! Jo!” he said, “is that you? I’ve told poor little June. But that’s not all of it. Are you going to Soames’? She’s brought it on herself, I suppose; but somehow I can’t bear to think of her, shut up there — and all alone.” And holding up his thin, veined hand, he clenched it.

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Chapter 32

Irene's Return

After leaving James and old Jolyon in the mortuary of the hospital, Soames hurried aimlessly along the streets.

The tragic event of Bosinney's death altered the complexion of everything. There was no longer the same feeling that to lose a minute would be fatal, nor would he now risk communicating the fact of his wife's flight to anyone till the inquest was over.

That morning he had risen early, before the postman came, had taken the first-post letters from the box himself, and, though there had been none from Irene, he had made an opportunity of telling Bilson that her mistress was at the sea; he would probably, he said, be going down himself from Saturday to Monday. This had given him time to breathe, time to leave no stone unturned to find her.

But now, cut off from taking steps by Bosinney's death — that strange death, to think of which was like putting a hot iron to his heart, like lifting a great weight from it — he did not know how to pass his day; and he wandered here and there through the streets, looking at every face he met, devoured by a hundred anxieties.

And as he wandered, he thought of him who had finished his wandering, his prowling, and would never haunt his house again.

Already in the afternoon he passed posters announcing the identity of the dead man, and bought the papers to see what they said. He would stop their mouths if he could, and he went into the City, and was closeted with Boulter for a long time.

On his way home, passing the steps of Jobson's about half past four, he met George Forsyte, who held out an evening paper to Soames, saying:

"Here! Have you seen this about the poor Buccaneer?"

Soames answered stonily: "Yes."

George stared at him. He had never liked Soames; he now held him responsible for Bosinney's death. Soames had done for him — done for him by that act of property that had sent the Buccaneer to run amok that fatal afternoon.

'The poor fellow,' he was thinking, 'was so cracked with jealousy, so cracked for his vengeance, that he heard nothing of the omnibus in that infernal fog.'

Soames had done for him! And this judgment was in George's eyes.

"They talk of suicide here," he said at last. "That cat won't jump."

Soames shook his head. "An accident," he muttered.

Clenching his fist on the paper, George crammed it into his pocket. He could not resist a parting shot.

"H'mm! All flourishing at home? Any little Soameses yet?"

With a face as white as the steps of Jobson's, and a lip raised as if snarling, Soames brushed past him and was gone. . . .

On reaching home, and entering the little lighted hall with his latchkey, the first thing that caught his eye was his wife's gold-mounted umbrella lying on the rug chest. Flinging off his fur coat, he hurried to the drawing-room.

The curtains were drawn for the night, a bright fire of cedar-logs burned in the grate, and by its light he saw Irene sitting in her usual corner on the sofa. He shut the door softly, and went towards her. She did not move, and did not seem to see him.

"So you've come back?" he said. "Why are you sitting here in the dark?"

Then he caught sight of her face, so white and motionless that it seemed as though the blood must have stopped flowing in her veins; and her eyes, that looked enormous, like the great, wide, startled brown eyes of an owl.

Huddled in her grey fur against the sofa cushions, she had a strange resemblance to a captive owl, bunched fir its soft feathers against the wires of a cage. The supple erectness of her figure was gone, as though she had been broken by cruel exercise; as though there were no longer any reason for being beautiful, and supple, and erect.

“So you’ve come back,” he repeated.

She never looked up, and never spoke, the firelight playing over her motionless figure.

Suddenly she tried to rise, but he prevented her; it was then that he understood.

She had come back like an animal wounded to death, not knowing where to turn, not knowing what she was doing. The sight of her figure, huddled in the fur, was enough.

He knew then for certain that Bosinney had been her lover; knew that she had seen the report of his death — perhaps, like himself, had bought a paper at the draughty corner of a street, and read it.

She had come back then of her own accord, to the cage she had pined to be free of — and taking in all the tremendous significance of this, he longed to cry: “Take your hated body, that I love, out of my house! Take away that pitiful white face, so cruel and soft — before I crush it. Get out of my sight; never let me see you again!”

And, at those unspoken words, he seemed to see her rise and move away, like a woman in a terrible dream, from which she was fighting to awake — rise and go out into the dark and cold, without a thought of him, without so much as the knowledge of his presence.

Then he cried, contradicting what he had not yet spoken, “No; stay there!” And turning away from her, he sat down in his accustomed chair on the other side of the hearth.

They sat in silence.

And Soames thought: ‘Why is all this? Why should I suffer so? What have I done? It is not my fault!’

Again he looked at her, huddled like a bird that is shot and dying, whose poor breast you see panting as the air is taken from it, whose poor eyes look at you who have shot it, with a slow, soft, unseeing look, taking farewell of all that is good — of the sun, and the air, and its mate.

So they sat, by the firelight, in the silence, one on each side of the hearth.

And the fume of the burning cedar logs, that he loved so well, seemed to grip Soames by the throat till he could bear it no longer. And going out into the hall he flung the door wide, to gulp down the cold air that came in; then without hat or overcoat went out into the Square.

Along the garden rails a half-starved cat came rubbing her way towards him, and Soames thought: ‘Suffering! when will it cease, my suffering?’

At a front door across the way was a man of his acquaintance named Rutter, scraping his boots, with an air of ‘I am master here.’ And Soames walked on.

From far in the clear air the bells of the church where he and Irene had been married were pealing in ‘practice’ for the advent of Christ, the chimes ringing out above the sound of traffic. He felt a craving for strong drink, to lull him to indifference, or rouse him to fury. If only he could burst out of himself, out of this web that for the first time in his life he felt around him. If only he could surrender to the thought: ‘Divorce her — turn her out! She has forgotten you. Forget her!’

If only he could surrender to the thought: ‘Let her go — she has suffered enough!’

If only he could surrender to the desire: ‘Make a slave of her — she is in your power!’

If only even he could surrender to the sudden vision: ‘What does it all matter?’ Forget himself for a minute, forget that it mattered what he did, forget that whatever he did he must sacrifice something.

If only he could act on an impulse!

He could forget nothing; surrender to no thought, vision, or desire; it was all too serious; too close around him, an unbreakable cage.

On the far side of the Square newspaper boys were calling their evening wares, and the ghoulish cries mingled and jangled with the sound of those church bells.

Soames covered his ears. The thought flashed across him that but for a chance, he himself, and not Bosinney, might be lying dead, and she, instead of crouching there like a shot bird with those dying eyes. . . .

Something soft touched his legs, the cat was rubbing herself against them. And a sob that shook him from head to foot burst from Soames’ chest. Then all was still again in the dark, where the houses seemed to stare at him, each with a master and mistress of its own, and a secret story of happiness or sorrow.

And suddenly he saw that his own door was open, and black against the light from the hall a man standing with his back turned. Something slid too in his breast, and he stole up close behind.

He could see his own fur coat flung across the carved oak chair; the Persian rugs; the silver bowls, the rows of porcelain plates arranged along the walls, and this unknown man who was standing there.

And sharply he asked: “What is it you want, sir?”

The visitor turned. It was young Jolyon.

“The door was open,” he said. “Might I see your wife for a minute, I have a message for her?”

Soames gave him a strange, sidelong stare.

“My wife can see no one,” he muttered doggedly.

Young Jolyon answered gently: “I shouldn’t keep her a minute.”

Soames brushed by him and barred the way.

“She can see no one,” he said again.

Young Jolyon’s glance shot past him into the hall, and Soames turned. There in the drawing-room doorway stood Irene, her eyes were wild and eager, her lips were parted, her hands outstretched. In the sight of both men that light vanished from her face; her hands dropped to her sides; she stood like stone.

Soames spun round, and met his visitor’s eyes, and at the look he saw in them, a sound like a snarl escaped him. He drew his lips back in the ghost of a smile.

“This is my house,” he said; “I manage my own affairs. I’ve told you once — I tell you again; we are not at home.”

And in young Jolyon’s face he slammed the door.

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THE COUNTRY HOUSE

PART I

CHAPTER I

A PARTY AT WORSTED SKEYNES

The year was 1891, the month October, the day Monday. In the dark outside the railway-station at Worsted Skeynes Mr. Horace Pendyce's omnibus, his brougham, his luggage-cart, monopolised space. The face of Mr. Horace Pendyce's coachman monopolised the light of the solitary station lantern. Rosy-gilled, with fat close-clipped grey whiskers and inscrutably pursed lips, it presided high up in the easterly air like an emblem of the feudal system. On the platform within, Mr. Horace Pendyce's first footman and second groom in long livery coats with silver buttons, their appearance slightly relieved by the rakish cock of their top-hats, awaited the arrival of the 6.15.

The first footman took from his pocket a half-sheet of stamped and crested notepaper covered with Mr. Horace Pendyce's small and precise calligraphy. He read from it in a nasal, derisive voice:

"Hon. Geoff, and Mrs. Winlow, blue room and dress; maid, small drab. Mr. George, white room. Mrs. Jaspar Bellew, gold. The Captain, red. General Pendyce, pink room; valet, back attic. That's the lot."

The groom, a red-cheeked youth, paid no attention.

"If this here Ambler of Mr. George's wins on Wednesday," he said, "it's as good as five pounds in my pocket. Who does for Mr. George?"

"James, of course."

The groom whistled.

"I'll try an' get his loadin' to-morrow. Are you on, Tom?"

The footman answered:

"Here's another over the page. Green room, right wing — that Foxleigh; he's no good. 'Take all you can and give nothing' sort! But can't he shoot just! That's why they ask him!"

From behind a screen of dark trees the train ran in.

Down the platform came the first passengers — two cattlemen with long sticks, slouching by in their frieze coats, diffusing an odour of beast and black tobacco; then a couple, and single figures, keeping as far apart as possible, the guests of Mr. Horace Pendyce. Slowly they came out one by one into the loom of the carriages, and stood with their eyes fixed carefully before them, as though afraid they might recognise each other. A tall man in a fur coat, whose tall wife carried a small bag of silver and shagreen, spoke to the coachman:

"How are you, Benson? Mr. George says Captain Pendyce told him he wouldn't be down till the 9.30. I suppose we'd better — —"

Like a breeze tuning through the frigid silence of a fog, a high, clear voice was heard:

"Oh, thanks; I'll go up in the brougham."

Followed by the first footman carrying her wraps, and muffled in a white veil, through which the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow's leisurely gaze caught the gleam of eyes, a lady stepped forward, and with a backward glance vanished into the brougham. Her head appeared again behind the swathe of gauze.

"There's plenty of room, George."

George Pendyce walked quickly forward, and disappeared beside her. There was a crunch of wheels; the brougham rolled away.

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow raised his face again.

"Who was that, Benson?"

The coachman leaned over confidentially, holding his podgy white-gloved hand outspread on a level with the Hon. Geoffrey's hat.

"Mrs. Jaspar Bellew, sir. Captain Bellew's lady, of the Firs."

"But I thought they weren't—"

"No, sir; they're not, sir."

"Ah!"

A calm rarefied voice was heard from the door of the omnibus:

"Now, Geoff!"

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow followed his wife, Mr. Foxleigh, and General Pendyce into the omnibus, and again Mrs. Winlow's voice was heard:

"Oh, do you mind my maid? Get in, Tookson!"

Mr. Horace Pendyce's mansion, white and long and low, standing well within its acres, had come into the possession of his great-great-great-grandfather through an alliance with the last of the Worsteds. Originally a fine property let in smallish holdings to tenants who, having no attention bestowed on them, did very well and paid excellent rents, it was now farmed on model lines at a slight loss. At stated intervals Mr. Pendyce imported a new kind of cow, or partridge, and built a wing to the schools. His income was fortunately independent of this estate. He was in complete accord with the Rector and the sanitary authorities, and not infrequently complained that his tenants did not stay on the land. His wife was a Totteridge, and his coverts admirable. He had been, needless to say, an eldest son. It was his individual conviction that individualism had ruined England, and he had set himself deliberately to eradicate this vice from the character of his tenants. By substituting for their individualism his own tastes, plans, and sentiments, one might almost say his own individualism, and losing money thereby, he had gone far to demonstrate his pet theory that the higher the individualism the more sterile the life of the community. If, however, the matter was thus put to him he grew both garrulous and angry, for he considered himself not an individualist, but what he called a "Tory Communist." In connection with his agricultural interests he was naturally a Fair Trader; a tax on corn, he knew, would make all the difference in the world to the prosperity of England. As he often said: "A tax of three or four shillings on corn, and I should be farming my estate at a profit."

Mr. Pendyce had other peculiarities, in which he was not too individual. He was averse to any change in the existing order of things, made lists of everything, and was never really so happy as when talking of himself or his estate. He had a black spaniel dog called John, with a long nose and longer ears, whom he had bred himself till the creature was not happy out of his sight.

In appearance Mr. Pendyce was rather of the old school, upright and active, with thin side-whiskers, to which, however, for some years past he had added moustaches which drooped and were now grizzled. He wore large cravats and square-tailed coats. He did not smoke.

At the head of his dining-table loaded with flowers and plate, he sat between the Hon. Mrs. Winlow and Mrs. Jaspar Bellew, nor could he have desired more striking and contrasted supporters. Equally tall, full-figured, and comely, Nature had fixed between these two women a gulf which Mr. Pendyce, a man of spare figure, tried in vain to fill. The composure peculiar to the ashen type of the British aristocracy wintered permanently on Mrs. Winlow's features like the smile of a frosty day. Expressionless to a degree, they at once convinced the spectator that she was a woman of the best breeding. Had an expression ever arisen upon these features, it is impossible to say what might have been the consequences. She had followed her nurse's adjuration: "Lor, Miss Truda, never you make a face — You might grow so!" Never since that day had Gertrude Winlow, an Honourable in her own right and in that of her husband, made a face, not even, it is believed, when her son was born. And then to find on the other side of Mr. Pendyce that puzzling Mrs. Bellew with the green-grey eyes, at which the best people of her own sex looked with instinctive disapproval! A woman in her position should avoid anything conspicuous, and Nature had given her a too-striking appearance. People said that when, the year before last, she had separated from Captain Bellew, and left the Firs, it was simply because they were tired of one another. They said, too, that it looked as if she were encouraging the attentions of George, Mr. Pendyce's eldest son.

Lady Maiden had remarked to Mrs. Winlow in the drawing-room before dinner:

"What is it about that Mrs. Bellew? I never liked her. A woman situated as she is ought to be more careful. I don't understand her being asked here at all, with her husband still at the Firs, only just over the way. Besides, she's very hard up. She doesn't even attempt to disguise it. I call her almost an adventuress."

Mrs. Winlow had answered:

"But she's some sort of cousin to Mrs. Pendyce. The Pendyces are related to everybody! It's so boring. One never knows—"

Lady Maiden replied:

"Did you know her when she was living down here? I dislike those hard-riding women. She and her husband were perfectly reckless. One heard of nothing else but what she had jumped and how she had jumped it; and she bets and goes racing. If George Pendyce is not in love with her, I'm very much mistaken. He's been seeing far too much of her in town. She's one of those women that men are always hanging about!"

At the head of his dinner-table, where before each guest was placed a menu carefully written in his eldest daughter's handwriting, Horace Pendyce supped his soup.

"This soup," he said to Mrs. Bellew, "reminds me of your dear old father; he was extraordinarily fond of it. I had a great respect for your father — a wonderful man! I always said he was the most determined man I'd met since my own dear father, and he was the most obstinate man in the three kingdoms!"

He frequently made use of the expression "in the three kingdoms," which sometimes preceded a statement that his grandmother was descended from Richard III., while his grandfather came down from the Cornish giants, one of whom, he would say with a disparaging smile, had once thrown a cow over a wall.

"Your father was too much of an individualist, Mrs. Bellew. I have a lot of experience of individualism in the management of my estate, and I find that an individualist is never contented. My tenants have everything they want, but it's impossible to satisfy them. There's a fellow called Peacock, now, a most pig-headed, narrowminded chap. I don't give in to him, of course. If he had his way, he'd go back to the old days, farm the land in his own fashion. He wants to buy it from me. Old vicious system of yeoman farming. Says his grandfather had it. He's that sort of man. I hate individualism; it's ruining England. You won't find better cottages, or better farm-buildings anywhere than on my estate. I go in for centralisation. I dare say you know what I call myself — a 'Tory Communist.' To my mind, that's the party of the future. Now, your father's motto was: 'Every man for himself!' On the land that would never do. Landlord and tenant must work together. You'll come over to Newmarket with us on Wednesday? George has a very fine horse running in the Rutlandshire a very fine horse. He doesn't bet, I'm glad to say. If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's gambling!"

Mrs. Bellew gave him a sidelong glance, and a little ironical smile peeped out on her full red lips. But Mr. Pendyce had been called away to his soup. When he was ready to resume the conversation she was talking to his son, and the Squire, frowning, turned to the Hon. Mrs. Winlow. Her attention was automatic, complete, monosyllabic; she did not appear to fatigue herself by an over-sympathetic comprehension, nor was she subservient. Mr. Pendyce found her a competent listener.

"The country is changing," he said, "changing every day. Country houses are not what they were. A great responsibility rests on us landlords. If we go, the whole thing goes."

What, indeed, could be more delightful than this country-house life of Mr. Pendyce; its perfect cleanliness, its busy leisure, its combination of fresh air and scented warmth, its complete intellectual repose, its essential and professional aloofness from suffering of any kind, and its soup — emblematically and above all, its soup — made from the rich remains of pampered beasts?

Mr. Pendyce thought this life the one right life; those who lived it the only right people. He considered it a duty to live this life, with its simple, healthy, yet luxurious curriculum, surrounded by creatures bred for his own devouring, surrounded, as it were, by a sea of soup! And that people should go on existing by the million in the towns, preying on each other, and getting continually out of work, with all those other depressing concomitants of an awkward state, distressed him. While suburban life, that living in little rows of slate-roofed houses so lamentably similar that no man of individual taste could bear to see them, he much disliked. Yet, in spite of his strong prejudice in favour of country-house life, he was not a rich man, his income barely exceeding ten thousand a year.

The first shooting-party of the season, devoted to spinneys and the outlying coverts, had been, as usual, made to synchronise with the last Newmarket Meeting, for Newmarket was within an uncomfortable distance of Worsted Skeynes; and though Mr. Pendyce had a horror of gaming, he liked to figure there and pass for a man interested in sport for sport's sake, and he was really rather proud of the fact that his son had picked up so good a horse as the Ambler promised to be for so little money, and was racing him for pure sport.

The guests had been carefully chosen. On Mrs. Winlow's right was Thomas Brandwhite (of Brown and Brandwhite), who had a position in the financial world which could not well be ignored, two places in the country, and a yacht. His long, lined face, with very heavy moustaches, wore habitually a peevish look. He had retired from his firm, and now only sat on the Boards of several companies. Next to him was Mrs. Hussell Barter, with that touching look to be seen on the faces of many English ladies, that look of women who are always doing their duty, their rather painful duty; whose eyes, above cheeks creased and withered, once rose-leaf hued, now over-coloured by strong weather, are starry and anxious; whose speech is simple, sympathetic, direct, a little shy, a little hopeless, yet always hopeful; who are ever surrounded by children, invalids, old people, all looking to them for support; who have never known the luxury of breaking down — of these was Mrs. Hussell Barter, the wife of the Reverend Hussell Barter, who would shoot to-morrow, but would not attend the race-meeting on the Wednesday. On her other hand was Gilbert Foxleigh, a lean-flanked man with a long, narrow head, strong white teeth, and hollow, thirsting eyes. He came of a county family of Foxleighs, and was one of six brothers, invaluable to the owners of coverts or young, half-broken horses in days when, as a Foxleigh would put it, "hardly a Johnny of the lot could shoot or ride for nuts." There was no species of beast, bird, or fish, that he could not and did not destroy with equal skill and enjoyment. The only thing against him was his income, which was very small. He had taken in Mrs. Brandwhite, to whom, however, he talked but little, leaving her to General Pendyce, her neighbour on the other side.

Had he been born a year before his brother, instead of a year after, Charles Pendyce would naturally have owned Worsted Skeynes, and Horace would have gone into the Army instead. As it was, having almost imperceptibly become a Major-General, he had retired, taking with him his pension. The third brother, had he chosen to be born, would have gone into the Church, where a living awaited him; he had elected otherwise, and the living had passed perforce to a collateral branch. Between Horace and Charles, seen from behind, it was difficult to distinguish. Both were spare, both erect, with the least inclination to bottle shoulders, but Charles Pendyce brushed his hair, both before and behind, away from a central parting, and about the back of his still active knees there was a look of feebleness. Seen from the front they could readily be differentiated, for the General's whiskers broadened down his cheeks till they reached his moustaches, and there was in his face and manner a sort of formal, though discontented, effacement, as of an individualist who has all his life been part of a system, from which he has issued at last, unconscious indeed of his loss, but with a vague sense of injury. He had never married, feeling it to be comparatively useless, owing to Horace having gained that year on him at the start, and he lived with a valet close to his club in Pall Mall.

In Lady Maiden, whom he had taken in to dinner, Worsted Skeynes entertained a good woman and a personality, whose teas to Working Men in the London season were famous. No Working Man who had attended them had ever gone away without a wholesome respect for his hostess. She was indeed a woman who permitted no liberties to be taken with her in any walk of life. The daughter of a Rural Dean, she appeared at her best when seated, having rather short legs. Her face was well-coloured, her mouth, firm and rather wide, her nose well-shaped, her hair dark. She spoke in a decided voice, and did not mince her words. It was to her that her husband, Sir James, owed his reactionary principles on the subject of woman.

Round the corner at the end of the table the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow was telling his hostess of the Balkan Provinces, from a tour in which he had just returned. His face, of the Norman type, with regular, handsome features, had a leisurely and capable expression. His manner was easy and pleasant; only at times it became apparent that his ideas were in perfect order, so that he would naturally not care to be corrected. His father, Lord Montrossor, whose seat was at Coldingham six miles away, would ultimately yield to him his place in the House of Lords.

And next him sat Mrs. Pendyce. A portrait of this lady hung over the sideboard at the end of the room, and though it had been painted by a fashionable painter, it had caught a gleam of that "something" still in her face these twenty years later. She was not young, her dark hair was going grey; but she was not old, for she had been married at nineteen and was still only fifty-two. Her face was rather long and very pale, and her eyebrows arched and dark and always slightly raised. Her eyes were dark grey, sometimes almost black, for the pupils dilated when she was moved; her lips were the least thing parted, and the expression of those lips and eyes was of a rather touching gentleness, of a rather touching expectancy. And yet all this was not the "something"; that was rather the outward sign of an inborn sense that she had no need to ask for things, of an instinctive faith that she already had them. By that "something," and by her long, transparent hands, men could tell that she had been a Totteridge. And her voice, which was rather slow, with a little, not unpleasant, trick of speech, and her eyelids by second nature just a trifle lowered, confirmed this impression. Over her bosom, which hid the heart of a lady, rose and fell a piece of wonderful old lace.

Round the corner again Sir James Maiden and Bee Pendyce (the eldest daughter) were talking of horses and hunting — Bee seldom from choice spoke of anything else. Her face was pleasant and good, yet not quite pretty, and this little fact seemed to have entered into her very nature, making her shy and ever willing to do things for others.

Sir James had small grey whiskers and a carved, keen visage. He came of an old Kentish family which had migrated to Cambridgeshire; his coverts were exceptionally fine; he was also a Justice of the Peace, a Colonel of Yeomanry, a keen Churchman, and much feared by poachers. He held the reactionary views already mentioned, being a little afraid of Lady Malden.

Beyond Miss Pendyce sat the Reverend Hussell Barter, who would shoot to-morrow, but would not attend the race-meeting on Wednesday.

The Rector of Worsted Skeynes was not tall, and his head had been rendered somewhat bald by thought. His broad face, of very straight build from the top of the forehead to the base of the chin, was well-coloured, clean-shaven, and of a shape that may be seen in portraits of the Georgian era. His cheeks were full and folded, his lower lip had a habit of protruding, and his eyebrows jutted out above his full, light eyes. His manner was authoritative, and he articulated his words in a voice to which long service in the pulpit had imparted remarkable carrying-power — in fact, when engaged in private conversation, it was with difficulty that he was not overheard. Perhaps even in confidential matters he was not unwilling that what he said should bear fruit. In some ways, indeed, he was typical. Uncertainty, hesitation, toleration — except of such opinions as he held — he did not like. Imagination he distrusted. He found his duty in life very clear, and other people's perhaps clearer, and he did not encourage his parishioners to think for themselves. The habit seemed to him a dangerous one. He was outspoken in his opinions, and when he had occasion to find fault, spoke of the offender as “a man of no character,” “a fellow like that,” with such a ring of conviction that his audience could not but be convinced of the immorality of that person. He had a bluff jolly way of speaking, and was popular in his parish — a good cricketer, a still better fisherman, a fair shot, though, as he said, he could not really afford time for shooting. While disclaiming interference in secular matters, he watched the tendencies of his flock from a sound point of view, and especially encouraged them to support the existing order of things — the British Empire and the English Church. His cure was hereditary, and he fortunately possessed some private means, for he had a large family. His partner at dinner was Norah, the younger of the two Pendyce girls, who had a round, open face, and a more decided manner than her sister Bee.

Her brother George, the eldest son, sat on her right. George was of middle height, with a red-brown, clean-shaved face and solid jaw. His eyes were grey; he had firm lips, and darkish, carefully brushed hair, a little thin on the top, but with that peculiar gloss seen on the hair of some men about town. His clothes were unostentatiously perfect. Such men may be seen in Piccadilly at any hour of the day or night. He had been intended for the Guards, but had failed to pass the necessary examination, through no fault of his own, owing to a constitutional inability to spell. Had he been his younger brother Gerald, he would probably have fulfilled the Pendyce tradition, and passed into the Army as a matter of course. And had Gerald (now Captain Pendyce) been George the elder son, he might possibly have failed. George lived at his club in town on an allowance of six hundred a year, and sat a great deal in a bay-window reading Ruff’s “Guide to the Turf.”

He raised his eyes from the menu and looked stealthily round. Helen Bellew was talking to his father, her white shoulder turned a little away. George was proud of his composure, but there was a strange longing in his face. She gave, indeed, just excuse for people to consider her too good-looking for the position in which she was placed. Her figure was tall and supple and full, and now that she no longer hunted was getting fuller. Her hair, looped back in loose bands across a broad low brow, had a peculiar soft lustre.

There was a touch of sensuality about her lips. The face was too broad across the brow and cheekbones, but the eyes were magnificent — ice-grey, sometimes almost green, always luminous, and set in with dark lashes.

There was something pathetic in George’s gaze, as of a man forced to look against his will.

It had been going on all that past summer, and still he did not know where he stood. Sometimes she seemed fond of him, sometimes treated him as though he had no chance. That which he had begun as a game was now deadly earnest. And this in itself was tragic. That comfortable ease of spirit which is the breath of life was taken away; he could think of nothing but her. Was she one of those women who feed on men’s admiration, and give them no return? Was she only waiting to make her conquest more secure? These riddles he asked of her face a hundred times, lying awake in the dark. To George Pendyce, a man of the world, unaccustomed to privation, whose simple creed was “Live and enjoy,” there was something terrible about a longing which never left him for a moment, which he could not help any more than he could help eating, the end of which he could not see. He had known her when she lived at the Firs, he had known her in the hunting-field, but his passion was only of last summer’s date. It had sprung suddenly out of a flirtation started at a dance.

A man about town does not psychologise himself; he accepts his condition with touching simplicity. He is hungry; he must be fed. He is thirsty; he must drink. Why he is hungry, when he became hungry, these inquiries are beside the mark. No ethical aspect of the matter troubled him; the attainment of a married woman, not living with her husband, did not impinge upon his creed. What would come after, though full of unpleasant possibilities, he left to the future. His real disquiet, far nearer, far more primitive and simple, was the feeling of drifting helplessly in a current so strong that he could not keep his feet.

“Ah yes; a bad case. Dreadful thing for the Sweetenhams! That young fellow’s been obliged to give up the Army. Can’t think what old Sweetenham was about. He must have known his son was hit. I should say Bethany himself was the only one in the dark. There’s no doubt Lady Rose was to blame!” Mr. Pendyce was speaking.

Mrs. Bellew smiled.

“My sympathies are all with Lady Rose. What do you say, George?”

George frowned.

“I always thought,” he said, “that Bethany was an ass.”

“George,” said Mr. Pendyce, “is immoral. All young men are immoral. I notice it more and more. You’ve given up your hunting, I hear.”

Mrs. Bellew sighed.

“One can’t hunt on next to nothing!”

“Ah, you live in London. London spoils everybody. People don’t take the interest in hunting and farming they used to. I can’t get George here at all. Not that I’m a believer in apron-strings. Young men will be young men!”

Thus summing up the laws of Nature, the Squire resumed his knife and fork.

But neither Mrs. Bellew nor George followed his example; the one sat with her eyes fixed on her plate and a faint smile playing on her lips, the other sat without a smile, and his eyes, in which there was such a deep resentful longing, looked from his father to Mrs. Bellew, and from Mrs. Bellew to his mother. And as though down that vista of faces and fruits and flowers a secret current had been set flowing, Mrs. Pendyce nodded gently to her son.

CHAPTER II

THE COVERT SHOOT

At the head of the breakfast-table sat Mr. Pendyce, eating methodically. He was somewhat silent, as became a man who has just read family prayers; but about that silence, and the pile of half-opened letters on his right, was a hint of autocracy.

"Be informal — do what you like, dress as you like, sit where you like, eat what you like, drink tea or coffee, but — —" Each glance of his eyes, each sentence of his sparing, semi-genial talk, seemed to repeat that "but".

At the foot of the breakfast-table sat Mrs. Pendyce behind a silver urn which emitted a gentle steam. Her hands worked without ceasing amongst cups, and while they worked her lips worked too in spasmodic utterances that never had any reference to herself. Pushed a little to her left and entirely neglected, lay a piece of dry toast on a small white plate. Twice she took it up, buttered a bit of it, and put it down again. Once she rested, and her eyes, which fell on Mrs. Bellow, seemed to say: "How very charming you look, my dear!" Then, taking up the sugar-tongs, she began again.

On the long sideboard covered with a white cloth reposed a number of edibles only to be found amongst that portion of the community which breeds creatures for its own devouring. At one end of this row of viands was a large game pie with a triangular gap in the pastry; at the other, on two oval dishes, lay four cold partridges in various stages of decomposition. Behind them a silver basket of openwork design was occupied by three bunches of black, one bunch of white grapes, and a silver grape-cutter, which performed no function (it was so blunt), but had once belonged to a Totteridge and wore their crest.

No servants were in the room, but the side-door was now and again opened, and something brought in, and this suggested that behind the door persons were collected, only waiting to be called upon. It was, in fact, as though Mr. Pendyce had said: "A butler and two footmen at least could hand you things, but this is a simple country house."

At times a male guest rose, napkin in hand, and said to a lady: "Can I get you anything from the sideboard?" Being refused, he went and filled his own plate. Three dogs — two fox-terriers and a decrepit Skye circled round uneasily, smelling at the visitors' napkins. And there went up a hum of talk in which sentences like these could be distinguished: "Rippin' stand that, by the wood. D'you remember your rockettin' woodcock last year, Jerry?" "And the dear old Squire never touched a feather! Did you, Squire?" "Dick — Dick! Bad dog! — come and do your tricks. Trust-trust! Paid for! Isn't he rather a darling?"

On Mr. Pendyce's foot, or by the side of his chair, whence he could see what was being eaten, sat the spaniel John, and now and then Mr. Pendyce, taking a small portion of something between his finger and thumb, would say:

"John! — Make a good breakfast, Sir James; I always say a half-breakfasted man is no good!"

And Mrs. Pendyce, her eyebrows lifted, would look anxiously up and down the table, murmuring: "Another cup, dear; let me see — are you sugar?"

When all had finished a silence fell, as if each sought to get away from what he had been eating, as if each felt he had been engaged in an unworthy practice; then Mr. Pendyce, finishing his last grape, wiped his mouth.

"You've a quarter of an hour, gentlemen; we start at ten-fifteen."

Mrs. Pendyce, left seated with a vague, ironical smile, ate one mouthful of her buttered toast, now very old and leathery, gave the rest to "the dear dogs," and called:

"George! You want a new shooting tie, dear boy; that green one's quite faded. I've been meaning to get some silks down for ages. Have you had any news of your horse this morning?"

"Yes, Blacksmith says he's fit as a fiddle."

"I do so hope he'll win that race for you. Your Uncle Hubert once lost four thousand pounds over the Rutlandshire. I remember perfectly; my father had to pay it. I'm so glad you don't bet, dear boy!"

"My dear mother, I do bet."

"Oh, George, I hope not much! For goodness' sake, don't tell your father; he's like all the Pendyces, can't bear a risk."

"My dear mother, I'm not likely to; but, as a matter of fact, there is no risk. I stand to win a lot of money to nothing."

"But, George, is that right?"

"Of course it's all right."

"Oh, well, I don't understand." Mrs. Pendyce dropped her eyes, a flush came into her white cheeks; she looked up again and said quickly: "George, I should like just a little bet on your horse — a real bet, say about a sovereign."

George Pendyce's creed permitted the show of no emotion. He smiled.

"All right, mother, I'll put it on for you. It'll be about eight to one."

"Does that mean that if he wins I shall get eight?"

George nodded.

Mrs. Pendyce looked abstractedly at his tie.

"I think it might be two sovereigns; one seems very little to lose, because I do so want him to win. Isn't Helen Bellew perfectly charming this morning! It's delightful to see a woman look her best in the morning."

George turned, to hide the colour in his cheeks.

"She looks fresh enough, certainly."

Mrs. Pendyce glanced up at him; there was a touch of quizzicality in one of her lifted eyebrows.

"I mustn't keep you, dear; you'll be late for the shooting."

Mr. Pendyce, a sportsman of the old school, who still kept pointers, which, in the teeth of modern fashion, he was unable to employ, set his face against the use of two guns.

"Any man," he would say, "who cares to shoot at Worsted Skeynes must do with one gun, as my dear old father had to do before me. He'll get a good day's sport — no barndoor birds" (for he encouraged his pheasants to remain lean, that they might fly the better), "but don't let him expect one of these battues — sheer butchery, I call them."

He was excessively fond of birds — it was, in fact, his hobby, and he had collected under glass cases a prodigious number of specimens of those species which are in danger of becoming extinct, having really, in some Pendycean sort of way, a feeling that by this practice he was doing them a good turn, championing them, as it were, to a world that would soon be unable to look upon them in the flesh. He wished, too, that his collection should become an integral part of the estate, and be passed on to his son, and his son's son after him.

"Look at this Dartford Warbler," he would say; "beautiful little creature — getting rarer every day. I had the greatest difficulty in procuring this specimen. You wouldn't believe me if I told you what I had to pay for him!"

Some of his unique birds he had shot himself, having in his youth made expeditions to foreign countries solely with this object, but the great majority he had been compelled to purchase. In his library were row upon row of books carefully arranged and bearing on this fascinating subject; and his collection of rare, almost extinct, birds' eggs was one of the finest in the "three kingdoms." One egg especially he would point to with pride as the last obtainable of that particular breed. "This was procured," he would say, "by my dear old gillie Angus out of the bird's very nest. There was just the single egg. The species," he added, tenderly handling the delicate, porcelain-like oval in his brown hand covered with very fine, blackish hairs, "is now extinct." He was, in fact, a true bird-lover, strongly condemning cockneys, or rough, ignorant persons who, with no collections of their own, wantonly destroyed kingfishers, or scarce birds of any sort, out of pure stupidity. "I would have them flogged," he would say, for he believed that no such bird should be killed except on commission, and for choice — barring such extreme cases as that Dartford Warbler — in some foreign country or remoter part of the British Isles. It was indeed illustrative of Mr. Pendyce's character and whole point of view that whenever a rare, winged stranger appeared on his own estate it was talked of as an event, and preserved alive with the greatest care, in the hope that it might breed and be handed down with the property; but if it were personally known to belong to Mr. Fuller or Lord Quarryman, whose estates abutted on Worsted Skeynes, and there was grave and imminent danger of its going back, it was promptly shot and stuffed, that it might not be lost to posterity. An encounter with another landowner having the same hobby, of whom there were several in his neighbourhood, would upset him for a week, making him strangely morose, and he would at once redouble his efforts to add something rarer than ever to his own collection.

His arrangements for shooting were precisely conceived. Little slips of paper with the names of the "guns" written thereon were placed in a hat, and one by one drawn out again, and this he always did himself. Behind the right wing of the house he held a review of the beaters, who filed before him out of the yard, each with a long stick in his hand, and no expression on his face. Five minutes of directions to the keeper, and then the guns started, carrying their own weapons and a sufficiency of cartridges for the first drive in the old way.

A misty radiance clung over the grass as the sun dried the heavy dew; the thrushes hopped and ran and hid themselves, the rooks cawed peacefully in the old elms. At an angle the game cart, constructed on Mr. Pendyce's own pattern, and drawn by a hairy horse in charge of an aged man, made its way slowly to the end of the first beat:

George lagged behind, his hands deep in his pockets, drinking in the joy of the tranquil day, the soft bird sounds, so clear and friendly, that chorus of wild life. The scent of the coverts stole to him, and he thought:

'What a ripping day for shooting!'

The Squire, wearing a suit carefully coloured so that no bird should see him, leather leggings, and a cloth helmet of his own devising, ventilated by many little holes, came up to his son; and the spaniel John, who had a passion for the collection of birds almost equal to his master's, came up too.

"You're end gun, George," he said; "you'll get a nice high bird!"

George felt the ground with his feet, and blew a speck of dust off his barrels, and the smell of the oil sent a delicious tremor darting through him. Everything, even Helen Bellew, was forgotten. Then in the silence rose a far-off clamour; a cock pheasant, skimming low, his plumage silken in the sun, dived out of the green and golden spinney, curled to the right, and was lost in undergrowth. Some pigeons passed over at a great height. The tap-tap of sticks beating against trees began; then with a fitful rushing noise a pheasant came straight out. George threw up his gun and pulled. The bird stopped in mid-air, jerked forward, and fell headlong into the grass sods with a thud. In the sunlight the dead bird lay, and a smirk of triumph played on George's lips. He was feeling the joy of life.

During his covert shoots the Squire had the habit of recording his impressions in a mental note-book. He put special marks against such as missed, or shot birds behind the waist, or placed lead in them to the detriment of their market value, or broke only one leg of a hare at a time, causing the animal to cry like a tortured child, which some men do not like; or such as, anxious for fame, claimed dead creatures that they had not shot, or peopled the next beat with imaginary slain, or too frequently "wiped an important neighbour's eye," or shot too many beaters in the legs. Against this evidence, however, he unconsciously weighed the more undeniable social facts, such as the title of Winlow's father; Sir James Malden's coverts, which must also presently be shot; Thomas Brandwhite's position in the financial world; General Pendyce's relationship to himself; and the importance of the English Church. Against Foxleigh alone he could put no marks. The fellow destroyed everything that came within reach with utter precision, and this was perhaps fortunate, for Foxleigh had neither title, coverts, position, nor cloth! And the Squire weighed one thing else besides — the pleasure of giving them all a good day's sport, for his heart was kind.

The sun had fallen well behind the home wood when the guns stood waiting for the last drive of the day. From the keeper's cottage in the hollow, where late threads of crimson clung in the brown network of Virginia creeper, rose a mist of wood smoke, dispersed upon the breeze. Sound there was none, only that faint stir — the far, far callings of men and beasts and birds — that never quite dies of a country evening. High above the wood some startled pigeons were still wheeling, no other life in sight; but a gleam of sunlight stole down the side of the covert and laid a burnish on the turned leaves till the whole wood seemed quivering with magic. Out of that quivering wood a wounded rabbit had stolen and was dying. It lay on its side on the slope of a tussock of grass, its hind legs drawn under it, its forelegs raised like the hands of a praying child. Motionless as death, all its remaining life was centred in its black soft eyes. Uncomplaining, ungrudging, unknowing, with that poor soft wandering eye, it was going back to Mother Earth. There Foxleigh, too, some day must go, asking of Nature why she had murdered him.

CHAPTER III

THE BLISSFUL HOUR

It was the hour between tea and dinner, when the spirit of the country house was resting, conscious of its virtue, half asleep.

Having bathed and changed, George Pendyce took his betting-book into the smoking-room. In a nook devoted to literature, protected from draught and intrusion by a high leather screen, he sat down in an armchair and fell into a doze.

With legs crossed, his chin resting on one hand, his comely figure relaxed, he exhaled a fragrance of soap, as though in this perfect peace his soul were giving off its natural odour. His spirit, on the borderland of dreams, trembled with those faint stirrings of chivalry and aspiration, the outcome of physical well-being after a long day in the open air, the outcome of security from all that is unpleasant and fraught with danger. He was awakened by voices.

"George is not a bad shot!"

"Gave a shocking exhibition at the last stand; Mrs. Bellew was with him. They were going over him like smoke; he couldn't touch a feather."

It was Winlow's voice. A silence, then Thomas Brandwhite's:

"A mistake, the ladies coming out. I never will have them myself. What do you say, Sir James?"

"Bad principle — very bad!"

A laugh — Thomas Brandwhite's laugh, the laugh of a man never quite sure of himself.

"That fellow Bellew is a cracked chap. They call him the 'desperate character' about here. Drinks like a fish, and rides like the devil. She used to go pretty hard, too. I've noticed there's always a couple like that in a hunting country. Did you ever see him? Thin, high-shouldered, white-faced chap, with little dark eyes and a red moustache."

"She's still a young woman?"

"Thirty or thirty-two."

"How was it they didn't get on?"

The sound of a match being struck.

"Case of the kettle and the pot."

"It's easy to see she's fond of admiration. Love of admiration plays old Harry with women!"

Winlow's leisurely tones again

"There was a child, I believe, and it died. And after that — I know there was some story; you never could get to the bottom of it. Bellew chucked his regiment in consequence. She's subject to moods, they say, when nothing's exciting enough; must skate on thin ice, must have a man skating after her. If the poor devil weighs more than she does, in he goes."

"That's like her father, old Cheriton. I knew him at the club — one of the old sort of squires; married his second wife at sixty and buried her at eighty. Old 'Claret and Piquet,' they called him; had more children under the rose than any man in Devonshire. I saw him playing half-crown points the week before he died. It's in the blood. What's George's weight? — ah, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, Brandwhite. There's time for a hundred up before dinner if you care for a game, Winlow?"

The sound of chairs drawn back, of footsteps, and the closing of a door. George was alone again, a spot of red in either of his cheeks. Those vague stirrings of chivalry and aspiration were gone, and gone that sense of well-earned ease. He got up, came out of his corner, and walked to and fro on the tiger-skin before the fire. He lit a cigarette, threw it away, and lit another.

Skating on thin ice! That would not stop him! Their gossip would not stop him, nor their sneers; they would but send him on the faster!

He threw away the second cigarette. It was strange for him to go to the drawing-room at this hour of the day, but he went.

Opening the door quietly, he saw the long, pleasant room lighted with tall oil-lamps, and Mrs. Bellew seated at the piano, singing. The tea-things were still on a table at one end, but every one had finished. As far away as might be, in the embrasure of the bay-window, General Pendyce and Bee were playing chess. Grouped in the centre of the room, by one of the lamps, Lady Maiden, Mrs. Winlow, and Mrs. Brandwhite had turned their faces towards the piano, and a sort of slight unwillingness or surprise showed on those faces, a sort of "We were having a most interesting talk; I don't think we ought to have been stopped" expression.

Before the fire, with his long legs outstretched, stood Gerald Pendyce. And a little apart, her dark eyes fixed on the singer, and a piece of embroidery in her lap, sat Mrs. Pendyce, on the edge of whose skirt lay Roy, the old Skye terrier.

"But had I wist, before I lost,
  That love had been sae ill to win;
I had lockt my heart in a case of gowd
  And pinn'd it with a siller pin....
O waly! waly! but love be bonny
  A little time while it is new,
But when 'tis auld, it waxeth cauld,
  And fades awa' like morning dew!"

This was the song George heard, trembling and dying to the chords of the fine piano that was a little out of tune.

He gazed at the singer, and though he was not musical, there came a look into his eyes that he quickly hid away.

A slight murmur occurred in the centre of the room, and from the fireplace Gerald called out, "Thanks; that's rippin!"

The voice of General Pendyce rose in the bay-window: "Check!"

Mrs. Pendyce, taking up her embroidery, on which a tear had dropped, said gently:

"Thank you, dear; most charming!"

Mrs. Bellew left the piano, and sat down beside her. George moved into the bay-window. He knew nothing of chess-indeed, he could not stand the game; but from here, without attracting attention, he could watch Mrs. Bellew.

The air was drowsy and sweet-scented; a log of cedarwood had just been put on the fire; the voices of his mother and Mrs. Bellew, talking of what he could not hear, the voices of Lady Malden, Mrs. Brandwhite, and Gerald, discussing some neighbours, of Mrs. Winlow dissenting or assenting in turn, all mingled in a comfortable, sleepy sound, clipped now and then by the voice of General Pendyce calling, “Check!” and of Bee saying, “Oh, uncle!”

A feeling of rage rose in George. Why should they all be so comfortable and cosy while this perpetual fire was burning in himself? And he fastened his moody eyes on her who was keeping him thus dancing to her pipes.

He made an awkward movement which shook the chess-table. The General said behind him: “Look out, George! What — what!”

George went up to his mother.

“Let’s have a look at that, Mother.”

Mrs. Pendyce leaned back in her chair and handed up her work with a smile of pleased surprise.

“My dear boy, you won’t understand it a bit. It’s for the front of my new frock.”

George took the piece of work. He did not understand it, but turning and twisting it he could breathe the warmth of the woman he loved. In bending over the embroidery he touched Mrs. Bellew’s shoulder; it was not drawn away, a faint pressure seemed to answer his own. His mother’s voice recalled him:

“Oh, my needle, dear! It’s so sweet of you, but perhaps”

George handed back the embroidery. Mrs. Pendyce received it with a grateful look. It was the first time he had ever shown an interest in her work.

Mrs. Bellew had taken up a palm-leaf fan to screen her face from the fire. She said slowly:

“If we win to-morrow I’ll embroider you something, George.”

“And if we lose?”

Mrs. Bellew raised her eyes, and involuntarily George moved so that his mother could not see the sort of slow mesmerism that was in them.

“If we lose,” she said, “I shall sink into the earth. We must win, George.”

He gave an uneasy little laugh, and glanced quickly at his mother. Mrs. Pendyce had begun to draw her needle in and out with a half-startled look on her face.

“That’s a most haunting little song you sang, dear,” she said.

Mrs. Bellew answered: “The words are so true, aren’t they?”

George felt her eyes on him, and tried to look at her, but those half-smiling, half-threatening eyes seemed to twist and turn him about as his hands had twisted and turned about his mother’s embroidery. Again across Mrs. Pendyce’s face flitted that half-startled look.

Suddenly General Pendyce’s voice was heard saying very loud, “Stale? Nonsense, Bee, nonsense! Why, damme, so it is!”

A hum of voices from the centre of the room covered up that outburst, and Gerald, stepping to the hearth, threw another cedar log upon the fire. The smoke came out in a puff.

Mrs. Pendyce leaned back in her chair smiling, and wrinkling her fine, thin nose.

“Delicious!” she said, but her eyes did not leave her son’s face, and in them was still that vague alarm.

CHAPTER IV

THE HAPPY HUNTING-GROUND

Of all the places where, by a judicious admixture of whip and spur, oats and whisky, horses are caused to place one leg before another with unnecessary rapidity, in order that men may exchange little pieces of metal with the greater freedom, Newmarket Heath is “the topmost, and merriest, and best.”

This museum of the state of flux — the secret reason of horse-racing being to afford an example of perpetual motion (no proper racing-man having ever been found to regard either gains or losses in the light of an accomplished fact) — this museum of the state of flux has a climate unrivalled for the production of the British temperament.

Not without a due proportion of that essential formative of character, east wind, it has at once the hottest sun, the coldest blizzards, the wettest rain, of any place of its size in the “three kingdoms.” It tends — in advance even of the City of London — to the nurture and improvement of individualism, to that desirable “I’ll see you d — d” state of mind which is the proud objective of every Englishman, and especially of every country gentleman. In a word — a mother to the self-reliant secretiveness which defies intrusion and forms an integral part in the Christianity of this country — Newmarket Heath is beyond all others the happy hunting-ground of the landed classes.

In the Paddock half an hour before the Rutlandshire Handicap was to be run numbers of racing-men were gathered in little knots of two and three, describing to each other with every precaution the points of strength in the horses they had laid against, the points of weakness in the horses they had backed, or vice versa, together with the latest discrepancies of their trainers and jockeys. At the far end George Pendyce, his trainer Blacksmith, and his jockey Swells, were talking in low tones. Many people have observed with surprise the close-buttoned secrecy of all who have to do with horses. It is no matter for wonder. The horse is one of those generous and somewhat careless animals that, if not taken firmly from the first, will surely give itself away. Essential to a man who has to do with horses is a complete closeness of physiognomy, otherwise the animal will never know what is expected of him. The more that is expected of him, the closer must be the expression of his friends, or a grave fiasco may have to be deplored.

It was for these reasons that George’s face wore more than its habitual composure, and the faces of his trainer and his jockey were alert, determined, and expressionless. Blacksmith, a little man, had in his hand a short notched cane, with which, contrary to expectation, he did not switch his legs. His eyelids drooped over his shrewd eyes, his upper lip advanced over the lower, and he wore no hair on his face. The Jockey Swells’ pinched-up countenance, with jutting eyebrows and practically no cheeks, had under George’s racing-cap of “peacock blue” a subfusc hue like that of old furniture.

The Ambler had been bought out of the stud of Colonel Dorking, a man opposed on high grounds to the racing of two-year-olds, and at the age of three had never run. Showing more than a suspicion of form in one or two home trials, he ran a bye in the Fane Stakes, when obviously not up to the mark, and was then withdrawn from the public gaze. The Stable had from the start kept its eye on the Rutlandshire Handicap, and no sooner was Goodwood over than the commission was placed in the hands of Barney’s, well known for their power to enlist at the most appropriate moment the sympathy of the public in a horse’s favour. Almost coincidentally with the completion of the Stable Commission it was found that the public were determined to support the Ambler at any price over seven to one. Barney’s at once proceeded judiciously to lay off the Stable Money, and this having been done, George found that he stood to win four thousand pounds to nothing. If he had now chosen to bet this sum against the horse at the then current price of eight to one, it is obvious that he could have made an absolute certainty of five hundred pounds, and the horse need never even have started. But George, who would have been glad enough of such a sum, was not the man to do this sort of thing. It was against the tenets of his creed. He believed, too, in his horse; and had enough of the Totteridge in him to like a race for a race’s sake. Even when beaten there was enjoyment to be had out of the imperturbability with which he could take that beating, out of a sense of superiority to men not quite so sportsmanlike as himself.

“Come and see the nag saddled,” he said to his brother Gerald.

In one of the long line of boxes the Ambler was awaiting his toilette, a dark-brown horse, about sixteen hands, with well-placed shoulders, straight hocks, a small head, and what is known as a rat-tail. But of all his features, the most remarkable was his eye. In the depths of that full, soft eye was an almost uncanny gleam, and when he turned it, half-circled by a moon of white, and gave bystanders that look of strange comprehension, they felt that he saw to the bottom of all this that was going on around him. He was still but three years old, and had not yet attained the age when people apply to action the fruits of understanding; yet there was little doubt that as he advanced in years he would manifest his disapproval of a system whereby men made money at his expense. And with that eye half-circled by the moon he looked at George, and in silence George looked back at him, strangely baffled by the horse’s long, soft, wild gaze. On this heart beating deep within its warm, dark satin sheath, on the spirit gazing through that soft, wild eye, too much was hanging, and he turned away.

“Mount, jockeys!”

Through the crowd of hard-looking, hatted, muffled, two-legged men, those four-legged creatures in their chestnut, bay, and brown, and satin nakedness, most beautiful in all the world, filed proudly past, as though going forth to death. The last vanished through the gate, the crowd dispersed.

Down by the rails of Tattersall’s George stood alone. He had screwed himself into a corner, whence he could watch through his long glasses that gay-coloured, shifting wheel at the end of the mile and more of turf. At this moment, so pregnant with the future, he could not bear the company of his fellows.

“They’re off!”

He looked no longer, but hunched his shoulders, holding his elbows stiff, that none might see what he was feeling. Behind him a man said:

“The favourite’s beat. What’s that in blue on the rails?”

Out by himself on the far rails, out by himself, sweeping along like a home-coming bird, was the Ambler. And George's heart leaped, as a fish leaps of a summer evening out of a dark pool.

"They'll never catch him. The Ambler wins! It's a walk-over! The Ambler!"

Silent amidst the shouting throng, George thought: 'My horse! my horse!' and tears of pure emotion sprang into his eyes. For a full minute he stood quite still; then, instinctively adjusting hat and tie, made his way calmly to the Paddock. He left it to his trainer to lead the Ambler back, and joined him at the weighing-room.

The little jockey was seated, nursing his saddle, negligent and saturnine, awaiting the words "All right."

Blacksmith said quietly:

"Well, sir, we've pulled it off. Four lengths. I've told Swells he does no more riding for me. There's a gold-mine given away. What on earth was he about to come in by himself like that? We shan't get into the 'City' now under nine stone. It's enough to make a man cry!"

And, looking at his trainer, George saw the little man's lips quiver.

In his stall, streaked with sweat, his hind-legs outstretched, fretting under the ministrations of the groom, the Ambler stayed the whisking of his head to look at his owner, and once more George met that long, proud, soft glance. He laid his gloved hand on the horse's lather-flecked neck. The Ambler tossed his head and turned it away.

George came out into the open, and made his way towards the Stand. His trainer's words had instilled a drop of poison into his cup. "A goldmine given away!"

He went up to Swells. On his lips were the words: "What made you give the show away like that?" He did not speak them, for in his soul he felt it would not become him to ask his jockey why he had not dissembled and won by a length. But the little jockey understood at once.

"Mr. Blacksmith's been at me, sir. You take my tip: he's a queer one, that 'orse. I thought it best to let him run his own race. Mark my words, he knows what's what. When they're like that, they're best let alone."

A voice behind him said:

"Well, George, congratulate you! Not the way I should have ridden the race myself. He should have lain off to the distance. Remarkable turn of speed that horse. There's no riding nowadays!"

The Squire and General Pendyce were standing there. Erect and slim, unlike and yet so very much alike, the eyes of both of them seemed saying:

'I shall differ from you; there are no two opinions about it. I shall differ from you!'

Behind them stood Mrs. Bellew. Her eyes could not keep still under their lashes, and their light and colour changed continually. George walked on slowly at her side. There was a look of triumph and softness about her; the colour kept deepening in her cheeks, her figure swayed. They did not look at each other.

Against the Paddock railings stood a man in riding-clothes, of spare figure, with a horseman's square, high shoulders, and thin long legs a trifle bowed. His narrow, thin-lipped, freckled face, with close-cropped sandy hair and clipped red moustache, was of a strange dead pallor. He followed the figures of George and his companion with little fiery dark-brown eyes, in which devils seemed to dance. Someone tapped him on the arm.

"Hallo, Bellew! had a good race?"

"Devil take you, no! Come and have a drink?"

Still without looking at each other, George and Mrs. Bellew walked towards the gate.

"I don't want to see any more," she said. "I should like to get away at once."

"We'll go after this race," said George. "There's nothing running in the last."

At the back of the Grand Stand, in the midst of all the hurrying crowd, he stopped.

"Helen?" he said.

Mrs. Bellew raised her eyes and looked full into his.

Long and cross-country is the drive from Royston Railway Station to Worsted Skeynes. To George Pendyce, driving the dog cart, with Helen Bellew beside him, it seemed but a minute — that strange minute when the heaven is opened and a vision shows between. To some men that vision comes but once, to some men many times. It comes after long winter, when the blossom hangs; it comes after parched summer, when the leaves are going gold; and of what hues it is painted — of frost-white and fire, of wine and purple, of mountain flowers, or the shadowy green of still deep pools — the seer alone can tell. But this is certain — the vision steals from him who looks on it all images of other things, all sense of law, of order, of the living past, and the living present. It is the future, fair-scented, singing, jewelled, as when suddenly between high banks a bough of apple-blossom hangs quivering in the wind loud with the song of bees.

George Pendyce gazed before him at this vision over the grey mare's back, and she who sat beside him muffled in her fur was touching his arm with hers. And back to them the second groom, hugging himself above the road that slipped away beneath, saw another kind of vision, for he had won five pounds, and his eyes were closed. And the grey mare saw a vision of her warm light stall, and the oats dropping between her manger bars, and fled with light hoofs along the lanes where the side-lamps shot two moving gleams over dark beech-hedges that rustled crisply in the northeast wind. Again and again she sneezed in the pleasure of that homeward flight, and the light foam of her nostrils flicked the faces of those behind. And they sat silent, thrilling at the touch of each other's arms, their cheeks glowing in the windy darkness, their eyes shining and fixed before them.

The second groom awoke suddenly from his dream.

"If I owned that 'orse, like Mr. George, and had such a topper as this 'ere Mrs. Bellew beside me, would I be sittin' there without a word?"

CHAPTER V

MRS. PENDYCE'S DANCE

Mrs. Pendyce believed in the practice of assembling county society for the purpose of inducing it to dance, a hardy enterprise in a county where the souls, and incidentally the feet, of the inhabitants were shaped for more solid pursuits. Men were her chief difficulty, for in spite of really national discouragement, it was rare to find a girl who was not "fond of dancing."

"Ah, dancing; I did so love it! Oh, poor Cecil Tharp!" And with a queer little smile she pointed to a strapping red-faced youth dancing with her daughter. "He nearly trips Bee up every minute, and he hugs her so, as if he were afraid of falling on his head. Oh, dear, what a bump! It's lucky she's so nice and solid. I like to see the dear boy. Here come George and Helen Bellew. Poor George is not quite up to her form, but he's better than most of them. Doesn't she look lovely this evening?"

Lady Maiden raised her glasses to her eyes by the aid of a tortoise-shell handle.

"Yes, but she's one of those women you never can look at without seeing that she has a — a — body. She's too-too — d'you see what I mean? It's almost — almost like a Frenchwoman!"

Mrs. Bellew had passed so close that the skirt of her seagreen dress brushed their feet with a swish, and a scent as of a flower-bed was wafted from it. Mrs. Pendyce wrinkled her nose.

"Much nicer. Her figure's so delicious," she said.

Lady Maiden pondered.

"She's a dangerous woman. James quite agrees with me."

Mrs. Pendyce raised her eyebrows; there was a touch of scorn in that gentle gesture.

"She's a very distant cousin of mine," she said. "Her father was quite a wonderful man. It's an old Devonshire family. The Cheritons of Bovey are mentioned in Twisdom. I like young people to enjoy themselves."

A smile illumined softly the fine wrinkles round her eyes. Beneath her lavender satin bodice, with strips of black velvet banding it at intervals, her heart was beating faster than usual. She was thinking of a night in her youth, when her old playfellow, young Trefane of the Blues, danced with her nearly all the evening, and of how at her window she saw the sun rise, and gently wept because she was married to Horace Pendyce.

"I always feel sorry for a woman who can dance as she does. I should have liked to have got some men from town, but Horace will only have the county people. It's not fair to the girls. It isn't so much their dancing, as their conversation — all about the first meet, and yesterday's cubbing, and to-morrow's covert-shooting, and their fox-terriers (though I'm awfully fond of the dear dogs), and then that new golf course. Really, it's quite distressing to me at times." Again Mrs. Pendyce looked out into the room with her patient smile, and two little lines of wrinkles formed across her forehead between the regular arching of her eyebrows that were still dark-brown. "They don't seem able to be gay. I feel they don't really care about it. They're only just waiting till to-morrow morning, so that they can go out and kill something. Even Bee's like that!"

Mrs. Pendyce was not exaggerating. The guests at Worsted Skeynes on the night of the Rutlandshire Handicap were nearly all county people, from the Hon. Gertrude Winlow, revolving like a faintly coloured statue, to young Tharp, with his clean face and his fair bullety head, who danced as though he were riding at a bullfinch. In a niche old Lord Quarryman, the Master of the Gaddesdon, could be discerned in conversation with Sir James Malden and the Reverend Hussell Barter.

Mrs. Pendyce said:

"Your husband and Lord Quarryman are talking of poachers; I can tell that by the look of their hands. I can't help sympathising a little with poachers."

Lady Malden dropped her eyeglasses.

"James takes a very just view of them," she said. "It's such an insidious offence. The more insidious the offence the more important it is to check it. It seems hard to punish people for stealing bread or turnips, though one must, of course; but I've no sympathy with poachers. So many of them do it for sheer love of sport!"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"That's Captain Maydew dancing with her now. He is a good dancer. Don't their steps fit? Don't they look happy? I do like people to enjoy themselves! There is such a dreadful lot of unnecessary sadness and suffering in the world. I think it's really all because people won't make allowances for each other."

Lady Malden looked at her sideways, pursing her lips; but Mrs. Pendyce, by race a Totteridge, continued to smile. She had been born unconscious of her neighbours' scrutinies.

"Helen Bellew," she said, "was such a lovely girl. Her grandfather was my mother's cousin. What does that make her? Anyway, my cousin, Gregory Vigil, is her first cousin once removed — the Hampshire Vigils. Do you know him?"

Lady Malden answered:

"Gregory Vigil? The man with a lot of greyish hair? I've had to do with him in the S.R.W.C."

But Mrs. Pendyce was dancing mentally.

"Such a good fellow! What is that — the —— ?"

Lady Malden gave her a sharp look.

"Society for the Rescue of Women and Children, of course. Surely you know about that?"

Mrs. Pendyce continued to smile.

"Ah, yes, that is nice! What a beautiful figure she has! It's so refreshing. I envy a woman with a figure like that; it looks as if it would never grow old. 'Society for the Regeneration of Women'? Gregory's so good about that sort of thing. But he never seems quite successful, have you noticed? There was a woman he was very interested in this spring. I think she drank."

"They all do," said Lady Malden; "it's the curse of the day."

Mrs. Pendyce wrinkled her forehead.

"Most of the Totteridges," she said, "were great drinkers. They ruined their constitutions. Do you know Jaspar Bellew?"

"No."

"It's such a pity he drinks. He came to dinner here once, and I'm afraid he must have come intoxicated. He took me in; his little eyes quite burned me up. He drove his dog cart into a ditch on the way home. That sort of thing gets about so. It's such a pity. He's quite interesting. Horace can't stand him."

The music of the waltz had ceased. Lady Maiden put her glasses to her eyes. From close beside them George and Mrs. Bellew passed by. They moved on out of hearing, but the breeze of her fan had touched the arching hair on Lady Maiden's forehead, the down on her upper lip.

"Why isn't she with her husband?" she asked abruptly.

Mrs. Pendyce lifted her brows.

"Do you concern yourself to ask that which a well-bred woman leaves unanswered?" she seemed to say, and a flush coloured her cheeks.

Lady Maiden winced, but, as though it were forced through her mouth by some explosion in her soul, she said:

"You have only to look and see how dangerous she is!"

The colour in Mrs. Pendyce's cheeks deepened to a blush like a girl's.

"Every man," she said, "is in love with Helen Bellew. She's so tremendously alive. My cousin Gregory has been in love with her for years, though he is her guardian or trustee, or whatever they call them now. It's quite romantic. If I were a man I should be in love with her myself." The flush vanished and left her cheeks to their true colour, that of a faded rose.

Once more she was listening to the voice of young Trefane, "Ah, Margery, I love you!" — to her own half whispered answer, "Poor boy!" Once more she was looking back through that forest of her life where she had wandered so long, and where every tree was Horace Pendyce.

"What a pity one can't always be young!" she said.

Through the conservatory door, wide open to the lawn, a full moon flooded the country with pale gold light, and in that light the branches of the cedar-trees seemed printed black on the grey-blue paper of the sky; all was cold, still witchery out there, and not very far away an owl was hooting.

The Reverend Husell Barter, about to enter the conservatory for a breath of air, was arrested by the sight of a couple half-hidden by a bushy plant; side by side they were looking at the moonlight, and he knew them for Mrs. Bellew and George Pendyce. Before he could either enter or retire, he saw George seize her in his arms. She seemed to bend her head back, then bring her face to his. The moonlight fell on it, and on the full, white curve of her neck. The Rector of Worsted Skeynes saw, too, that her eyes were closed, her lips parted.

CHAPTER VI

INFLUENCE OF THE REVEREND HUSSELL BARTER

Along the walls of the smoking-room, above a leather dado, were prints of horsemen in night-shirts and nightcaps, or horsemen in red coats and top-hats, with words underneath such as:

"'Yeoicks' says Thruster; 'Yeoicks' says Dick. 'My word! these d — d Quornites shall now see the trick!'"

Two pairs of antlers surmounted the hearth, mementoes of Mr. Pendyce's deer-forest, Strathbegally, now given up, where, with the assistance of his dear old gillie Angus McBane, he had secured the heads of these monarchs of the glen. Between them was the print of a personage in trousers, with a rifle under his arm and a smile on his lips, while two large deerhounds worried a dying stag, and a lady approached him on a pony.

The Squire and Sir James Malden had retired; the remaining guests were seated round the fire. Gerald Pendyce stood at a side-table, on which was a tray of decanters, glasses, and mineral water.

"Who's for a dhrop of the craythur? A wee dhrop of the craythur? Rector, a dhrop of the craythur? George, a dhrop—"

George shook his head. A smile was on his lips, and that smile had in it a quality of remoteness, as though it belonged to another sphere, and had strayed on to the lips of this man of the world against his will. He seemed trying to conquer it, to twist his face into its habitual shape, but, like the spirit of a strange force, the smile broke through. It had mastered him, his thoughts, his habits, and his creed; he was stripped of fashion, as on a thirsty noon a man stands stripped for a cool plunge from which he hardly cares if he come up again.

And this smile, not by intrinsic merit, but by virtue of its strangeness, attracted the eye of each man in the room; so, in a crowd, the most foreign-looking face will draw all glances.

The Reverend Husell Barter with a frown watched that smile, and strange thoughts chased through his mind.

"Uncle Charles, a dhrop of the craythur a wee dhrop of the craythur?"

General Pendyce caressed his whisker.

"The least touch," he said, "the least touch! I hear that our friend Sir Percival is going to stand again."

Mr. Barter rose and placed his back before the fire.

"Outrageous!" he said. "He ought to be told at once that we can't have him."

The Hon. Geoffrey Winlow answered from his chair:

"If he puts up, he'll get in; they can't afford to lose him." And with a leisurely puff of smoke: "I must say, sir, I don't quite see what it has to do with his public life."

Mr. Barter thrust forth his lower lip.

"An impenitent man," he said.

"But a woman like that! What chance has a fellow if she once gets hold of him?"

"When I was stationed at Halifax," began General Pendyce, "she was the belle of the place—"

Again Mr. Barter thrust out his lower lip.

"Don't let's talk of her — the jade!" Then suddenly to George: "Let's hear your opinion, George. Dreaming of your victories, eh?" And the tone of his voice was peculiar.

But George got up.

"I'm too sleepy," he said; "good-night." Curtly nodding, he left the room.

Outside the door stood a dark oak table covered with silver candlesticks; a single candle burned thereon, and made a thin gold path in the velvet blackness. George lighted his candle, and a second gold path leaped out in front; up this he began to ascend. He carried his candle at the level of his breast, and the light shone sideways and up over his white shirt-front and the comely, bulldog face above it. It shone, too, into his eyes, 'grey and slightly bloodshot, as though their surfaces concealed passions violently struggling for expression. At the turning platform of the stair he paused. In darkness above and in darkness below the country house was still; all the little life of its day, its petty sounds, movements, comings, goings, its very breathing, seemed to have fallen into sleep. The forces of its life had gathered into that pool of light where George stood listening. The beating of his heart was the only sound; in that small sound was all the pulse of this great slumbering space. He stood there long, motionless, listening to the beating of his heart, like a man fallen into a trance. Then floating up through the darkness came the echo of a laugh. George started. "The d —— d parson!" he muttered, and turned up the stairs again; but now he moved like a man with a purpose, and held his candle high so that the light fell far out into the darkness. He went beyond his own room, and stood still again. The light of the candle showed the blood flushing his forehead, beating and pulsing in the veins at the side of his temples; showed, too, his lips quivering, his shaking hand. He stretched out that hand and touched the handle of a door, then stood again like a man of stone, listening for the laugh. He raised the candle, and it shone into every nook; his throat clicked, as though he found it hard to swallow....

It was at Barnard Scrolls, the next station to Worsted Skeynes, on the following afternoon, that a young man entered a first-class compartment of the 3.10 train to town. The young man wore a Newmarket coat, natty white gloves, and carried an eyeglass. His face was well coloured, his chestnut moustache well brushed, and his blue eyes with their loving expression seemed to say, "Look at me — come, look at me — can anyone be better fed?" His valise and hat-box, of the best leather, bore the inscription, "E. Maydew, 8th Lancers."

There was a lady leaning back in a corner, wrapped to the chin in a fur garment, and the young man, encountering through his eyeglass her cool, ironical glance, dropped it and held out his hand.

"Ah, Mrs. Bellew, great pleasure t'see you again so soon. You goin' up to town? Jolly dance last night, wasn't it? Dear old sort, the Squire, and Mrs. Pendyce such an awf'ly nice woman."

Mrs. Bellew took his hand, and leaned back again in her corner. She was rather paler than usual, but it became her, and Captain Maydew thought he had never seen so charming a creature.

"Got a week's leave, thank goodness. Most awf'ly slow time of year. Cubbin's pretty well over, an' we don't open till the first."

He turned to the window. There in the sunlight the hedgerows ran golden and brown away from the clouds of trailing train smoke. Young Maydew shook his head at their beauty.

"The country's still very blind," he said. "Awful pity you've given up your huntin'."

Mrs. Bellew did not trouble to answer, and it was just that certainty over herself, the cool assurance of a woman who has known the world, her calm, almost negligent eyes, that fascinated this young man. He looked at her quite shyly.

'I suppose you will become my slave,' those eyes seemed to say, 'but I can't help you, really.'

"Did you back George's horse? I had an awf'ly good race. I was at school with George. Charmin' fellow, old George."

In Mrs. Bellew's eyes something seemed to stir down in the depths, but young Maydew was looking at his glove. The handle of the carriage had left a mark that saddened him.

"You know him well, I suppose, old George?"

"Very well."

"Some fellows, if they have a good thing, keep it so jolly dark. You fond of racin', Mrs. Bellew?"

"Passionately."

"So am I." And his eyes continued, 'It's ripping to like what you like,' for, hypnotised, they could not tear themselves away from that creamy face, with its full lips and the clear, faintly smiling eyes above the high collar of white fur.

At the terminus his services were refused, and rather crestfallen, with his hat raised, he watched her walk away. But soon, in his cab, his face regained its normal look, his eyes seemed saying to the little mirror, 'Look at me come, look at me — can anyone be better fed?'

CHAPTER VII

SABBATH AT WORSTED SKEYNES

In the white morning-room which served for her boudoir Mrs. Pendyce sat with an opened letter in her lap. It was her practice to sit there on Sunday mornings for an hour before she went to her room adjoining to put on her hat for church. It was her pleasure during that hour to do nothing but sit at the window, open if the weather permitted, and look over the home paddock and the squat spire of the village church rising among a group of elms. It is not known what she thought about at those times, unless of the countless Sunday mornings she had sat there with her hands in her lap waiting to be roused at 10.45 by the Squire's entrance and his "Now, my dear, you'll be late!" She had sat there till her hair, once dark-brown, was turning grey; she would sit there until it was white. One day she would sit there no longer, and, as likely as not, Mr. Pendyce, still well preserved, would enter and say, "Now, my dear, you'll be late!" having for the moment forgotten.

But this was all to be expected, nothing out of the common; the same thing was happening in hundreds of country houses throughout the "three kingdoms," and women were sitting waiting for their hair to turn white, who, long before, at the altar of a fashionable church, had parted with their imaginations and all the changes and chances of this mortal life.

Round her chair "the dear dogs" lay — this was their practice too, and now and again the Skye (he was getting very old) would put out a long tongue and lick her little pointed shoe. For Mrs. Pendyce had been a pretty woman, and her feet were as small as ever.

Beside her on a spindley table stood a china bowl filled with dried rose-leaves, whereon had been scattered an essence smelling like sweetbriar, whose secret she had learned from her mother in the old Warwickshire home of the Totteridges, long since sold to Mr. Abraham Brightman. Mrs. Pendyce, born in the year 1840, loved sweet perfumes, and was not ashamed of using them.

The Indian summer sun was soft and bright; and wistful, soft, and bright were Mrs. Pendyce's eyes, fixed on the letter in her lap. She turned it over and began to read again. A wrinkle visited her brow. It was not often that a letter demanding decision or involving responsibility came to her hands past the kind and just censorship of Horace Pendyce. Many matters were under her control, but were not, so to speak, connected with the outer world. Thus ran the letter:

"S.R.W.C., HANOVER SQUARE,

"November 1, 1891.

"DEAR MARGERY,

"I want to see you and talk something over, so I'm running down on Sunday afternoon. There is a train of sorts. Any loft will do for me to sleep in if your house is full, as it may be, I suppose, at this time of year. On second thoughts I will tell you what I want to see you about. You know, of course, that since her father died I am Helen Bellew's only guardian. Her present position is one in which no woman should be placed; I am convinced it ought to be put an end to. That man Bellew deserves no consideration. I cannot write of him coolly, so I won't write at all. It is two years now since they separated, entirely, as I consider, through his fault. The law has placed her in a cruel and helpless position all this time; but now, thank God, I believe we can move for a divorce. You know me well enough to realise what I have gone through before coming to this conclusion. Heaven knows if I could hit on some other way in which her future could be safeguarded, I would take it in preference to this, which is most repugnant; but I cannot. You are the only woman I can rely on to be interested in her, and I must see Bellew. Let not the fat and just Benson and his estimable horses be disturbed on my account; I will walk up and carry my toothbrush.

"Affectionately your cousin,

"GREGORY VIGIL."

Mrs. Pendyce smiled. She saw no joke, but she knew from the wording of the last sentence that Gregory saw one, and she liked to give it a welcome; so smiling and wrinkling her forehead, she mused over the letter. Her thoughts wandered. The last scandal — Lady Rose Bethany's divorce — had upset the whole county, and even now one had to be careful what one said. Horace would not like the idea of another divorce-suit, and that so close to Worsted Skeynes. When Helen left on Thursday he had said:

"I'm not sorry she's gone. Her position is a queer one. People don't like it. The Maidens were quite — —"

And Mrs. Pendyce remembered with a glow at her heart how she had broken in:

"Ellen Maiden is too bourgeoise for anything!"

Nor had Mr. Pendyce's look of displeasure effaced the comfort of that word.

Poor Horace! The children took after him, except George, who took after her brother Hubert. The dear boy had gone back to his club on Friday — the day after Helen and the others went. She wished he could have stayed. She wished —— The wrinkle deepened on her brow. Too much London was bad for him! Too much —— Her fancy flew to the London which she saw now only for three weeks in June and July, for the sake of the girls, just when her garden was at its best, and when really things were such a whirl that she never knew whether she was asleep or awake. It was not like London at all — not like that London under spring skies, or in early winter lamplight, where all the passers-by seemed so interesting, living all sorts of strange and eager lives, with strange and eager pleasures, running all sorts of risks, hungry sometimes, homeless even — so fascinating, so unlike —

"Now, my dear, you'll be late!"

Mr. Pendyce, in his Norfolk jacket, which he was on his way to change for a black coat, passed through the room, followed by the spaniel John. He turned at the door, and the spaniel John turned too.

"I hope to goodness Barter'll be short this morning. I want to talk to old Fox about that new chaff-cutter."

Round their mistress the three terriers raised their heads; the aged Skye gave forth a gentle growl. Mrs. Pendyce leaned over and stroked his nose.

"Roy, Roy, how can you, dear?"

Mr. Pendyce said:

"The old dog's losing all his teeth; he'll have to be put away."

His wife flushed painfully.

“Oh no, Horace — oh no!”

The Squire coughed.

“We must think of the dog!” he said.

Mrs. Pendyce rose, and crumpling the letter nervously, followed him from the room.

A narrow path led through the home paddock towards the church, and along it the household were making their way. The maids in feathers hurried along guiltily by twos and threes; the butler followed slowly by himself. A footman and a groom came next, leaving trails of pomatum in the air. Presently General Pendyce, in a high square-topped bowler hat, carrying a malacca cane, and Prayer-Book, appeared walking between Bee and Norah, also carrying Prayer-Books, with fox-terriers by their sides. Lastly, the Squire in a high hat, six or seven paces in advance of his wife, in a small velvet toque.

The rooks had ceased their wheeling and their cawing; the five-minutes bell, with its jerky, toneless tolling, alone broke the Sunday hush. An old horse, not yet taken up from grass, stood motionless, resting a hind-leg, with his face turned towards the footpath. Within the churchyard wicket the Rector, firm and square, a low-crowned hat tilted up on his bald forehead, was talking to a deaf old cottager. He raised his hat and nodded to the ladies; then, leaving his remark unfinished, disappeared within the vestry. At the organ Mrs. Barter was drawing out stops in readiness to play her husband into church, and her eyes, half-shining and half-anxious, were fixed intently on the vestry door.

The Squire and Mrs. Pendyce, now almost abreast, came down the aisle and took their seats beside their daughters and the General in the first pew on the left. It was high and cushioned. They knelt down on tall red hassocks. Mrs. Pendyce remained over a minute buried in thought; Mr. Pendyce rose sooner, and looking down, kicked the hassock that had been put too near the seat. Fixing his glasses on his nose, he consulted a worn old Bible, then rising, walked to the lectern and began to find the Lessons. The bell ceased; a wheezing, growling noise was heard. Mrs. Barter had begun to play; the Rector, in a white surplice, was coming in. Mr. Pendyce, with his back turned, continued to find the Lessons. The service began.

Through a plain glass window high up in the right-hand aisle the sun shot a gleam athwart the Pendyces’ pew. It found its last resting-place on Mrs. Barter’s face, showing her soft crumpled cheeks painfully flushed, the lines on her forehead, and those shining eyes, eager and anxious, travelling ever from her husband to her music and back again. At the least fold or frown on his face the music seemed to quiver, as to some spasm in the player’s soul. In the Pendyces’ pew the two girls sang loudly and with a certain sweetness. Mr. Pendyce, too, sang, and once or twice he looked in surprise at his brother, as though he were not making a creditable noise.

Mrs. Pendyce did not sing, but her lips moved, and her eyes followed the millions of little dust atoms dancing in the long slanting sunbeam. Its gold path canted slowly from her, then, as by magic, vanished. Mrs. Pendyce let her eyes fall. Something had fled from her soul with the sunbeam; her lips moved no more.

The Squire sang two loud notes, spoke three, sang two again; the Psalms ceased. He left his seat, and placing his hands on the lectern’s sides, leaned forward and began to read the Lesson. He read the story of Abraham and Lot, and of their flocks and herds, and how they could not dwell together, and as he read, hypnotised by the sound of his own voice, he was thinking:

‘This Lesson is well read by me, Horace Pendyce. I am Horace Pendyce — Horace Pendyce. Amen, Horace Pendyce!’

And in the first pew on the left Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes upon him, for this was her habit, and she thought how, when the spring came again, she would run up to town, alone, and stay at Green’s Hotel, where she had always stayed with her father when a girl. George had promised to look after her, and take her round the theatres. And forgetting that she had thought this every autumn for the last ten years, she gently smiled and nodded. Mr. Pendyce said:

“‘And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.’ Here endeth the first Lesson.”

The sun, reaching the second window, again shot a gold pathway athwart the church; again the millions of dust atoms danced, and the service went on.

There came a hush. The spaniel John, crouched close to the ground outside, poked his long black nose under the churchyard gate; the fox-terriers, seated patient in the grass, pricked their ears. A voice speaking on one note broke the hush. The spaniel John sighed, the fox-terriers dropped their ears, and lay down heavily against each other. The Rector had begun to preach. He preached on fruitfulness, and in the first right-hand pew six of his children at once began to fidget. Mrs. Barter, sideways and unsupported on her seat, kept her starry eyes fixed on his cheek; a line of perplexity furrowed her brow. Now and again she moved as though her back ached. The Rector quartered his congregation with his gaze, lest any amongst them should incline to sleep. He spoke in a loud-sounding voice.

God-he said-wished men to be fruitful, intended them to be fruitful, commanded them to be fruitful. God — he said — made men, and made the earth; He made man to be fruitful in the earth; He made man neither to question nor answer nor argue; He made him to be fruitful and possess the land. As they had heard in that beautiful Lesson this morning, God had set bounds, the bounds of marriage, within which man should multiply; within those bounds it was his duty to multiply, and that exceedingly — even as Abraham multiplied. In these days dangers, pitfalls, snares, were rife; in these days men went about and openly, unashamedly advocated shameful doctrines. Let them beware. It would be his sacred duty to exclude such men from within the precincts of that parish entrusted to his care by God. In the language of their greatest poet, “Such men were dangerous” — dangerous to Christianity, dangerous to their country, and to national life. They were not brought into this world to follow sinful inclination, to obey their mortal reason. God demanded sacrifices of men. Patriotism demanded sacrifices of men, it demanded that they should curb their inclinations and desires. It demanded of them their first duty as men and Christians, the duty of being fruitful and multiplying, in order that they might till this fruitful earth, not selfishly, not for themselves alone. It demanded of them the duty of multiplying in order that they and their children might be equipped to smite the enemies of their Queen and country, and uphold the name of England in whatever quarrel, against all who rashly sought to drag her flag in the dust.

The Squire opened his eyes and looked at his watch. Folding his arms, he coughed, for he was thinking of the chaff-cutter. Beside him Mrs. Pendyce, with her eyes on the altar, smiled as if in sleep. She was thinking, ‘Skyward’s in Bond Street used to have lovely lace. Perhaps in the spring I could —— Or there was Goblin’s, their Point de Venise — —’

Behind them, four rows back, an aged cottage woman, as upright as a girl, sat with a rapt expression on her carved old face. She never moved, her eyes seemed drinking in the movements of the Rector’s lips, her whole being seemed hanging on his words. It is true her dim eyes saw nothing but a blur, her poor deaf ears could not hear one word, but she sat at the angle she was used to, and thought of nothing at all. And perhaps it was better so, for she was near her end.

Outside the churchyard, in the sun-warmed grass, the fox-terriers lay one against the other, pretending to shiver, with their small bright eyes fixed on the church door, and the rubbery nostrils of the spaniel John worked ever busily beneath the wicket gate.

CHAPTER VIII

GREGORY VIGIL PROPOSES

About three o'clock that afternoon a tall man walked up the avenue at Worsted Skeynes, in one hand carrying his hat, in the other a small brown bag. He stopped now and then, and took deep breaths, expanding the nostrils of his straight nose. He had a fine head, with wings of grizzled hair. His clothes were loose, his stride was springy. Standing in the middle of the drive, taking those long breaths, with his moist blue eyes upon the sky, he excited the attention of a robin, who ran out of a rhododendron to see, and when he had passed began to whistle. Gregory Vigil turned, and screwed up his humorous lips, and, except that he was completely lacking in embonpoint, he had a certain resemblance to this bird, which is supposed to be peculiarly British.

He asked for Mrs. Pendyce in a high, light voice, very pleasant to the ear, and was at once shown to the white morning-room.

She greeted him affectionately, like many women who have grown used to hearing from their husbands the formula "Oh! your people!" — she had a strong feeling for her kith and kin.

"You know, Grig," she said, when her cousin was seated, "your letter was rather disturbing. Her separation from Captain Bellew has caused such a lot of talk about here. Yes; it's very common, I know, that sort of thing, but Horace is so —— ! All the squires and parsons and county people we get about here are just the same. Of course, I'm very fond of her, she's so charming to look at; but, Gregory, I really don't dislike her husband. He's a desperate sort of person — I think that's rather, refreshing; and you know I do think she's a little like him in that!"

The blood rushed up into Gregory Vigil's forehead; he put his hand to his head, and said:

"Like him? Like that man? Is a rose like an artichoke?"

Mrs. Pendyce went on:

"I enjoyed having her here immensely. It's the first time she's been here since she left the Firs. How long is that? Two years? But you know, Grig, the Maidens were quite upset about her. Do you think a divorce is really necessary?"

Gregory Vigil answered: "I'm afraid it is."

Mrs. Pendyce met her cousin's gaze serenely; if anything, her brows were uplifted more than usual; but, as at the stirring of secret trouble, her fingers began to twine and twist. Before her rose a vision of George and Mrs. Bellew side by side. It was a vague maternal feeling, an instinctive fear. She stilled her fingers, let her eyelids droop, and said:

"Of course, dear Grig, if I can help you in any way — Horace does so dislike anything to do with the papers."

Gregory Vigil drew in his breath.

"The papers!" he said. "How hateful it is! To think that our civilisation should allow women to be cast to the dogs! Understand, Margery, I'm thinking of her. In this matter I'm not capable of considering anything else."

Mrs. Pendyce murmured: "Of course, dear Grig, I quite understand."

"Her position is odious; a woman should not have to live like that, exposed to everyone's foul gossip."

"But, dear Grig, I don't think she minds; she seemed to me in such excellent spirits."

Gregory ran his fingers through his hair.

"Nobody understands her," he said; "she's so plucky!"

Mrs. Pendyce stole a glance at him, and a little ironical smile flickered over her face.

"No one can look at her without seeing her spirit. But, Grig, perhaps you don't quite understand her either!"

Gregory Vigil put his hand to his head.

"I must open the window a moment," he said.

Again Mrs. Pendyce's fingers began twisting, again she stilled them.

"We were quite a large party last week, and now there's only Charles. Even George has gone back; he'll be so sorry to have missed you!"

Gregory neither turned nor answered, and a wistful look came into Mrs. Pendyce's face.

"It was so nice for the dear boy to win that race! I'm afraid he bets rather! It's such a comfort Horace doesn't know."

Still Gregory did not speak.

Mrs. Pendyce's face lost its anxious look, and gained a sort of gentle admiration.

"Dear Grig," she said, "where do you go about your hair? It is so nice and long and wavy!"

Gregory turned with a blush.

"I've been wanting to get it cut for ages. Do you really mean, Margery, that your husband can't realise the position she's placed in?"

Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes on her lap.

"You see, Grig," she began, "she was here a good deal before she left the Firs, and, of course, she's related to me — though it's very distant. With those horrid cases, you never know what will happen. Horace is certain to say that she ought to go back to her husband; or, if that's impossible, he'll say she ought to think of Society. Lady Rose Bethany's case has shaken everybody, and Horace is nervous. I don't know how it is, there's a great feeling amongst people about here against women asserting themselves. You should hear Mr. Barter and Sir James Maiden, and dozens of others; the funny thing is that the women take their side. Of course, it seems odd to me, because so many of the Totteridges ran away, or did something funny. I can't help sympathising with her, but I have to think of — of —— In the country, you don't know how things that people do get about before they've done them! There's only that and hunting to talk of."

Gregory Vigil clutched at his head.

"Well, if this is what chivalry has come to, thank God I'm not a squire!"

Mrs. Pendyce's eyes flickered.

"Ah!" she said, "I've thought like that so often."

Gregory broke the silence.

"I can't help the customs of the country. My duty's plain. There's nobody else to look after her."

Mrs. Pendyce sighed, and, rising from her chair, said: "Very well, dear Grig; do let us go and have some tea."

Tea at Worsted Skeynes was served in the hall on Sundays, and was usually attended by the Rector and his wife. Young Cecil Tharp had walked over with his dog, which could be heard whimpering faintly outside the front-door.

General Pendyce, with his knees crossed and the tips of his fingers pressed together, was leaning back in his chair and staring at the wall. The Squire, who held his latest bird's-egg in his hand, was showing its spots to the Rector.

In a corner by a harmonium, on which no one ever played, Norah talked of the village hockey club to Mrs. Barter, who sat with her eyes fixed on her husband. On the other side of the fire Bee and young Tharp, whose chairs seemed very close together, spoke of their horses in low tones, stealing shy glances at each other. The light was failing, the wood logs crackled, and now and then over the cosy hum of talk there fell short, drowsy silences — silences of sheer warmth and comfort, like the silence of the spaniel John asleep against his master's boot.

"Well," said Gregory softly, "I must go and see this man."

"Is it really necessary, Grig, to see him at all? I mean — if you've made up your mind — —"

Gregory ran his hand through his hair.

"It's only fair, I think!" And crossing the hall, he let himself out so quietly that no one but Mrs. Pendyce noticed he had gone.

An hour and a half later, near the railway-station, on the road from the village back to Worsted Skeynes, Mr. Pendyce and his daughter Bee were returning from their Sunday visit to their old butler, Bigson. The Squire was talking.

"He's failing, Bee-dear old Bigson's failing. I can't hear what he says, he mumbles so; and he forgets. Fancy his forgetting that I was at Oxford. But we don't get servants like him nowadays. That chap we've got now is a sleepy fellow. Sleepy! he's —— What's that in the road? They've no business to be coming at that pace. Who is it? I can't see."

Down the middle of the dark road a dog cart was approaching at top speed. Bee seized her father's arm and pulled it vigorously, for Mr. Pendyce was standing stock-still in disapproval. The dog cart passed within a foot of him and vanished, swinging round into the station. Mr. Pendyce turned in his tracks.

"Who was that? Disgraceful! On Sunday, too! The fellow must be drunk; he nearly ran over my legs. Did you see, Bee, he nearly ran over — —"

Bee answered:

"It was Captain Bellew, Father; I saw his face." "Bellew? That drunken fellow? I shall summons him. Did you see, Bee, he nearly ran over my — —"

"Perhaps he's had bad news," said Bee. "There's the train going out now; I do hope he caught it!"

"Bad news! Is that an excuse for driving over me? You hope he caught it? I hope he's thrown himself out. The ruffian! I hope he's killed himself."

In this strain Mr. Pendyce continued until they reached the church. On their way up the aisle they passed Gregory Vigil leaning forward with his elbows on the desk and his hand covering his eyes....

At eleven o'clock that night a man stood outside the door of Mrs. Bellew's flat in Chelsea violently ringing the bell. His face was deathly white, but his little dark eyes sparkled. The door was opened, and Helen Bellew in evening dress stood there holding a candle in her hand.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

The man moved into the light.

"Jaspar! You? What on earth — —"

"I want to talk."

"Talk? Do you know what time it is?"

"Time — there's no such thing. You might give me a kiss after two years. I've been drinking, but I'm not drunk."

Mrs. Bellew did not kiss him, neither did she draw back her face. No trace of alarm showed in her ice-grey eyes. She said: "If I let you in, will you promise to say what you want to say quickly, and go away?"

The little brown devils danced in Bellew's face. He nodded. They stood by the hearth in the sitting-room, and on the lips of both came and went a peculiar smile.

It was difficult to contemplate too seriously a person with whom one had lived for years, with whom one had experienced in common the range of human passion, intimacy, and estrangement, who knew all those little daily things that men and women living together know of each other, and with whom in the end, without hatred, but because of one's nature, one had ceased to live. There was nothing for either of them to find out, and with a little smile, like the smile of knowledge itself, Jaspar Bellew and Helen his wife looked at each other.

"Well," she said again; "what have you come for?"

Bellew's face had changed. Its expression was furtive; his mouth twitched; a furrow had come between his eyes.

"How — are — you?" he said in a thick, muttering voice.

Mrs. Bellew's clear voice answered:

"Now, Jaspar, what is it that you want?"

The little brown devils leaped up again in Jaspar's face.

"You look very pretty to-night!"

His wife's lips curled.

"I'm much the same as I always was," she said.

A violent shudder shook Bellew. He fixed his eyes on the floor a little beyond her to the left; suddenly he raised them. They were quite lifeless.

"I'm perfectly sober," he murmured thickly; then with startling quickness his eyes began to sparkle again. He came a step nearer.

“You’re my wife!” he said.

Mrs. Bellew smiled.

“Come,” she answered, “you must go!” and she put out her bare arm to push him back. But Bellew recoiled of his own accord; his eyes were fixed again on the floor a little beyond her to the left.

“What’s that?” he stammered. “What’s that — that black —— ?”

The devilry, mockery, admiration, bemusement, had gone out of his face; it was white and calm, and horribly pathetic.

“Don’t turn me out,” he stammered; “don’t turn me out!”

Mrs. Bellew looked at him hard; the defiance in her eyes changed to a sort of pity. She took a quick step and put her hand on his shoulder.

“It’s all right, old boy — all right!” she said. “There’s nothing there!”

CHAPTER IX

MR. PARAMOR DISPOSES

Mrs. Pendyce, who, in accordance with her husband's wish, still occupied the same room as Mr. Pendyce, chose the ten minutes before he got up to break to him Gregory's decision. The moment was auspicious, for he was only half awake.

"Horace," she said, and her face looked young and anxious, "Grig says that Helen Bellew ought not to go on in her present position. Of course, I told him that you'd be annoyed, but Grig says that she can't go on like this, that she simply must divorce Captain Bellew."

Mr. Pendyce was lying on his back.

"What's that?" he said.

Mrs. Pendyce went on

"I knew it would worry you; but really" — she fixed her eyes on the ceiling—"I suppose we ought only to think of her."

The Squire sat up.

"What was that," he said, "about Bellew?"

Mrs. Pendyce went on in a languid voice and without moving her eyes:

"Don't be angrier than you can help, dear; it is so wearing. If Grig says she ought to divorce Captain Bellew, then I'm sure she ought."

Horace Pendyce subsided on his pillow with a bounce, and he too lay with his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Divorce him!" he said—"I should think so! He ought to be hanged, a fellow like that. I told you last night he nearly drove over me. Living just as he likes, setting an example of devilry to the whole neighbourhood! If I hadn't kept my head he'd have bowled me over like a ninepin, and Bee into the bargain."

Mrs. Pendyce sighed.

"It was a narrow escape," she said.

"Divorce him!" resumed Mr. Pendyce—"I should think so! She ought to have divorced him long ago. It was the nearest thing in the world; another foot and I should have been knocked off my feet!"

Mrs. Pendyce withdrew her glance from the ceiling.

"At first," she said, "I wondered whether it was quite — but I'm very glad you've taken it like this."

"Taken it! I can tell you, Margery, that sort of thing makes one think. All the time Barter was preaching last night I was wondering what on earth would have happened to this estate if — if — —" And he looked round with a frown. "Even as it is, I barely make the two ends of it meet. As to George, he's no more fit at present to manage it than you are; he'd make a loss of thousands."

"I'm afraid George is too much in London. That's the reason I wondered whether — I'm afraid he sees too much of — —"

Mrs. Pendyce stopped; a flush suffused her cheeks; she had pinched herself violently beneath the bedclothes.

"George," said Mr. Pendyce, pursuing his own thoughts, "has no gumption. He'd never manage a man like Peacock — and you encourage him! He ought to marry and settle down."

Mrs. Pendyce, the flush dying in her cheeks, said:

"George is very like poor Hubert."

Horace Pendyce drew his watch from beneath his pillow.

"Ah!" But he refrained from adding, "Your people!" for Hubert Totteridge had not been dead a year. "Ten minutes to eight! You keep me talking here; it's time I was in my bath."

Clad in pyjamas with a very wide blue stripe, grey-eyed, grey-moustached, slim and erect, he paused at the door.

"The girls haven't a scrap of imagination. What do you think Bee said? 'I hope he hasn't lost his train.' Lost his train! Good God! and I might have — I might have — —" The Squire did not finish his sentence; no words but what seemed to him violent and extreme would have fulfilled his conception of the danger he had escaped, and it was against his nature and his training to exaggerate a physical risk.

At breakfast he was more cordial than usual to Gregory, who was going up by the first train, for as a rule Mr. Pendyce rather distrusted him, as one would a wife's cousin, especially if he had a sense of humour.

"A very good fellow," he was wont to say of him, "but an out-and-out Radical." It was the only label he could find for Gregory's peculiarities.

Gregory departed without further allusion to the object of his visit. He was driven to the station in a brougham by the first groom, and sat with his hat off and his head at the open window, as if trying to get something blown out of his brain. Indeed, throughout the whole of his journey up to town he looked out of the window, and expressions half humorous and half puzzled played on his face. Like a panorama slowly unrolled, country house after country house, church after church, appeared before his eyes in the autumn sunlight, among the hedgerows and the coverts that were all brown and gold; and far away on the rising uplands the slow ploughman drove, outlined against the sky:

He took a cab from the station to his solicitors' in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He was shown into a room bare of all legal accessories, except a series of Law Reports and a bunch of violets in a glass of fresh water. Edmund Paramor, the senior partner of Paramor and Herring, a clean-shaven man of sixty, with iron-grey hair brushed in a cockscomb off his forehead, greeted him with a smile.

"Ah, Vigil, how are you? Up from the country?"

"From Worsted Skeynes."

"Horace Pendyce is a client of mine. Well, what can we do for you? Your Society up a tree?"

Gregory Vigil, in the padded leather chair that had held so many aspirants for comfort, sat a full minute without speaking; and Mr. Paramor, too, after one keen glance at his client that seemed to come from very far down in his soul, sat motionless and grave. There was at that moment something a little similar in the eyes of these two very different men, a look of kindred honesty and aspiration. Gregory spoke at last.

"It's a painful subject to me."

Mr. Paramor drew a face on his blotting-paper.

"I have come," went on Gregory, "about a divorce for my ward."

"Mrs. Jaspar Bellew?"

"Yes; her position is intolerable."

Mr. Paramor gave him a searching look.

"Let me see: I think she and her husband have been separated for some time."

"Yes, for two years."

"You're acting with her consent, of course?"

"I have spoken to her."

"You know the law of divorce, I suppose?"

Gregory answered with a painful smile:

"I'm not very clear about it; I hardly ever look at those cases in the paper. I hate the whole idea."

Mr. Paramor smiled again, became instantly grave, and said:

"We shall want evidence of certain things, Have you got any evidence?"

Gregory ran his hand through his hair.

"I don't think there'll be any difficulty," he said. "Bellew agrees — they both agree!"

Mr. Paramor stared.

"What's that to do with it?"

Gregory caught him up.

"Surely, where both parties are anxious, and there's no opposition, it can't be difficult."

"Good Lord!" said Mr. Paramor.

"But I've seen Bellew; I saw him yesterday. I'm sure I can get him to admit anything you want!"

Mr. Paramor drew his breath between his teeth.

"Did you ever," he said drily, "hear of what's called collusion?"

Gregory got up and paced the room.

"I don't know that I've ever heard anything very exact about the thing at all," he said. "The whole subject is hateful to me. I regard marriage as sacred, and when, which God forbid, it proves unsacred, it is horrible to think of these formalities. This is a Christian country; we are all flesh and blood. What is this slime, Paramor?"

With this outburst he sank again into the chair, and leaned his head on his hand. And oddly, instead of smiling, Mr. Paramor looked at him with haunting eyes.

"Two unhappy persons must not seem to agree to be parted," he said. "One must be believed to desire to keep hold of the other, and must pose as an injured person. There must be evidence of misconduct, and in this case of cruelty or of desertion. The evidence must be impartial. This is the law."

Gregory said without looking up:

"But why?"

Mr. Paramor took his violets out of the water, and put them to his nose.

"How do you mean — why?"

"I mean, why this underhand, roundabout way?"

Mr. Paramor's face changed with startling speed from its haunting look back to his smile.

"Well," he said, "for the preservation of morality. What do you suppose?"

"Do you call it moral so to imprison people that you drive them to sin in order to free themselves?"

Mr. Paramor obliterated the face on his blotting-pad.

"Where's your sense of humour?" he said.

"I see no joke, Paramor."

Mr. Paramor leaned forward.

"My dear friend," he said earnestly, "I don't say for a minute that our system doesn't cause a great deal of quite unnecessary suffering; I don't say that it doesn't need reform. Most lawyers and almost any thinking man will tell you that it does. But that's a wide question which doesn't help us here. We'll manage your business for you, if it can be done. You've made a bad start, that's all. The first thing is for us to write to Mrs. Bellew, and ask her to come and see us. We shall have to get Bellew watched."

Gregory said:

"That's detestable. Can't it be done without that?"

Mr. Paramor bit his forefinger.

"Not safe," he said. "But don't bother; we'll see to all that."

Gregory rose and went to the window. He said suddenly:

"I can't bear this underhand work."

Mr. Paramor smiled.

"Every honest man," he said, "feels as you do. But, you see, we must think of the law."

Gregory burst out again:

"Can no one get a divorce, then, without making beasts or spies of themselves?"

Mr. Paramor said gravely

"It is difficult, perhaps impossible. You see, the law is based on certain principles."

"Principles?"

A smile wreathed Mr. Paramor's mouth, but died instantly.

"Ecclesiastical principles, and according to these a person desiring a divorce 'ipso facto' loses caste. That they should have to make spies or beasts of themselves is not of grave importance."

Gregory came back to the table, and again buried his head in his hands.

"Don't joke, please, Paramor," he said; "it's all so painful to me."

Mr. Paramor's eyes haunted his client's bowed head.

"I'm not joking," he said. "God forbid! Do you read poetry?" And opening a drawer, he took out a book bound in red leather. "This is a man I'm fond of:

"'Life is mostly froth and bubble;
Two things stand like stone —
KINDNESS in another's trouble,
COURAGE in your own.'

"That seems to me the sum of all philosophy."

"Paramor," said Gregory, "my ward is very dear to me; she is dearer to me than any woman I know. I am here in a most dreadful dilemma. On the one hand there is this horrible underhand business, with all its publicity; and on the other there is her position — a beautiful woman, fond of gaiety, living alone in this London, where every man's instincts and every woman's tongue look upon her as fair game. It has been brought home to me only too painfully of late. God forgive me! I have even advised her to go back to Bellew, but that seems out of the question. What am I to do?"

Mr. Paramor rose.

"I know," he said—"I know. My dear friend, I know!" And for a full minute he remained motionless, a little turned from Gregory. "It will be better," he said suddenly, "for her to get rid of him. I'll go and see her myself. We'll spare her all we can. I'll go this afternoon, and let you know the result."

As though by mutual instinct, they put out their hands, which they shook with averted faces. Then Gregory, seizing his hat, strode out of the room.

He went straight to the rooms of his Society in Hanover Square. They were on the top floor, higher than the rooms of any other Society in the building — so high, in fact, that from their windows, which began five feet up, you could practically only see the sky.

A girl with sloping shoulders, red cheeks, and dark eyes, was working a typewriter in a corner, and sideways to the sky at a bureau littered with addressed envelopes, unanswered letters, and copies of the Society's publications, was seated a grey-haired lady with a long, thin, weatherbeaten face and glowing eyes, who was frowning at a page of manuscript.

"Oh, Mr. Vigil," she said, "I'm so glad you've come. This paragraph mustn't go as it is. It will never do."

Gregory took the manuscript and read the paragraph in question.

"This case of Eva Nevill is so horrible that we ask those of our women readers who live in the security, luxury perhaps, peace certainly, of their country homes, what they would have done, finding themselves suddenly in the position of this poor girl — in a great city, without friends, without money, almost without clothes, and exposed to all the craft of one of those fiends in human form who prey upon our womankind. Let each one ask herself: Should I have resisted where she fell?"

"It will never do to send that out," said the lady again.

"What is the matter with it, Mrs. Shortman?"

"It's too personal. Think of Lady Maiden, or most of our subscribers. You can't expect them to imagine themselves like poor Eva. I'm sure they won't like it."

Gregory clutched at his hair.

"Is it possible they can't stand that?" he said.

"It's only because you've given such horrible details of poor Eva."

Gregory got up and paced the room.

Mrs. Shortman went on

"You've not lived in the country for so long, Mr. Vigil, that you don't remember. You see, I know. People don't like to be harrowed. Besides, think how difficult it is for them to imagine themselves in such a position. It'll only shock them, and do our circulation harm."

Gregory snatched up the page and handed it to the girl who sat at the typewriter in the corner.

"Read that, please, Miss Mallow."

The girl read without raising her eyes.

"Well, is it what Mrs. Shortman says?"

The girl handed it back with a blush.

"It's perfect, of course, in itself, but I think Mrs. Shortman is right. It might offend some people."

Gregory went quickly to the window, threw it up, and stood gazing at the sky. Both women looked at his back.

Mrs. Shortman said gently:

"I would only just alter it like this, from after 'country homes': 'whether they do not pity and forgive this poor girl in a great city, without friends, without money, almost without clothes, and exposed to all the craft of one of those fiends in human form who prey upon our womankind,' and just stop there."

Gregory returned to the table.

"Not 'forgive,'" he said, "not 'forgive'!"

Mrs. Shortman raised her pen.

"You don't know," she said, "what a strong feeling there is. Mind, it has to go to numbers of parsonages, Mr. Vigil. Our principle has always been to be very careful. And you have been plainer than usual in stating the case. It's not as if they really could put themselves in her position; that's impossible. Not one woman in a hundred could, especially among those who live in the country and have never seen life. I'm a squire's daughter myself."

"And I a parson's," said Gregory, with a smile.

Mrs. Shortman looked at him reproachfully.

"Joking apart, Mr. Vigil, it's touch and go with our paper as it is; we really can't afford it. I've had lots of letters lately complaining that we put the cases unnecessarily strongly. Here's one:

"'BOURNEFIELD RECTORY,

"'November 1.

"'DEAR MADAM,

"'While sympathising with your good work, I am afraid I cannot become a subscriber to your paper while it takes its present form, as I do not feel that it is always fit reading for my girls. I cannot think it either wise or right that they should become acquainted with such dreadful aspects of life, however true they may be.

"'I am, dear madam,

"'Respectfully yours,

"'WINIFRED TUDDENHAM.

"'P.S. — I could never feel sure, too, that my maids would not pick it up, and perhaps take harm.'"

"I had that only this morning."

Gregory buried his face in his hands, and sitting thus he looked so like a man praying that no one spoke. When he raised his face it was to say:

"Not 'forgive,' Mrs. Shortman, not 'forgive'!"

Mrs. Shortman ran her pen through the word.

"Very well, Mr. Vigil," she said; "it's a risk."

The sound of the typewriter, which had been hushed, began again from the corner.

"That case of drink, Mr. Vigil — Millicent Porter — I'm afraid there's very little hope there."

Gregory asked:

"What now?"

"Relapsed again; it's the fifth time."

Gregory turned his face to the window, and looked at the sky.

"I must go and see her. Just give me her address."

Mrs. Shortman read from a green book:

"'Mrs. Porter, 2 Bilcock Buildings, Bloomsbury.' Mr. Vigil!"

"Yes."

"Mr. Vigil, I do sometimes wish you would not persevere so long with those hopeless cases; they never seem to come to anything, and your time is so valuable."

"How can I give them up, Mrs. Shortman? There's no choice."

"But, Mr. Vigil, why is there no choice? You must draw the line somewhere. Do forgive me for saying that I think you sometimes waste your time."

Gregory turned to the girl at the typewriter.

"Miss Mallow, is Mrs. Shortman right? do I waste my time?"

The girl at the typewriter blushed vividly, and, without looking round, said:

"How can I tell, Mr. Vigil? But it does worry one."

A humorous and perplexed smile passed over Gregory's lips.

"Now I know I shall cure her," he said. "2 Bilcock Buildings." And he continued to look at the sky. "How's your neuralgia, Mrs. Shortman?"

Mrs. Shortman smiled.

"Awful!"

Gregory turned quickly.

"You feel that window, then; I'm so sorry."

Mrs. Shortman shook her head.

"No, but perhaps Molly does."

The girl at the typewriter said:

"Oh no; please, Mr. Vigil, don't shut it for me."

"Truth and honour?"

"Truth and honour," replied both women. And all three for a moment sat looking at the sky. Then Mrs. Shortman said:

"You see, you can't get to the root of the evil — that husband of hers."

Gregory turned.

"Ah," he said, "that man! If she could only get rid of him! That ought to have been done long ago, before he drove her to drink like this. Why didn't she, Mrs. Shortman, why didn't she?"

Mrs. Shortman raised her eyes, which had such a peculiar spiritual glow.

"I don't suppose she had the money," she said; "and she must have been such a nice woman then. A nice woman doesn't like to divorce—"

Gregory looked at her.

"What, Mrs. Shortman, you too, you too among the Pharisees?"

Mrs. Shortman flushed.

“She wanted to save him,” she said; “she must have wanted to save him.”

“Then you and I — —” But Gregory did not finish, and turned again to the window. Mrs. Shortman, too, biting her lips, looked anxiously at the sky.

Miss Mallow at the typewriter, with a scared face, plied her fingers faster than ever.

Gregory was the first to speak.

“You must please forgive me,” he said gently. “A personal matter; I forgot myself.”

Mrs. Shortman withdrew her gaze from the sky.

“Oh, Mr. Vigil, if I had known — —”

Gregory Gregory smiled.

“Don’t, don’t!” he said; “we’ve quite frightened poor Miss Mallow!”

Miss Mallow looked round at him, he looked at her, and all three once more looked at the sky. It was the chief recreation of this little society.

Gregory worked till nearly three, and walked out to a bun-shop, where he lunched off a piece of cake and a cup of coffee. He took an omnibus, and getting on the top, was driven West with a smile on his face and his hat in his hand. He was thinking of Helen Bellew. It had become a habit with him to think of her, the best and most beautiful of her sex — a habit in which he was growing grey, and with which, therefore, he could not part. And those women who saw him with his uncovered head smiled, and thought:

‘What a fine-looking man!’

But George Pendyce, who saw him from the window of the Stoics’ Club, smiled a different smile; the sight of him was always a little unpleasant to George.

Nature, who had made Gregory Vigil a man, had long found that he had got out of her hands, and was living in celibacy, deprived of the comfort of woman, even of those poor creatures whom he befriended; and Nature, who cannot bear that man should escape her control, avenged herself through his nerves and a habit of blood to the head. Extravagance, she said, I cannot have, and when I made this man I made him quite extravagant enough. For his temperament (not uncommon in a misty climate) had been born seven feet high; and as a man cannot add a cubit to his stature, so neither can he take one off. Gregory could not bear that a yellow man must always remain a yellow man, but trusted by care and attention some day to see him white. There lives no mortal who has not a philosophy as distinct from every other mortal’s as his face is different from their faces; but Gregory believed that philosophers unfortunately alien must gain in time a likeness to himself if he were careful to tell them often that they had been mistaken. Other men in this Great Britain had the same belief.

To Gregory’s reforming instinct it was a constant grief that he had been born refined. A natural delicacy would interfere and mar his noblest efforts. Hence failures deplored by Mrs. Pendyce to Lady Maiden the night they danced at Worsted Skeynes.

He left his bus near to the flat where Mrs. Bellow lived; with reverence he made the tour of the building and back again. He had long fixed a rule, which he never broke, of seeing her only once a fortnight; but to pass her windows he went out of his way most days and nights. And having made this tour, not conscious of having done anything ridiculous, still smiling, and with his hat on his knee, perhaps really happier because he had not seen her, was driven East, once more passing George Pendyce in the bow-window of the Stoics’ Club, and once more raising on his face a jeering smile.

He had been back at his rooms in Buckingham Street half an hour when a club commissionaire arrived with Mr. Paramor’s promised letter.

He opened it hastily.

“THE NELSON CLUB, “TRAFALGAR SQUARE. “MY DEAR VIGIL,

“I’ve just come from seeing your ward. An embarrassing complexion is lent to affairs by what took place last night. It appears that after your visit to him yesterday afternoon her husband came up to town, and made his appearance at her flat about eleven o’clock. He was in a condition bordering on delirium tremens, and Mrs. Bellew was obliged to keep him for the night. ‘I could not,’ she said to me, ‘have refused a dog in such a state.’ The visit lasted until this afternoon — in fact, the man had only just gone when I arrived. It is a piece of irony, of which I must explain to you the importance. I think I told you that the law of divorce is based on certain principles. One of these excludes any forgiveness of offences by the party moving for a divorce. In technical language, any such forgiveness or overlooking is called condonation, and it is a complete bar to further action for the time being. The Court is very jealous of this principle of non-forgiveness, and will regard with grave suspicion any conduct on the part of the offended party which might be construed as amounting to condonation. I fear that what your ward tells me will make it altogether inadvisable to apply for a divorce on any evidence that may lie in the past. It is too dangerous. In other words, the Court would almost certainly consider that she has condoned offences so far. Any further offence, however, will in technical language ‘revive’ the past, and under these circumstances, though nothing can be done at present, there may be hope in the future. After seeing your ward, I quite appreciate your anxiety in the matter, though I am by no means sure that you are right in advising this divorce. If you remain in the same mind, however, I will give the matter my best personal attention, and my counsel to you is not to worry. This is no matter for a layman, especially not for one who, like you, judges of things rather as they ought to be than as they are.

“I am, my dear Vigil,

“Very sincerely yours,

“EDMUND PARAMOR. “GREGORY VIGIL, ESQ.

“If you want to see me, I shall be at my club all the evening.-E. P.”

When Gregory had read this note he walked to the window, and stood looking out over the lights on the river. His heart beat furiously, his temples were crimson. He went downstairs, and took a cab to the Nelson Club.

Mr. Paramor, who was about to dine, invited his visitor to join him.

Gregory shook his head.

“No, thanks,” he said; “I don’t feel like dining. What is this, Paramor? Surely there’s some mistake? Do you mean to tell me that because she acted like a Christian to that man she is to be punished for it in this way?”

Mr. Paramor bit his finger.

“Don’t confuse yourself by dragging in Christianity. Christianity has nothing to do with law.”

“You talked of principles,” said Gregory—”ecclesiastical”

“Yes, yes; I meant principles imported from the old ecclesiastical conception of marriage, which held man and wife to be undivorceable. That conception has been abandoned by the law, but the principles still haunt — —”

“I don’t understand.”

Mr. Paramor said slowly:

“I don’t know that anyone does. It’s our usual muddle. But I know this, Vigil — in such a case as your ward’s we must tread very carefully. We must ‘save face,’ as the Chinese say. We must pretend we don’t want to bring this divorce, but that we have been so injured that we are obliged to come forward. If Bellew says nothing, the Judge will have to take what’s put before him. But there’s always the Queen’s Proctor. I don’t know if you know anything about him?”

“No,” said Gregory, “I don’t.”

“Well, if he can find out anything against our getting this divorce, he will. It is not my habit to go into Court with a case in which anybody can find out anything.”

“Do you mean to say”

“I mean to say that she must not ask for a divorce merely because she is miserable, or placed in a position that no woman should be placed in, but only if she has been offended in certain technical ways; and if — by condonation, for instance — she has given the Court technical reason for refusing her a divorce, that divorce will be refused her. To get a divorce, Vigil, you must be as hard as nails and as wary as a cat. Now do you understand?”

Gregory did not answer.

Mr. Paramor looked searchingly and rather pityingly in his face.

“It won’t do to go for it at present,” he said. “Are you still set on this divorce? I told you in my letter that I am not sure you are right.”

“How can you ask me, Paramor? After that man’s conduct last night, I am more than ever set on it.”

“Then,” said Mr. Paramor, “we must keep a sharp eye on Bellew, and hope for the best.”

Gregory held out his hand.

“You spoke of morality,” he said. “I can’t tell you how inexpressibly mean the whole thing seems to me. Goodnight.”

And, turning rather quickly, he went out.

His mind was confused and his heart torn. He thought of Helen Bellew as of the woman dearest to him in the coils of a great slimy serpent, and the knowledge that each man and woman unhappily married was, whether by his own, his partner’s, or by no fault at all, in the same embrace, afforded him no comfort whatsoever. It was long before he left the windy streets to go to his home.

CHAPTER X

AT BLAFARD'S

There comes now and then to the surface of our modern civilisation one of those great and good men who, unconscious, like all great and good men, of the goodness and greatness of their work, leave behind a lasting memorial of themselves before they go bankrupt.

It was so with the founder of the Stoics' Club.

He came to the surface in the year 187-, with nothing in the world but his clothes and an idea. In a single year he had floated the Stoics' Club, made ten thousand pounds, lost more, and gone down again.

The Stoics' Club lived after him by reason of the immortal beauty of his idea. In 1891 it was a strong and corporate body, not perhaps quite so exclusive as it had been, but, on the whole, as smart and aristocratic as any club in London, with the exception of that one or two into which nobody ever got. The idea with which its founder had underpinned the edifice was, like all great ideas, simple, permanent, and perfect — so simple, permanent, and perfect that it seemed amazing no one had ever thought of it before. It was embodied in No. 1 of the members' rules:

"No member of this club shall have any occupation whatsoever."

Hence the name of a club renowned throughout London for the excellence of its wines and cuisine.

Its situation was in Piccadilly, fronting the Green Park, and through the many windows of its ground-floor smoking-room the public were privileged to see at all hours of the day numbers of Stoics in various attitudes reading the daily papers or gazing out of the window.

Some of them who did not direct companies, grow fruit, or own yachts, wrote a book, or took an interest in a theatre. The greater part eked out existence by racing horses, hunting foxes, and shooting birds. Individuals among them, however, had been known to play the piano, and take up the Roman Catholic religion. Many explored the same spots of the Continent year after year at stated seasons. Some belonged to the Yeomanry; others called themselves barristers; once in a way one painted a picture or devoted himself to good works. They were, in fact, of all sorts and temperaments, but their common characteristic was an independent income, often so settled by Providence that they could not in any way get rid of it.

But though the principle of no occupation overruled all class distinctions, the Stoics were mainly derived from the landed gentry. An instinct that the spirit of the club was safest with persons of this class guided them in their elections, and eldest sons, who became members almost as a matter of course, lost no time in putting up their younger brothers, thereby keeping the wine as pure as might be, and preserving that fine old country-house flavour which is nowhere so appreciated as in London.

After seeing Gregory pass on the top of a bus, George Pendyce went into the card-room, and as it was still empty, set to contemplation of the pictures on the walls. They were effigies of all those members of the Stoics' Club who from time to time had come under the notice of a celebrated caricaturist in a celebrated society paper. Whenever a Stoic appeared, he was at once cut out, framed, glassed, and hung alongside his fellows in this room. And George moved from one to another till he came to the last. It was himself. He was represented in very perfectly cut clothes, with slightly crooked elbows, and race-glasses slung across him. His head, disproportionately large, was surmounted by a black billycock hat with a very flat brim. The artist had thought long and carefully over the face. The lips and cheeks and chin were moulded so as to convey a feeling of the unimaginative joy of life, but to their shape and complexion was imparted a suggestion of obstinacy and choler. To the eyes was given a glazed look, and between them set a little line, as though their owner were thinking:

'Hard work, hard work! Noblesse oblige. I must keep it going!'

Underneath was written: "The Ambler."

George stood long looking at the apotheosis of his fame. His star was high in the heavens. With the eye of his mind he saw a long procession of turf triumphs, a long vista of days and nights, and in them, round them, of them — Helen Bellow; and by an odd coincidence, as he stood there, the artist's glazed look came over his eyes, the little line sprang up between them.

He turned at the sound of voices and sank into a chair. To have been caught thus gazing at himself would have jarred on his sense of what was right.

It was twenty minutes past seven, when, in evening dress, he left the club, and took a shilling's-worth to Buckingham Gate. Here he dismissed his cab, and turned up the large fur collar of his coat. Between the brim of his opera-hat and the edge of that collar nothing but his eyes were visible. He waited, compressing his lips, scrutinising each hansom that went by. In the soft glow of one coming fast he saw a hand raised to the trap. The cab stopped; George stepped out of the shadow and got in. The cab went on, and Mrs. Bellew's arm was pressed against his own.

It was their simple formula for arriving at a restaurant together.

In the third of several little rooms, where the lights were shaded, they sat down at a table in a corner, facing each a wall, and, underneath, her shoe stole out along the floor and touched his patent leather boot. In their eyes, for all their would-be wariness, a light smouldered which would not be put out. An habitue, sipping claret at a table across the little room, watched them in a mirror, and there came into his old heart a glow of warmth, half ache, half sympathy; a smile of understanding stirred the crow's-feet round his eyes. Its sweetness ebbed, and left a little grin about his shaven lips. Behind the archway in the neighbouring room two waiters met, and in their nods and glances was that same unconscious sympathy, the same conscious grin. And the old habitue thought:

'How long will it last?'.... "Waiter, some coffee and my bill!"

He had meant to go to the play, but he lingered instead to look at Mrs. Bellew's white shoulders and bright eyes in the kindly mirror. And he thought:

'Young days at present. Ah, young days!'....

"Waiter, a Benedictine!" And hearing her laugh, O his old heart ached. 'No one,' he thought, 'will ever laugh like that for me again!'.... "Here, waiter, how's this? You've charged me for an ice!" But when the waiter had gone he glanced back into the mirror, and saw them clink their glasses filled with golden bubbling wine, and he thought: ‘Wish you good luck! For a flash of those teeth, my dear, I’d give — —’

But his eyes fell on the paper flowers adorning his little table — yellow and red and green; hard, lifeless, tawdry. He saw them suddenly as they were, with the dregs of wine in his glass, the spill of gravy on the cloth, the ruin of the nuts that he had eaten. Wheezing and coughing, ‘This place is not what it was,’ he thought; ‘I shan’t come here again!’

He struggled into his coat to go, but he looked once more in the mirror, and met their eyes resting on himself. In them he read the careless pity of the young for the old. His eyes answered the reflection of their eyes, ‘Wait, wait! It is young days yet! I wish you no harm, my dears!’ and limping-for one of his legs was lame — he went away.

But George and his partner sat on, and with every glass of wine the light in their eyes grew brighter. For who was there now in the room to mind? Not a living soul! Only a tall, dark young waiter, a little cross-eyed, who was in consumption; only the little wine-waiter, with a pallid face, and a look as if he suffered. And the whole world seemed of the colour of the wine they had been drinking; but they talked of indifferent things, and only their eyes, bemused and shining, really spoke. The dark young waiter stood apart, unmoving, and his cross-eyed glance, fixed on her shoulders, had all unconsciously the longing of a saint in some holy picture. Unseen, behind the serving screen, the little wine-waiter poured out and drank a glass from a derelict bottle. Through a chink of the red blinds an eye peered in from the chill outside, staring and curious, till its owner passed on in the cold.

It was long after nine when they rose. The dark young waiter laid her cloak upon her with adoring hands. She looked back at him, and in her eyes was an infinite indulgence. ‘God knows,’ she seemed to say, ‘if I could make you happy as well, I would. Why should one suffer? Life is strong and good!’

The young waiter’s cross-eyed glance fell before her, and he bowed above the money in his hand. Quickly before them the little wine-waiter hurried to the door, his suffering face screwed into one long smile.

“Good-night, madam; good-night, sir. Thank you very much!”

And he, too, remained bowed over his hand, and his smile relaxed.

But in the cab George’s arm stole round her underneath the cloak, and they were borne on in the stream of hurrying hansoms, carrying couples like themselves, cut off from all but each other’s eyes, from all but each other’s touch; and with their eyes turned in the half-dark they spoke together in low tones.

PART II

CHAPTER I

GREGORY REOPENS THE CAMPAIGN

At one end of the walled garden which Mr. Pendyce had formed in imitation of that at dear old Strathbegally, was a virgin orchard of pear and cherry trees. They blossomed early, and by the end of the third week in April the last of the cherries had broken into flower. In the long grass, underneath, a wealth of daffodils, jonquils, and narcissus, came up year after year, and sunned their yellow stars in the light which dappled through the blossom.

And here Mrs. Pendyce would come, tan gauntlets on her hands, and stand, her face a little flushed with stooping, as though the sight of all that bloom was restful. It was due to her that these old trees escaped year after year the pruning and improvements which the genius of the Squire would otherwise have applied. She had been brought up in an old Totteridge tradition that fruit-trees should be left to themselves, while her husband, possessed of a grasp of the subject not more than usually behind the times, was all for newer methods. She had fought for those trees. They were as yet the only things she had fought for in her married life, and Horace Pendyce still remembered with a discomfort robbed by time of poignancy how she had stood with her back to their bedroom door and said, "If you cut those poor trees, Horace, I won't live here!" He had at once expressed his determination to have them pruned; but, having put off the action for a day or two, the trees still stood unpruned thirty-three years later. He had even come to feel rather proud of the fact that they continued to bear fruit, and would speak of them thus: "Queer fancy of my wife's, never been cut. And yet, remarkable thing, they do better than any of the others!"

This spring, when all was so forward, and the cuckoos already in full song, when the scent of young larches in the New Plantation (planted the year of George's birth) was in the air like the perfume of celestial lemons, she came to the orchard more than usual, and her spirit felt the stirring, the old, half-painful yearning for she knew not what, that she had felt so often in her first years at Worsted Skeynes. And sitting there on a green-painted seat under the largest of the cherry-trees, she thought even more than her wont of George, as though her son's spirit, vibrating in its first real passion, were calling to her for sympathy.

He had been down so little all that winter, twice for a couple of days' shooting, once for a week-end, when she had thought him looking thinner and rather worn. He had missed Christmas for the first time. With infinite precaution she had asked him casually if he had seen Helen Bellew, and he had answered, "Oh yes, I see her once in a way!"

Secretly all through the winter she consulted the Times newspaper for mention of George's horse, and was disappointed not to find any. One day, however, in February, discovering him absolutely at the head of several lists of horses with figures after them, she wrote off at once with a joyful heart. Of five lists in which the Ambler's name appeared, there was only one in which he was second. George's answer came in the course of a week or so.

"MY DEAR MOTHER,

"What you saw were the weights for the Spring Handicaps. They've simply done me out of everything. In great haste,

"Your affectionate son,

"GEORGE PENDYCE."

As the spring approached, the vision of her independent visit to London, which had sustained her throughout the winter, having performed its annual function, grew mistier and mistier, and at last faded away. She ceased even to dream of it, as though it had never been, nor did George remind her, and as usual, she ceased even to wonder whether he would remind her. She thought instead of the season visit, and its scurry of parties, with a sort of languid fluttering. For Worsted Skeynes, and all that Worsted Skeynes stood for, was like a heavy horseman guiding her with iron hands along a narrow lane; she dreamed of throwing him in the open, but the open she never reached.

She woke at seven with her tea, and from seven to eight made little notes on tablets, while on his back Mr. Pendyce snored lightly. She rose at eight. At nine she poured out coffee. From half-past nine to ten she attended to the housekeeper and her birds. From ten to eleven she attended to the gardener and her dress. From eleven to twelve she wrote invitations to persons for whom she did not care, and acceptances to persons who did not care for her; she drew out also and placed in due sequence cheques for Mr. Pendyce's signature; and secured receipts, carefully docketed on the back, within an elastic band; as a rule, also, she received a visit from Mrs. Husell Barter. From twelve to one she walked with her and "the dear dogs" to the village, where she stood hesitatingly in the cottage doors of persons who were shy of her. From half-past one to two she lunched. From two to three she rested on a sofa in the white morning-room with the newspaper in her hand, trying to read the Parliamentary debate, and thinking of other things. From three to half-past four she went to her dear flowers, from whom she was liable to be summoned at any moment by the arrival of callers; or, getting into the carriage, was driven to some neighbour's mansion, where she sat for half an hour and came away. At half-past four she poured out tea. At five she knitted a tie, or socks, for George or Gerald, and listened with a gentle smile to what was going on. From six to seven she received from the Squire his impressions of Parliament and things at large. From seven to seven-thirty she changed to a black low dress, with old lace about the neck. At seven-thirty she dined. At a quarter to nine she listened to Norah playing two waltzes of Chopin's, and a piece called "Serenade du Printemps" by Baff, and to Bee singing "The Mikado," or the "Saucy Girl" From nine to ten thirty she played a game called piquet, which her father had taught her, if she could get anyone with whom to play; but as this was seldom, she played as a rule patience by herself. At ten-thirty she went to bed. At eleven-thirty punctually the Squire woke her. At one o'clock she went to sleep. On Mondays she wrote out in her clear Totteridge hand, with its fine straight strokes, a list of library books, made up without distinction of all that were recommended in the Ladies' Paper that came weekly to Worsted Skeynes. Periodically Mr. Pendyce would hand her a list of his own, compiled out of the Times and the Field in the privacy of his study; this she sent too.

Thus was the household supplied with literature unerringly adapted to its needs; nor was it possible for any undesirable book to find its way into the house — not that this would have mattered much to Mrs. Pendyce, for as she often said with gentle regret, "My dear, I have no time to read."

This afternoon it was so warm that the bees were all around among the blossoms, and two thrushes, who had built in a yew-tree that watched over the Scotch garden, were in a violent flutter because one of their chicks had fallen out of the nest. The mother bird, at the edge of the long orchard grass, was silent, trying by example to still the tiny creature's cheeping, lest it might attract some large or human thing.

Mrs. Pendyce, sitting under the oldest cherry-tree, looked for the sound, and when she had located it, picked up the baby bird, and, as she knew the whereabouts of all the nests, put it back into its cradle, to the loud terror and grief of the parent birds. She went back to the bench and sat down again.

She had in her soul something of the terror of the mother thrush. The Maidens had been paying the call that preceded their annual migration to town, and the peculiar glow which Lady Maiden had the power of raising had not yet left her cheeks. True, she had the comfort of the thought, 'Ellen Maiden is so bourgeoise,' but to-day it did not still her heart.

Accompanied by one pale daughter who never left her, and two pale dogs forced to run all the way, now lying under the carriage with their tongues out, Lady Maiden had come and stayed full time; and for three-quarters of that time she had seemed, as it were, labouring under a sense of duty unfulfilled; for the remaining quarter Mrs. Pendyce had laboured under a sense of duty fulfilled.

"My dear," Lady Maiden had said, having told the pale daughter to go into the conservatory, "I'm the last person in the world to repeat gossip, as you know; but I think it's only right to tell you that I've been hearing things. You see, my boy Fred" (who would ultimately become Sir Frederick Maiden) "belongs to the same club as your son George — the Stoics. All young men belong there of course-I mean, if they're anybody. I'm sorry to say there's no doubt about it; your son has been seen dining at — perhaps I ought not to mention the name — Blafard's, with Mrs. Bellew. I dare say you don't know what sort of a place Blafard's is — a lot of little rooms where people go when they don't want to be seen. I've never been there, of course; but I can imagine it perfectly. And not once, but frequently. I thought I would speak to you, because I do think it's so scandalous of her in her position."

An azalea in a blue and white pot had stood between them, and in this plant Mrs. Pendyce buried her cheeks and eyes; but when she raised her face her eyebrows were lifted to their utmost limit, her lips trembled with anger.

"Oh," she said, "didn't you know? There's nothing in that; it's the latest thing!"

For a moment Lady Maiden wavered, then duskily flushed; her temperament and principles had recovered themselves.

"If that," she said with some dignity, "is the latest thing, I think it is quite time we were back in town."

She rose, and as she rose, such was her unfortunate conformation, it flashed through Mrs. Pendyce's mind 'Why was I afraid? She's only—' And then as quickly: 'Poor woman! how can she help her legs being short?'

But when she was gone, side by side with the pale daughter, the pale dogs once more running behind the carriage, Margery Pendyce put her hand to her heart.

And out here amongst the bees and blossom, where the blackbirds were improving each minute their new songs, and the air was so fainting sweet with scents, her heart would not be stilled, but throbbed as though danger were coming on herself; and she saw her son as a little boy again in a dirty holland suit with a straw hat down the back of his neck, flushed and sturdy, as he came to her from some adventure.

And suddenly a gush of emotion from deep within her heart and the heart of the spring day, a sense of being severed from him by a great, remorseless power, came over her; and taking out a tiny embroidered handkerchief, she wept. Round her the bees hummed carelessly, the blossom dropped, the dappled sunlight covered her with a pattern as of her own fine lace. From the home farm came the lowing of the cows on their way to milking, and, strange sound in that well-ordered home, a distant piping on a penny flute ....

"Mother, Mother, Mo-o-ther!"

Mrs. Pendyce passed her handkerchief across her eyes, and instinctively obeying the laws of breeding, her face lost all trace of its emotion. She waited, crumpling the tiny handkerchief in her gauntleted hand.

"Mother! Oh, there you are! Here's Gregory Vigil!"

Norah, a fox-terrier on either side, was coming down the path; behind her, unhatted, showed Gregory's sanguine face between his wings of grizzled hair.

"I suppose you're going to talk. I'm going over to the Rectory. Ta-to!"

And preceded by her dogs, Norah went on.

Mrs. Pendyce put out her hand.

"Well, Grig," she said, "this is a surprise."

Gregory seated himself beside her on the bench.

"I've brought you this," he said. "I want you to look at it before I answer."

Mrs. Pendyce, who vaguely felt that he would want her to see things as he was seeing them, took a letter from him with a sinking heart.

"Private.

"LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,

"April 21, 1892.

"MY DEAR VIGIL,

"I have now secured such evidence as should warrant our instituting a suit. I've written your ward to that effect, and am awaiting her instructions. Unfortunately, we have no act of cruelty, and I've been obliged to draw her attention to the fact that, should her husband defend the suit, it will be very difficult to get the Court to accept their separation in the light of desertion on his part — difficult indeed, even if he doesn't defend the suit. In divorce cases one has to remember that what has to be kept out is often more important than what has to be got in, and it would be useful to know, therefore, whether there is likelihood of opposition. I do not advise any direct approaching of the husband, but if you are possessed of the information you might let me know. I hate humbug, my dear Vigil, and I hate anything underhand, but divorce is always a dirty business, and while the law is shaped as at present, and the linen washed in public, it will remain impossible for anyone, guilty or innocent, and even for us lawyers, to avoid soiling our hands in one way or another. I regret it as much as you do.

"There is a new man writing verse in the Tertiary, some of it quite first-rate. You might look at the last number. My blossom this year is magnificent.

"With kind regards, I am,

"Very sincerely yours,

"EDMUND PARAMOR.

"Gregory Vigil, Esq."

Mrs. Pendyce dropped the letter in her lap, and looked at her cousin.

"He was at Harrow with Horace. I do like him. He is one of the very nicest men I know."

It was clear that she was trying to gain time.

Gregory began pacing up and down.

"Paramor is a man for whom I have the highest respect. I would trust him before anyone."

It was clear that he, too, was trying to gain time.

"Oh, mind my daffodils, please!"

Gregory went down on his knees, and raised the bloom that he had trodden on. He then offered it to Mrs. Pendyce. The action was one to which she was so unaccustomed that it struck her as slightly ridiculous.

"My dear Grig, you'll get rheumatism, and spoil that nice suit; the grass comes off so terribly!"

Gregory got up, and looked shamefacedly at his knees.

"The knee is not what it used to be," he said.

Mrs. Pendyce smiled.

"You should keep your knees for Helen Bellow, Grig. I was always five years older than you."

Gregory rumpled up his hair.

"Kneeling's out of fashion, but I thought in the country you wouldn't mind!"

"You don't notice things, dear Grig. In the country it's still more out of fashion. You wouldn't find a woman within thirty miles of here who would like a man to kneel to her. We've lost the habit. She would think she was being made fun of. We soon grow out of vanity!"

"In London," said Gregory, "I hear all women intend to be men; but in the country I thought — —"

"In the country, Grig, all women would like to be men, but they don't dare to try. They trot behind."

As if she had been guilty of thoughts too insightful, Mrs. Pendyce blushed.

Gregory broke out suddenly:

"I can't bear to think of women like that!"

Again Mrs. Pendyce smiled.

"You see, Grig dear, you are not married."

"I detest the idea that marriage changes our views, Margery; I loathe it."

"Mind my daffodils!" murmured Mrs. Pendyce.

She was thinking all the time: 'That dreadful letter! What am I to do?'

And as though he knew her thoughts, Gregory said:

"I shall assume that Bellew will not defend the case. If he has a spark of chivalry in him he will be only too glad to see her free. I will never believe that any man could be such a soulless clod as to wish to keep her bound. I don't pretend to understand the law, but it seems to me that there's only one way for a man to act and after all Bellew's a gentleman. You'll see that he will act like one!"

Mrs. Pendyce looked at the daffodil in her lap.

"I have only seen him three or four times, but it seemed to me, Grig, that he was a man who might act in one way today and another tomorrow. He is so very different from all the men about here."

"When it comes to the deep things of life," said Gregory, "one man is much as another. Is there any man you know who would be so lacking in chivalry as to refuse in these circumstances?"

Mrs. Pendyce looked at him with a confused expression — wonder, admiration, irony, and even fear, struggled in her eyes.

"I can think of dozens."

Gregory clutched his forehead.

"Margery," he said, "I hate your cynicism. I don't know where you get it from."

"I'm so sorry; I didn't mean to be cynical — I didn't, really. I only spoke from what I've seen."

"Seen?" said Gregory. "If I were to go by what I saw daily, hourly, in London in the course of my work I should commit suicide within a week."

"But what else can one go by?"

Without answering, Gregory walked to the edge of the orchard, and stood gazing over the Scotch garden, with his face a little tilted towards the sky. Mrs. Pendyce felt he was grieving that she failed to see whatever it was he saw up there, and she was sorry. He came back, and said:

"We won't discuss it any more."

Very dubiously she heard those words, but as she could not express the anxiety and doubt torturing her soul, she told him tea was ready. But Gregory would not come in just yet out of the sun.

In the drawing-room Beatrix was already giving tea to young Tharp and the Reverend Husell Barter. And the sound of these well-known voices restored to Mrs. Pendyce something of her tranquillity. The Rector came towards her at once with a teacup in his hand.

"My wife has got a headache," he said. "She wanted to come over with me, but I made her lie down. Nothing like lying down for a headache. We expect it in June, you know. Let me get you your tea."

Mrs. Pendyce, already aware even to the day of what he expected in June, sat down, and looked at Mr. Barter with a slight feeling of surprise. He was really a very good fellow; it was nice of him to make his wife lie down! She thought his broad, red-brown face, with its protecting, not unhumorous, lower lip, looked very friendly. Roy, the Skye terrier at her feet, was smelling at the reverend gentleman's legs with a slow movement of his tail.

"The old dog likes me," said the Rector; "they know a dog-lover when they see one wonderful creatures, dogs! I'm sometimes tempted to think they may have souls!"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"Horace says he's getting too old."

The dog looked up in her face, and her lip quivered.

The Rector laughed.

"Don't you worry about that; there's plenty of life in him." And he added unexpectedly: "I couldn't bear to put a dog away, the friend of man. No, no; let Nature see to that."

Over at the piano Bee and young Tharp were turning the pages of the "Saucy Girl"; the room was full of the scent of azaleas; and Mr. Barter, astride of a gilt chair, looked almost sympathetic, gazing tenderly at the old Skye.

Mrs. Pendyce felt a sudden yearning to free her mind, a sudden longing to ask a man's advice.

"Oh, Mr. Barter," she said, "my cousin, Gregory Vigil, has just brought me some news; it is confidential, please. Helen Bellew is going to sue for a divorce. I wanted to ask you whether you could tell me — —" Looking in the Rector's face, she stopped.

"A divorce! H'm! Really!"

A chill of terror came over Mrs. Pendyce.

"Of course you will not mention it to anyone, not even to Horace. It has nothing to do with us."

Mr. Barter bowed; his face wore the expression it so often wore in school on Sunday mornings.

"H'm!" he said again.

It flashed through Mrs. Pendyce that this man with the heavy jowl and menacing eyes, who sat so square on that flimsy chair, knew something. It was as though he had answered:

"This is not a matter for women; you will be good enough to leave it to me."

With the exception of those few words of Lady Malden's, and the recollection of George's face when he had said, "Oh yes, I see her now and then," she had no evidence, no knowledge, nothing to go on; but she knew from some instinctive source that her son was Mrs. Bellew's lover.

So, with terror and a strange hope, she saw Gregory entering the room.

"Perhaps," she thought, "he will make Grig stop it."

She poured out Gregory's tea, followed Bee and Cecil Tharp into the conservatory, and left the two men together:

CHAPTER II

CONTINUED INFLUENCE OF THE REVEREND HUSSELL BARTER

To understand and sympathise with the feelings and action of the Rector of Worsted Skeynes, one must consider his origin and the circumstances of his life.

The second son of an old Suffolk family, he had followed the routine of his house, and having passed at Oxford through certain examinations, had been certificated at the age of twenty-four as a man fitted to impart to persons of both sexes rules of life and conduct after which they had been groping for twice or thrice that number of years. His character, never at any time undecided, was by this fortunate circumstance crystallised and rendered immune from the necessity for self-search and spiritual struggle incidental to his neighbours. Since he was a man neither below nor above the average, it did not occur to him to criticise or place himself in opposition to a system which had gone on so long and was about to do him so much good. Like all average men, he was a believer in authority, and none the less because authority placed a large portion of itself in his hands. It would, indeed, have been unwarrantable to expect a man of his birth, breeding, and education to question the machine of which he was himself a wheel.

He had dropped, therefore, at the age of twenty-six, insensibly, on the death of an uncle, into the family living at Worsted Skeynes. He had been there ever since. It was a constant and natural grief to him that on his death the living would go neither to his eldest nor his second son, but to the second son of his elder brother, the Squire. At the age of twenty-seven he had married Miss Rose Twining, the fifth daughter of a Huntingdonshire parson, and in less than eighteen years begotten ten children, and was expecting the eleventh, all healthy and hearty like him self. A family group hung over the fireplace in the study, under the framed and illuminated text, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” which he had chosen as his motto in the first year of his cure, and never seen any reason to change. In that family group Mr. Barter sat in the centre with his dog between his legs; his wife stood behind him, and on both sides the children spread out like the wings of a fan or butterfly. The bills of their schooling were beginning to weigh rather heavily, and he complained a good deal; but in principle he still approved of the habit into which he had got, and his wife never complained of anything.

The study was furnished with studious simplicity; many a boy had been, not unkindly, caned there, and in one place the old Turkey carpet was rotted away, but whether by their tears or by their knees, not even Mr. Barter knew. In a cabinet on one side of the fire he kept all his religious books, many of them well worn; in a cabinet on the other side he kept his bats, to which he was constantly attending; a fishing-rod and a gun-case stood modestly in a corner. The archway between the drawers of his writing-table held a mat for his bulldog, a prize animal, wont to lie there and guard his master’s legs when he was writing his sermons. Like those of his dog, the Rector’s good points were the old English virtues of obstinacy, courage, intolerance, and humour; his bad points, owing to the circumstances of his life, had never been brought to his notice.

When, therefore, he found himself alone with Gregory Vigil, he approached him as one dog will approach another, and came at once to the matter in hand.

“It’s some time since I had the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Vigil,” he said. “Mrs. Pendyce has been giving me in confidence the news you’ve brought down. I’m bound to tell you at once that I’m surprised.”

Gregory made a little movement of recoil, as though his delicacy had received a shock.

“Indeed!” he said, with a sort of quivering coldness.

The Rector, quick to note opposition, repeated emphatically:

“More than surprised; in fact, I think there must be some mistake.”

“Indeed?” said Gregory again.

A change came over Mr. Barter’s face. It had been grave, but was now heavy and threatening.

“I have to say to you,” he said, “that somehow — somehow, this divorce must be put a stop to.”

Gregory flushed painfully.

“On what grounds? I am not aware that my ward is a parishioner of yours, Mr. Barter, or that if she were — —”

The Rector closed in on him, his head thrust forward, his lower lip projecting.

“If she were doing her duty,” he said, “she would be. I’m not considering her — I’m considering her husband; he is a parishioner of mine, and I say this divorce must be stopped.”

Gregory retreated no longer.

“On what grounds?” he said again, trembling all over.

“I’ve no wish to enter into particulars,” said Mr. Barter, “but if you force me to, I shall not hesitate.”

“I regret that I must,” answered Gregory.

“Without mentioning names, then, I say that she is not a fit person to bring a suit for divorce!”

“You say that?” said Gregory. “You — —”

He could not go on.

“You will not move me, Mr. Vigil,” said the Rector, with a grim little smile. “I have my duty to do.”

Gregory recovered possession of himself with an effort.

“You have said that which no one but a clergyman could say with impunity,” he said freezingly. “Be so good as to explain yourself.”

“My explanation,” said Mr. Barter, “is what I have seen with my own eyes.”

He raised those eyes to Gregory. Their pupils were contracted to pin-points, the light-grey irises around had a sort of swimming glitter, and round these again the whites were injected with blood.

“If you must know, with my own eyes I’ve seen her in that very conservatory over there kissing a man.”

Gregory threw up his hand.

“How dare you!” he whispered.

Again Mr. Barter’s humorous under-lip shot out.

“I dare a good deal more than that, Mr. Vigil,” he said, “as you will find; and I say this to you — stop this divorce, or I’ll stop it myself!”

Gregory turned to the window. When he came back he was outwardly calm.

“You have been guilty of indelicacy,” he said. “Continue in your delusion, think what you like, do what you like. The matter will go on. Good-evening, sir.”

And turning on his heel, he left the room.

Mr. Barter stepped forward. The words, “You have been guilty of indelicacy,” whirled round his brain till every blood vessel in his face and neck was swollen to bursting, and with a hoarse sound like that of an animal in pain he pursued Gregory to the door. It was shut in his face. And since on taking Orders he had abandoned for ever the use of bad language, he was very near an apoplectic fit. Suddenly he became aware that Mrs. Pendyce was looking at him from the conservatory door. Her face was painfully white, her eyebrows lifted, and before that look Mr. Barter recovered a measure of self-possession.

“Is anything the matter, Mr. Barter?”

The Rector smiled grimly.

“Nothing, nothing,” he said. “I must ask you to excuse me, that’s all. I’ve a parish matter to attend to.”

When he found himself in the drive, the feeling of vertigo and suffocation passed, but left him unrelieved. He had, in fact, happened on one of those psychological moments which enable a man’s true nature to show itself. Accustomed to say of himself bluffly, “Yes, yes; I’ve a hot temper, soon over,” he had never, owing to the autocracy of his position, had a chance of knowing the tenacity of his soul. So accustomed and so able for many years to vent displeasure at once, he did not himself know the wealth of his old English spirit, did not know of what an ugly grip he was capable. He did not even know it at this minute, conscious only of a sort of black wonder at this monstrous conduct to a man in his position, doing his simple duty. The more he reflected, the more intolerable did it seem that a woman like this Mrs. Bellew should have the impudence to invoke the law of the land in her favour a woman who was no better than a common baggage — a woman he had seen kissing George Pendyce. To have suggested to Mr. Barter that there was something pathetic in this black wonder of his, pathetic in the spectacle of his little soul delivering its little judgments, stumbling its little way along with such blind certainty under the huge heavens, amongst millions of organisms as important as itself, would have astounded him; and with every step he took the blacker became his wonder, the more fixed his determination to permit no such abuse of morality, no such disregard of Hussell Barter.

“You have been guilty of indelicacy!” This indictment had a wriggling sting, and lost no venom from the fact that he could in no wise have perceived where the indelicacy of his conduct lay. But he did not try to perceive it. Against himself, clergyman and gentleman, the monstrosity of the charge was clear. This was a point of morality. He felt no anger against George; it was the woman that excited his just wrath. For so long he had been absolute among women, with the power, as it were, over them of life and death. This was flat immorality! He had never approved of her leaving her husband; he had never approved of her at all! He turned his steps towards the Firs.

From above the hedges the sleepy cows looked down; a yaffle laughed a field or two away; in the sycamores, which had come out before their time, the bees hummed. Under the smile of the spring the innumerable life of the fields went carelessly on around that square black figure ploughing along the lane with head bent down under a wide-brimmed hat.

George Pendyce, in a fly drawn by an old grey horse, the only vehicle that frequented the station at Worsted Skeynes, passed him in the lane, and leaned back to avoid observation. He had not forgotten the tone of the Rector’s voice in the smoking-room on the night of the dance. George was a man who could remember as well as another. In the corner of the old fly, that rattled and smelled of stables and stale tobacco, he fixed his moody eyes on the driver’s back and the ears of the old grey horse, and never stirred till they set him down at the hall door.

He went at once to his room, sending word that he had come for the night. His mother heard the news with feelings of joy and dread, and she dressed quickly for dinner, that she might see him the sooner. The Squire came into her room just as she was going down. He had been engaged all day at Sessions, and was in one of the moods of apprehension as to the future which but seldom came over him.

“Why didn’t you keep Vigil to dinner?” he said. “I could have given him things for the night. I wanted to talk to him about insuring my life; he knows, about that. There’ll be a lot of money wanted, to pay my death-duties. And if the Radicals get in I shouldn’t be surprised if they put them up fifty per cent.”

“I wanted to keep him,” said Mrs. Pendyce, “but he went away without saying good-bye.”

“He’s an odd fellow!”

For some moments Mr. Pendyce made reflections on this breach of manners. He had a nice standard of conduct in all social affairs.

“I’m having trouble with that man Peacock again. He’s the most pig-headed —— What are you in such a hurry for, Margery?”

“George is here!”

“George? Well, I suppose he can wait till dinner. I have a lot of things I want to tell you about. We had a case of arson to-day. Old Quarryman was away, and I was in the chair. It was that fellow Woodford that we convicted for poaching — a very gross case. And this is what he does when he comes out. They tried to prove insanity. It’s the rankest case of revenge that ever came before me. We committed him, of course. He’ll get a swinging sentence. Of all dreadful crimes, arson is the most — —”

Mr. Pendyce could find no word to characterise his opinion of this offence, and drawing his breath between his teeth, passed into his dressing-room. Mrs. Pendyce hastened quietly out, and went to her son’s room. She found George in his shirtsleeves, inserting the links of his cuffs.

“Let me do that for you, my dear boy! How dreadfully they starch your cuffs! It is so nice to do something for you sometimes!”

George answered her:

“Well, Mother, and how have you been?”

Over Mrs. Pendyce’s face came a look half sorrowful, half arch, but wholly pathetic. ‘What! is it beginning already? Oh, don’t put me away from you!’ she seemed to say.

"Very well, thank you, dear. And you?"

George did not meet her eyes.

"So-so," he said. "I took rather a nasty knock over the 'City' last week."

"Is that a race?" asked Mrs. Pendyce.

And by some secret process she knew that he had hurried out that piece of bad news to divert her attention from another subject, for George had never been a "crybaby."

She sat down on the edge of the sofa, and though the gong was about to sound, incited him to dawdle and stay with her.

"And have you any other news, dear? It seems such an age since we've seen you. I think I've told you all our budget in my letters. You know there's going to be another event at the Rectory?"

"Another? I passed Barter on the way up. I thought he looked a bit blue."

A look of pain shot into Mrs. Pendyce's eyes.

"Oh, I'm afraid that couldn't have been the reason, dear." And she stopped, but to still her own fears hurried on again. "If I'd known you'd been coming, I'd have kept Cecil Tharp. Vic has had such dear little puppies. Would you like one? They've all got that nice black smudge round the eye."

She was watching him as only a mother can watch-stealthily, minutely, longingly, every little movement, every little change of his face, and more than all, that fixed something behind which showed the abiding temper and condition of his heart.

'Something is making him unhappy,' she thought. 'He is changed since I saw him last, and I can't get at it. I seem to be so far from him — so far!'

And somehow she knew he had come down this evening because he was lonely and unhappy, and instinct had made him turn to her.

But she knew that trying to get nearer would only make him put her farther off, and she could not bear this, so she asked him nothing, and bent all her strength on hiding from him the pain she felt.

She went downstairs with her arm in his, and leaned very heavily on it, as though again trying to get close to him, and forget the feeling she had had all that winter — the feeling of being barred away, the feeling of secrecy and restraint.

Mr. Pendyce and the two girls were in the drawing-room.

"Well, George," said the Squire dryly, "I'm glad you've come. How you can stick in London at this time of year! Now you're down you'd better stay a couple of days. I want to take you round the estate; you know nothing about anything. I might die at any moment, for all you can tell. Just make up your mind to stay."

George gave him a moody look.

"Sorry," he said; "I've got an engagement in town."

Mr. Pendyce rose and stood with his back to the fire.

"That's it," he said: "I ask you to do a simple thing for your own good — and — you've got an engagement. It's always like that, and your mother backs you up. Bee, go and play me something."

The Squire could not bear being played to, but it was the only command likely to be obeyed that came into his head.

The absence of guests made little difference to a ceremony esteemed at Worsted Skeynes the crowning blessing of the day. The courses, however, were limited to seven, and champagne was not drunk. The Squire drank a glass or so of claret, for, as he said, "My dear old father took his bottle of port every night of his life, and it never gave him a twinge. If I were to go on at that rate it would kill me in a year."

His daughters drank water. Mrs. Pendyce, cherishing a secret preference for champagne, drank sparingly of a Spanish burgundy, procured for her by Mr. Pendyce at a very reasonable price, and corked between meals with a special cork. She offered it to George.

"Try some of my burgundy, dear; it's so nice."

But George refused and asked for whisky-and-soda, glancing at the butler, who brought it in a very yellow state.

Under the influence of dinner the Squire recovered equanimity, though he still dwelt somewhat sadly on the future.

"You young fellows," he said, with a friendly look at George, "are such individualists. You make a business of enjoying yourselves. With your piquet and your racing and your billiards and what not, you'll be used up before you're fifty. You don't let your imaginations work. A green old age ought to be your ideal, instead of which it seems to be a green youth. Ha!" Mr. Pendyce looked at his daughters till they said:

"Oh, Father, how can you!"

Norah, who had the more character of the two, added:

"Isn't Father rather dreadful, Mother?"

But Mrs. Pendyce was looking at her son. She had longed so many evenings to see him sitting there.

"We'll have a game of piquet to-night, George."

George looked up and nodded with a glum smile.

On the thick, soft carpet round the table the butler and second footman moved. The light of the wax candles fell lustrous and subdued on the silver and fruit and flowers, on the girls' white necks, on George's well-coloured face and glossy shirt-front, gleamed in the jewels on his mother's long white fingers, showed off the Squire's erect and still spruce figure; the air was languorously sweet with the perfume of azaleas and narcissus bloom. Bee, with soft eyes, was thinking of young Tharp, who to-day had told her that he loved her, and wondering if father would object. Her mother was thinking of George, stealing timid glances at his moody face. There was no sound save the tinkle of forks and the voices of Norah and the Squire, talking of little things. Outside, through the long opened windows, was the still, wide country; the full moon, tinted apricot and figured like a coin, hung above the cedar-trees, and by her light the whispering stretches of the silent fields lay half enchanted, half asleep, and all beyond that little ring of moonshine, unfathomed and unknown, was darkness — a great darkness wrapping from their eyes the restless world.

CHAPTER III

THE SINISTER NIGHT

On the day of the big race at Kempton Park, in which the Ambler, starting favourite, was left at the post, George Pendyce had just put his latch-key in the door of the room he had taken near Mrs. Bellew, when a man, stepping quickly from behind, said:

"Mr. George Pendyce, I believe."

George turned.

"Yes; what do you want?"

The man put into George's hand a long envelope.

"From Messrs. Frost and Tuckett."

George opened it, and read from the top of a slip of paper:

"'ADMIRALTY, PROBATE, AND DIVORCE. The humble petition of Jaspar Bellew — —'"

He lifted his eyes, and his look, uncannily impassive, unresenting, unangered, dogged, caused the messenger to drop his gaze as though he had hit a man who was down.

"Thanks. Good-night!"

He shut the door, and read the document through. It contained some precise details, and ended in a claim for damages, and George smiled.

Had he received this document three months ago, he would not have taken it thus. Three months ago he would have felt with rage that he was caught. His thoughts would have run thus 'I have got her into a mess; I have got myself into a mess. I never thought this would happen. This is the devil! I must see someone — I must stop it. There must be a way out.' Having but little imagination, his thoughts would have beaten their wings against this cage, and at once he would have tried to act. But this was not three months ago, and now ——

He lit a cigarette and sat down on the sofa, and the chief feeling in his heart was a strange hope, a sort of funereal gladness. He would have to go and see her at once, that very night; an excuse — no need to wait in here — to wait — wait on the chance of her coming.

He got up and drank some whisky, then went back to the sofa and sat down again.

'If she is not here by eight,' he thought, 'I will go round.'

Opposite was a full-length mirror, and he turned to the wall to avoid it. There was fixed on his face a look of gloomy determination, as though he were thinking, 'I'll show them all that I'm not beaten yet.'

At the click of a latch-key he scrambled off the sofa, and his face resumed its mask. She came in as usual, dropped her opera cloak, and stood before him with bare shoulders. Looking in her face, he wondered if she knew.

"I thought I'd better come," she said. "I suppose you've had the same charming present?"

George nodded. There was a minute's silence.

"It's really rather funny. I'm sorry for you, George."

George laughed too, but his laugh was different.

"I will do all I can," he said.

Mrs. Bellew came close to him.

"I've seen about the Kempton race. What shocking luck! I suppose you've lost a lot. Poor boy! It never rains but it pours."

George looked down.

"That's all right; nothing matters when I have you."

He felt her arms fasten behind his neck, but they were cool as marble; he met her eyes, and they were mocking and compassionate.

Their cab, wheeling into the main thoroughfare, joined in the race of cabs flying as for life toward the East — past the Park, where the trees, new-leafed, were swinging their skirts like ballet-dancers in the wind; past the Stoics' and the other clubs, rattling, jingling, jostling for the lead, shooting past omnibuses that looked cosy in the half-light with their lamps and rows of figures solemnly opposed.

At Blafard's the tall dark young waiter took her cloak with reverential fingers; the little wine-waiter smiled below the suffering in his eyes. The same red-shaded lights fell on her arms and shoulders, the same flowers of green and yellow grew bravely in the same blue vases. On the menu were written the same dishes. The same idle eye peered through the chink at the corner of the red blinds with its stare of apathetic wonder.

Often during that dinner George looked at her face by stealth, and its expression baffled him, so careless was it. And, unlike her mood of late, that had been glum and cold, she was in the wildest spirits.

People looked round from the other little tables, all full now that the season had begun, her laugh was so infectious; and George felt a sort of disgust. What was it in this woman that made her laugh, when his own heart was heavy? But he said nothing; he dared not even look at her, for fear his eyes should show his feeling.

'We ought to be squaring our accounts,' he thought—'looking things in the face. Something must be done; and here she is laughing and making everyone stare!' Done! But what could be done, when it was all like quicksand?

The other little tables emptied one by one.

"George," she said, "take me somewhere where we can dance!"

George stared at her.

"My dear girl, how can I? There is no such place!"

"Take me to your Bohemians!"

"You can't possibly go to a place like that."

"Why not? Who cares where we go, or what we do?"

"I care!"

"Ah, my dear George, you and your sort are only half alive!"

Sullenly George answered:

"What do you take me for? A cad?"

But there was fear, not anger, in his heart.

"Well, then, let's drive into the East End. For goodness' sake, let's do something not quite proper!"

They took a hansom and drove East. It was the first time either had ever been in that unknown land.

"Close your cloak, dear; it looks odd down here."

Mrs. Bellew laughed.

"You'll be just like your father when you're sixty, George."

And she opened her cloak the wider. Round a barrel-organ at the corner of a street were girls in bright colours dancing.

She called to the cabman to stop.

"Let's watch those children!"

"You'll only make a show of us."

Mrs. Bellew put her hands on the cab door.

"I've a good mind to get out and dance with them!"

"You're mad to-night," said George. "Sit still!"

He stretched out his arm and barred her way. The passers-by looked curiously at the little scene. A crowd began to collect.

"Go on!" cried George.

There was a cheer from the crowd; the driver whipped his horse; they darted East again.

It was striking twelve when the cab put them down at last near the old church on Chelsea Embankment, and they had hardly spoken for an hour.

And all that hour George was feeling:

'This is the woman for whom I've given it all up. This is the woman to whom I shall be tied. This is the woman I cannot tear myself away from. If I could, I would never see her again. But I can't live without her. I must go on suffering when she's with me, suffering when she's away from me. And God knows how it's all to end!'

He took her hand in the darkness; it was cold and unresponsive as a stone. He tried to see her face, but could read nothing in those greenish eyes staring before them, like a cat's, into the darkness.

When the cab was gone they stood looking at each other by the light of a street lamp. And George thought:

'So I must leave her like this, and what then?'

She put her latch-key in the door, and turned round to him. In the silent, empty street, where the wind was rustling and scraping round the corners of tall houses, and the lamplight flickered, her face and figure were so strange, motionless, Sphinx-like. Only her eyes seemed alive, fastened on his own.

"Good-night!" he muttered.

She beckoned.

"Take what you can of me, George!" she said.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. PENDYCE’S HEAD

Mr. Pendyce’s head, seen from behind at his library bureau, where it was his practice to spend most mornings from half-past nine to eleven or even twelve, was observed to be of a shape to throw no small light upon his class and character. Its contour was almost national. Bulging at the back, and sloping rapidly to a thin and wiry neck, narrow between the ears and across the brow, prominent in the jaw, the length of a line drawn from the back headland to the promontory at the chin would have been extreme. Upon the observer there was impressed the conviction that here was a skull denoting, by surplusage of length, great precision of character and disposition to action, and, by deficiency of breadth, a narrow tenacity which might at times amount to wrong-headedness. The thin cantankerous neck, on which little hairs grew low, and the intelligent ears, confirmed this impression; and when his face, with its clipped hair, dry rosiness, into which the east wind had driven a shade of yellow and the sun a shade of brown, and grey, rather discontented eyes, came into view, the observer had no longer any hesitation in saying that he was in the presence of an Englishman, a landed proprietor, and, but for Mr. Pendyce’s rooted belief to the contrary, an individualist. His head, indeed, was like nothing so much as the Admiralty Pier at Dover — that strange long narrow thing, with a slight twist or bend at the end, which first disturbs the comfort of foreigners arriving on these shores, and strikes them with a sense of wonder and dismay.

He sat very motionless at his bureau, leaning a little over his papers like a man to whom things do not come too easily; and every now and then he stopped to refer to the calendar at his left hand, or to a paper in one of the many pigeonholes. Open, and almost out of reach, was a back volume of Punch, of which periodical, as a landed proprietor, he had an almost professional knowledge. In leisure moments it was one of his chief recreations to peruse lovingly those aged pictures, and at the image of John Bull he never failed to think: ‘Fancy making an Englishman out a fat fellow like that!’

It was as though the artist had offered an insult to himself, passing him over as the type, and conferring that distinction on someone fast going out of fashion. The Rector, whenever he heard Mr. Pendyce say this, strenuously opposed him, for he was himself of a square, stout build, and getting stouter.

With all their aspirations to the character of typical Englishmen, Mr. Pendyce and Mr. Barter thought themselves far from the old beef and beer, port and pigskin types of the Georgian and early Victorian era. They were men of the world, abreast of the times, who by virtue of a public school and ‘Varsity training had acquired a manner, a knowledge of men and affairs, a standard of thought on which it had really never been needful to improve. Both of them, but especially Mr. Pendyce, kept up with all that was going forward by visiting the Metropolis six or seven or even eight times a year. On these occasions they rarely took their wives, having almost always important business in hand — old College, Church, or Conservative dinners, cricket-matches, Church Congress, the Gaiety Theatre, and for Mr. Barter the Lyceum. Both, too, belonged to clubs — the Rector to a comfortable, old-fashioned place where he could get a rubber without gambling, and Mr. Pendyce to the Temple of things as they had been, as became a man who, having turned all social problems over in his mind, had decided that there was no real safety but in the past.

They always went up to London grumbling, but this was necessary, and indeed salutary, because of their wives; and they always came back grumbling, because of their livers, which a good country rest always fortunately reduced in time for the next visit. In this way they kept themselves free from the taint of provincialism.

In the silence of his master’s study the spaniel John, whose head, too, was long and narrow, had placed it over his paw, as though suffering from that silence, and when his master cleared his throat he guttered his tail and turned up an eye with a little moon of white, without stirring his chin.

The clock ticked at the end of the long, narrow room; the sunlight through the long, narrow windows fell on the long, narrow backs of books in the glassed book-case that took up the whole of one wall; and this room, with its slightly leathery smell, seemed a fitting place for some long, narrow ideal to be worked out to its long and narrow ending.

But Mr. Pendyce would have scouted the notion of an ending to ideals having their basis in the hereditary principle.

“Let me do my duty and carry on the estate as my dear old father did, and hand it down to my son enlarged if possible,” was sometimes his saying, very, very often his thought, not seldom his prayer. “I want to do no more than that.”

The times were bad and dangerous. There was every chance of a Radical Government being returned, and the country going to the dogs. It was but natural and human that he should pray for the survival of the form of things which he believed in and knew, the form of things bequeathed to him, and embodied in the salutary words “Horace Pendyce.” It was not his habit to welcome new ideas. A new idea invading the country of the Squire’s mind was at once met with a rising of the whole population, and either prevented from landing, or if already on shore instantly taken prisoner. In course of time the unhappy creature, causing its squeaks and groans to penetrate the prison walls, would be released from sheer humaneness and love of a quiet life, and even allowed certain privileges, remaining, however, “that poor, queer devil of a foreigner.” One day, in an inattentive moment, the natives would suffer it to marry, or find that in some disgraceful way it had caused the birth of children unrecognised by law; and their respect for the accomplished fact, for something that already lay in the past, would then prevent their trying to unmarry it, or restoring the children to an unborn state, and very gradually they would tolerate this intrusive brood. Such was the process of Mr. Pendyce’s mind. Indeed, like the spaniel John, a dog of conservative instincts, at the approach of any strange thing he placed himself in the way, barking and showing his teeth; and sometimes truly he suffered at the thought that one day Horace Pendyce would no longer be there to bark. But not often, for he had not much imagination.

All the morning he had been working at that old vexed subject of Common Rights on Worsted Scotton, which his father had fenced in and taught him once for all to believe was part integral of Worsted Skeynes. The matter was almost beyond doubt, for the cottagers — in a poor way at the time of the fencing, owing to the price of bread — had looked on apathetically till the very last year required by law to give the old Squire squatter’s rights, when all of a sudden that man, Peacock’s father, had made a gap in the fence and driven in beasts, which had reopened the whole unfortunate question. This had been in ‘65, and ever since there had been continual friction bordering on a law suit. Mr. Pendyce never for a moment allowed it to escape his mind that the man Peacock was at the bottom of it all; for it was his way to discredit all principles as ground of action, and to refer everything to facts and persons; except, indeed, when he acted himself, when he would somewhat proudly admit that it was on principle. He never thought or spoke on an abstract question; partly because his father had avoided them before him, partly because he had been discouraged from doing so at school, but mainly because he temperamentally took no interest in such unpractical things.

It was, therefore, a source of wonder to him that tenants of his own should be ungrateful. He did his duty by them, as the Rector, in whose keeping were their souls, would have been the first to affirm; the books of his estate showed this, recording year by year an average gross profit of some sixteen hundred pounds, and (deducting raw material incidental to the upkeep of Worsted Skeynes) a net loss of three.

In less earthly matters, too, such as non-attendance at church, a predisposition to poaching, or any inclination to moral laxity, he could say with a clear conscience that the Rector was sure of his support. A striking instance had occurred within the last month, when, discovering that his under-keeper, an excellent man at his work, had got into a scrape with the postman's wife, he had given the young fellow notice, and cancelled the lease of his cottage.

He rose and went to the plan of the estate fastened to the wall, which he unrolled by pulling a green silk cord, and stood there scrutinising it carefully and placing his finger here and there. His spaniel rose too, and settled himself unobtrusively on his master's foot. Mr. Pendyce moved and trod on him. The spaniel yelped.

"D — n the dog! Oh, poor fellow, John!" said Mr. Pendyce. He went back to his seat, but since he had identified the wrong spot he was obliged in a minute to return again to the plan. The spaniel John, cherishing the hope that he had been justly treated, approached in a half circle, fluttering his tail; he had scarcely reached Mr. Pendyce's foot when the door was opened, and the first footman brought in a letter on a silver salver.

Mr. Pendyce took the note, read it, turned to his bureau, and said: "No answer."

He sat staring at this document in the silent room, and over his face in turn passed anger, alarm, distrust, bewilderment. He had not the power of making very clear his thought, except by speaking aloud, and he muttered to himself. The spaniel John, who still nurtured a belief that he had sinned, came and lay down very close against his leg.

Mr. Pendyce, never having reflected profoundly on the working morality of his times, had the less difficulty in accepting it. Of violating it he had practically no opportunity, and this rendered his position stronger. It was from habit and tradition rather than from principle and conviction that he was a man of good moral character.

And as he sat reading this note over and over, he suffered from a sense of nausea.

It was couched in these terms:

"THE FIRS,

"May 20.

"DEAR SIR,

"You may or may not have heard that I have made your son, Mr. George Pendyce, correspondent in a divorce suit against my wife. Neither for your sake nor your son's, but for the sake of Mrs. Pendyce, who is the only woman in these parts that I respect, I will withdraw the suit if your son will give his word not to see my wife again.

"Please send me an early answer.

"I am,

"Your obedient servant,

"JASPAR BELLEW."

The acceptance of tradition (and to accept it was suitable to the Squire's temperament) is occasionally marred by the impingement of tradition on private life and comfort. It was legendary in his class that young men's peccadilloes must be accepted with a certain indulgence. They would, he said, be young men. They must, he would remark, sow their wild oats. Such was his theory. The only difficulty he now had was in applying it to his own particular case, a difficulty felt by others in times past, and to be felt again in times to come. But, since he was not a philosopher, he did not perceive the inconsistency between his theory and his dismay. He saw his universe reeling before that note, and he was not a man to suffer tamely; he felt that others ought to suffer too. It was monstrous that a fellow like this Bellew, a loose fish, a drunkard, a man who had nearly run over him, should have it in his power to trouble the serenity of Worsted Skeynes. It was like his impudence to bring such a charge against his son. It was like his d —— d impudence! And going abruptly to the bell, he trod on his spaniel's ear.

"D — n the dog! Oh, poor fellow, John!" But the spaniel John, convinced at last that he had sinned, hid himself in a far corner whence he could see nothing, and pressed his chin closely to the ground.

"Ask your mistress to come here."

Standing by the hearth, waiting for his wife, the Squire displayed to greater advantage than ever the shape of his long and narrow head; his neck had grown conspicuously redder; his eyes, like those of an offended swan, stabbed, as it were, at everything they saw.

It was not seldom that Mrs. Pendyce was summoned to the study to hear him say: "I want to ask your advice. So-and-so has done such and such.... I have made up my mind."

She came, therefore, in a few minutes. In compliance with his "Look at that, Margery," she read the note, and gazed at him with distress in her eyes, and he looked back at her with wrath in his. For this was tragedy.

Not to everyone is it given to take a wide view of things — to look over the far, pale streams, the purple heather, and moonlit pools of the wild marches, where reeds stand black against the sundown, and from long distance comes the cry of a curlew — nor to everyone to gaze from steep cliffs over the wine-dark, shadowy sea — or from high mountainsides to see crowned chaos, smoking with mist, or gold-bright in the sun.

To most it is given to watch assiduously a row of houses, a back-yard, or, like Mrs. and Mr. Pendyce, the green fields, trim coverts, and Scotch garden of Worsted Skeynes. And on that horizon the citation of their eldest son to appear in the Divorce Court loomed like a cloud, heavy with destruction.

So far as such an event could be realised imagination at Worsted Skeynes was not too vivid — it spelled ruin to an harmonious edifice of ideas and prejudice and aspiration. It would be no use to say of that event, "What does it matter? Let people think what they like, talk as they like." At Worsted Skeynes (and Worsted Skeynes was every country house) there was but one set of people, one church, one pack of hounds, one everything. The importance of a clear escutcheon was too great. And they who had lived together for thirty-four years looked at each other with a new expression in their eyes; their feelings were for once the same. But since it is always the man who has the nicer sense of honour, their thoughts were not the same, for Mr. Pendyce was thinking: 'I won't believe it — disgracing us all!' and Mrs. Pendyce was thinking: 'My boy!'

It was she who spoke first.

"Oh, Horace!"

The sound of her voice restored the Squire's fortitude.

"There you go, Margery! D'you mean to say you believe what this fellow says? He ought to be horsewhipped. He knows my opinion of him.

"It's a piece of his confounded impudence! He nearly ran over me, and now — —"

Mrs. Pendyce broke in:

"But, Horace, I'm afraid it's true! Ellen Maiden — —"

"Ellen Maiden?" said Mr. Pendyce. "What business has she — —" He was silent, staring gloomily at the plan of Worsted Skeynes, still unrolled, like an emblem of all there was at stake. "If George has really," he burst out, "he's a greater fool than I took him for! A fool? He's a knave!"

Again he was silent.

Mrs. Pendyce flushed at that word, and bit her lips.

"George could never be a knave!" she said.

Mr. Pendyce answered heavily:

"Disgracing his name!"

Mrs. Pendyce bit deeper into her lips.

"Whatever he has done," she said, "George is sure to have behaved like a gentleman!"

An angry smile twisted the Squire's mouth.

"Just like a woman!" he said.

But the smile died away, and on both their faces came a helpless look. Like people who have lived together without real sympathy — though, indeed, they had long ceased to be conscious of that — now that something had occurred in which their interests were actually at one, they were filled with a sort of surprise. It was no good to differ. Differing, even silent differing, would not help their son.

"I shall write to George," said Mr. Pendyce at last. "I shall believe nothing till I've heard from him. He'll tell us the truth, I suppose."

There was a quaver in his voice.

Mrs. Pendyce answered quickly:

"Oh, Horace, be careful what you say! I'm sure he is suffering!"

Her gentle soul, disposed to pleasure, was suffering, too, and the tears stole up in her eyes. Mr. Pendyce's sight was too long to see them. The infirmity had been growing on him ever since his marriage.

"I shall say what I think right," he said. "I shall take time to consider what I shall say; I won't be hurried by this ruffian."

Mrs. Pendyce wiped her lips with her lace-edged handkerchief.

"I hope you will show me the letter," she said.

The Squire looked at her, and he realised that she was trembling and very white, and, though this irritated him, he answered almost kindly:

"It's not a matter for you, my dear."

Mrs. Pendyce took a step towards him; her gentle face expressed a strange determination.

"He is my son, Horace, as well as yours."

Mr. Pendyce turned round uneasily.

"It's no use your getting nervous, Margery. I shall do what's best. You women lose your heads. That d —— d fellow's lying! If he isn't — —"

At these words the spaniel John rose from his corner and advanced to the middle of the floor. He stood there curved in a half-circle, and looked darkly at his master.

"Confound it!" said Mr. Pendyce. "It's — it's damnable!"

And as if answering for all that depended on Worsted Skeynes, the spaniel John deeply wagged that which had been left him of his tail.

Mrs. Pendyce came nearer still.

"If George refuses to give you that promise, what will you do, Horace?"

Mr. Pendyce stared.

"Promise? What promise?"

Mrs. Pendyce thrust forward the note.

"This promise not to see her again."

Mr. Pendyce motioned it aside.

"I'll not be dictated to by that fellow Bellew," he said. Then, by an afterthought: "It won't do to give him a chance. George must promise me that in any case."

Mrs. Pendyce pressed her lips together.

“But do you think he will?”

“Think — think who will? Think he will what? Why can’t you express yourself, Margery? If George has really got us into this mess he must get us out again.”

Mrs. Pendyce flushed.

“He would never leave her in the lurch!”

The Squire said angrily:

“Lurch! Who said anything about lurch? He owes it to her. Not that she deserves any consideration, if she’s been —— You don’t mean to say you think he’ll refuse? He’d never be such a donkey?”

Mrs. Pendyce raised her hands and made what for her was a passionate gesture.

“Oh, Horace!” she said, “you don’t understand. He’s in love with her!”

Mr. Pendyce’s lower lip trembled, a sign with him of excitement or emotion. All the conservative strength of his nature, all the immense dumb force of belief in established things, all that stubborn hatred and dread of change, that incalculable power of imagining nothing, which, since the beginning of time, had made Horace Pendyce the arbiter of his land, rose up within his sorely tried soul.

“What on earth’s that to do with it?” he cried in a rage. “You women! You’ve no sense of anything! Romantic, idiotic, immoral — I don’t know what you’re at. For God’s sake don’t go putting ideas into his head!”

At this outburst Mrs. Pendyce’s face became rigid; only the flicker of her eyelids betrayed how her nerves were quivering. Suddenly she threw her hands up to her ears.

“Horace!” she cried, “do —— Oh, poor John!”

The Squire had stepped hastily and heavily on to his dog’s paw. The creature gave a grievous howl. Mr. Pendyce went down on his knees and raised the limb.

“Damn the dog!” he stuttered. “Oh, poor fellow, John!”

And the two long and narrow heads for a moment were close together.

CHAPTER V

RECTOR AND SQUIRE

The efforts of social man, directed from immemorial time towards the stability of things, have culminated in Worsted Skeynes. Beyond commercial competition — for the estate no longer paid for living on it — beyond the power of expansion, set with tradition and sentiment, it was an undoubted jewel, past need of warranty. Cradled within it were all those hereditary institutions of which the country was most proud, and Mr. Pendyce sometimes saw before him the time when, for services to his party, he should call himself Lord Worsted, and after his own death continue sitting in the House of Lords in the person of his son. But there was another feeling in the Squire's heart — the air and the woods and the fields had passed into his blood a love for this, his home and the home of his fathers.

And so a terrible unrest pervaded the whole household after the receipt of Jaspar Bellew's note. Nobody was told anything, yet everybody knew there was something; and each after his fashion, down to the very dogs, betrayed their sympathy with the master and mistress of the house.

Day after day the girls wandered about the new golf course knocking the balls aimlessly; it was all they could do. Even Cecil Tharp, who had received from Bee the qualified affirmative natural under the circumstances, was infected. The off foreleg of her grey mare was being treated by a process he had recently discovered, and in the stables he confided to Bee that the dear old Squire seemed "off his feed;" he did not think it was any good worrying him at present. Bee, stroking the mare's neck, looked at him shyly and slowly.

"It's about George," she said; "I know it's about George! Oh, Cecil! I do wish I had been a boy!"

Young Tharp assented in spite of himself:

"Yes; it must be beastly to be a girl."

A faint flush coloured Bee's cheeks. It hurt her a little that he should agree; but her lover was passing his hand down the mare's shin.

"Father is rather trying," she said. "I wish George would marry."

Cecil Tharp raised his bullet head; his blunt, honest face was extremely red from stooping.

"Clean as a whistle," he said; "she's all right, Bee. I expect George has too good a time."

Bee turned her face away and murmured:

"I should loathe living in London." And she, too, stooped and felt the mare's shin.

To Mrs. Pendyce in these days the hours passed with incredible slowness. For thirty odd years she had waited at once for everything and nothing; she had, so to say, everything she could wish for, and — nothing, so that even waiting had been robbed of poignancy; but to wait like this, in direct suspense, for something definite was terrible. There was hardly a moment when she did not conjure up George, lonely and torn by conflicting emotions; for to her, long paralysed by Worsted Skeynes, and ignorant of the facts, the proportions of the struggle in her son's soul appeared Titanic; her mother instinct was not deceived as to the strength of his passion. Strange and conflicting were the sensations with which she awaited the result; at one moment thinking, 'It is madness; he must promise — it is too awful!' at another, 'Ah! but how can he, if he loves her so? It is impossible; and she, too — ah! how awful it is!'

Perhaps, as Mr. Pendyce had said, she was romantic; perhaps it was only the thought of the pain her boy must suffer. The tooth was too big, it seemed to her; and, as in old days, when she took him to Cornmarket to have an aching tooth out, she ever sat with his hand in hers while the little dentist pulled, and ever suffered the tug, too, in her own mouth, so now she longed to share this other tug, so terrible, so fierce.

Against Mrs. Bellew she felt only a sort of vague and jealous aching; and this seemed strange even to herself — but, again, perhaps she was romantic.

Now it was that she found the value of routine. Her days were so well and fully occupied that anxiety was forced below the surface. The nights were far more terrible; for then, not only had she to bear her own suspense, but, as was natural in a wife, the fears of Horace Pendyce as well. The poor Squire found this the only time when he could get relief from worry; he came to bed much earlier on purpose. By dint of reiterating dreads and speculation he at length obtained some rest. Why had not George answered? What was the fellow about? And so on and so on, till, by sheer monotony, he caused in himself the need for slumber. But his wife's torments lasted till after the birds, starting with a sleepy cheeping, were at full morning chorus. Then only, turning softly for fear she should awaken him, the poor lady fell asleep.

For George had not answered.

In her morning visits to the village Mrs. Pendyce found herself, for the first time since she had begun this practice, driven by her own trouble over that line of diffident distrust which had always divided her from the hearts of her poorer neighbours. She was astonished at her own indelicacy, asking questions, prying into their troubles, pushed on by a secret aching for distraction; and she was surprised how well they took it — how, indeed, they seemed to like it, as though they knew that they were doing her good. In one cottage, where she had long noticed with pitying wonder a white-faced, black-eyed girl, who seemed to crouch away from everyone, she even received a request. It was delivered with terrified secrecy in a back-yard, out of Mrs. Barter's hearing.

"Oh, ma'am! Get me away from here! I'm in trouble — it's comin', and I don't know what I shall do."

Mrs. Pendyce shivered, and all the way home she thought: 'Poor little soul — poor little thing!' racking her brains to whom she might confide this case and ask for a solution; and something of the white-faced, black-eyed girl's terror and secrecy fell on her, for, she found no one not even Mrs. Barter, whose heart, though soft, belonged to the Rector. Then, by a sort of inspiration, she thought of Gregory.

'How can I write to him,' she mused, 'when my son — —'

But she did write, for, deep down, the Totteridge instinct felt that others should do things for her; and she craved, too, to allude, however distantly, to what was on her mind. And, under the Pendyce eagle and the motto: 'Strenuus aureaque penna', thus her letter ran:

“DEAR GRIG,

“Can you do anything for a poor little girl in the village here who is ‘in trouble’? — you know what I mean. It is such a terrible crime in this part of the country, and she looks so wretched and frightened, poor little thing! She is twenty years old. She wants a hiding-place for her misfortune, and somewhere to go when it is over. Nobody, she says, will have anything to do with her where they know; and, really, I have noticed for a long time how white and wretched she looks, with great black frightened eyes. I don’t like to apply to our Rector, for though he is a good fellow in many ways, he has such strong opinions; and, of course, Horace could do nothing. I would like to do something for her, and I could spare a little money, but I can’t find a place for her to go, and that makes it difficult. She seems to be haunted, too, by the idea that wherever she goes it will come out. Isn’t it dreadful? Do do something, if you can. I am rather anxious about George. I hope the dear boy is well. If you are passing his club some day you might look in and just ask after him. He is sometimes so naughty about writing. I wish we could see you here, dear Grig; the country is looking beautiful just now — the oak-trees especially — and the apple-blossom isn’t over, but I suppose you are too busy. How is Helen Bellew? Is she in town?

“Your affectionate cousin,

“MARGERY PENDYCE.”

It was four o’clock this same afternoon when the second groom, very much out of breath, informed the butler that there was a fire at Peacock’s farm. The butler repaired at once to the library. Mr. Pendyce, who had been on horseback all the morning, was standing in his riding-clothes, tired and depressed, before the plan of Worsted Skeynes.

“What do you want, Bester?”

“There is a fire at Peacock’s farm, sir.” Mr. Pendyce stared.

“What?” he said. “A fire in broad daylight! Nonsense!”

“You can see the flames from the front, sir.” The worn and querulous look left Mr. Pendyce’s face.

“Ring the stable-bell!” he said. “Tell them all to run with buckets and ladders. Send Higson off to Cornmarket on the mare. Go and tell Mr. Barter, and rouse the village. Don’t stand there — God bless me! Ring the stable-bell!” And snatching up his riding-crop and hat, he ran past the butler, closely followed by the spaniel John.

Over the stile and along the footpath which cut diagonally across a field of barley he moved at a stiff trot, and his spaniel, who had not grasped the situation, frolicked ahead with a certain surprise. The Squire was soon out of breath — it was twenty years or more since he had run a quarter of a mile. He did not, however, relax his speed. Ahead of him in the distance ran the second groom; behind him a labourer and a footman. The stable-bell at Worsted Skeynes began to ring. Mr. Pendyce crossed the stile and struck into the lane, colliding with the Rector, who was running, too, his face flushed to the colour of tomatoes. They ran on, side by side.

“You go on!” gasped Mr. Pendyce at last, “and tell them I’m coming.”

The Rector hesitated — he, too, was very out of breath — and started again, panting. The Squire, with his hand to his side, walked painfully on; he had run himself to a standstill. At a gap in the corner of the lane he suddenly saw pale-red tongues of flame against the sunlight.

“God bless me!” he gasped, and in sheer horror started to run again. Those sinister tongues were licking at the air over a large barn, some ricks, and the roofs of stables and outbuildings. Half a dozen figures were dashing buckets of water on the flames. The true insignificance of their efforts did not penetrate the Squire’s mind. Trembling, and with a sickening pain in his lungs, he threw off his coat, wrenched a bucket from a huge agricultural labourer, who resigned it with awe, and joined the string of workers. Peacock, the farmer, ran past him; his face and round red beard were the colour of the flames he was trying to put out; tears dropped continually from his eyes and ran down that fiery face. His wife, a little dark woman with a twisted mouth, was working like a demon at the pump. Mr. Pendyce gasped to her:

“This is dreadful, Mrs. Peacock — this is dreadful!”

Conspicuous in black clothes and white shirt-sleeves, the Rector was hewing with an axe at the boarding of a cowhouse, the door end of which was already in flames, and his voice could be heard above the tumult shouting directions to which nobody paid any heed.

“What’s in that cow-house?” gasped Mr. Pendyce.

Mrs. Peacock, in a voice harsh with rage and grief answered:

“It’s the old horse and two of the cows!”

“God bless me!” cried the Squire, rushing forward with his bucket.

Some villagers came running up, and he shouted to these, but what he said neither he nor they could tell. The shrieks and snortings of the horse and cows, the steady whirr of the flames, drowned all lesser sounds. Of human cries, the Rector’s voice alone was heard, between the crashing blows of his axe upon the woodwork.

Mr. Pendyce tripped; his bucket rolled out of his hand; he lay where he had fallen, too exhausted to move. He could still hear the crash of the Rector’s axe, the sound of his shouts. Somebody helped him up, and trembling so that he could hardly stand, he caught an axe out of the hand of a strapping young fellow who had just arrived, and placing himself by the Rector’s side, swung it feebly against the boarding. The flames and smoke now filled the whole cow-house, and came rushing through the gap that they were making. The Squire and the Rector stood their ground. With a furious blow Mr. Barter cleared a way. A cheer rose behind them, but no beast came forth. All three were dead in the smoke and flames.

The Squire, who could see in, flung down his axe, and covered his eyes with his hands. The Rector uttered a sound like a deep oath, and he, too, flung down his axe.

Two hours later, with torn and blackened clothes, the Squire stood by the ruins of the barn. The fire was out, but the ashes were still smouldering. The spaniel John, anxious, panting, was licking his master’s boots, as though begging forgiveness that he had been so frightened, and kept so far away. Yet something in his eye seemed to be saying:

“Must you really have these fires, master?”

A black hand grasped the Squire’s arm, a hoarse voice said:

“I shan’t forget, Squire!”

“God bless me, Peacock!” returned Mr. Pendyce, “that’s nothing! You’re insured, I hope?’

“Aye, I’m insured; but it’s the beasts I’m thinking of!”

“Ah!” said the Squire, with a gesture of horror.

The brougham took him and the Rector back together. Under their feet crouched their respective dogs, faintly growling at each other. A cheer from the crowd greeted their departure.

They started in silence, deadly tired. Mr. Pendyce said suddenly:

“I can’t get those poor beasts out of my head, Barter!”

The Rector put his hand up to his eyes.

“I hope to God I shall never see such a sight again! Poor brutes, poor brutes!”

And feeling secretly for his dog’s muzzle, he left his hand against the animal’s warm, soft, rubbery mouth, to be licked again and again.

On his side of the brougham Mr. Pendyce, also unseen, was doing precisely the same thing.

The carriage went first to the Rectory, where Mrs. Barter and her children stood in the doorway. The Rector put his head back into the brougham to say:

“Good-night, Pendyce. You’ll be stiff tomorrow. I shall get my wife to rub me with Elliman!”

Mr. Pendyce nodded, raised his hat, and the carriage went on. Leaning back, he closed his eyes; a pleasanter sensation was stealing over him. True, he would be stiff to-morrow, but he had done his duty. He had shown them all that blood told; done something to bolster up that system which was-himself. And he had a new and kindly feeling towards Peacock, too. There was nothing like a little danger for bringing the lower classes closer; then it was they felt the need for officers, for something!

The spaniel John’s head rose between his knees, turning up eyes with a crimson touch beneath.

‘Master,’ he seemed to say, ‘I am feeling old. I know there are things beyond me in this life, but you, who know all things, will arrange that we shall be together even when we die.’

The carriage stopped at the entrance of the drive, and the Squire’s thoughts changed. Twenty years ago he would have beaten Barter running down that lane. Barter was only forty-five. To give him fourteen years and a beating was a bit too much to expect: He felt a strange irritation with Barter — the fellow had cut a very good figure! He had shirked nothing. Elliman was too strong! Homocea was the thing. Margery would have to rub him! And suddenly, as though springing naturally from the name of his wife, George came into Mr. Pendyce’s mind, and the respite that he had enjoyed from care was over. But the spaniel John, who scented home, began singing feebly for the brougham to stop, and beating a careless tail against his master’s boot.

It was very stiffly, with frowning brows and a shaking under-lip, that the Squire descended from the brougham, and began sorely to mount the staircase to his wife’s room.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARK

There comes a day each year in May when Hyde Park is possessed. A cool wind swings the leaves; a hot sun glistens on Long Water, on every bough, on every blade of grass. The birds sing their small hearts out, the band plays its gayest tunes, the white clouds race in the high blue heaven. Exactly why and how this day differs from those that came before and those that will come after, cannot be told; it is as though the Park said: 'To-day I live; the Past is past. I care not for the Future!'

And on this day they who chance in the Park cannot escape some measure of possession. Their steps quicken, their skirts swing, their sticks flourish, even their eyes brighten — those eyes so dulled with looking at the streets; and each one, if he has a Love, thinks of her, and here and there among the wandering throng he has her with him. To these the Park and all sweet-blooded mortals in it nod and smile.

There had been a meeting that afternoon at Lady Maiden's in Prince's Gate to consider the position of the working-class woman. It had provided a somewhat heated discussion, for a person had got up and proved almost incontestably that the working-class woman had no position whatsoever.

Gregory Vigil and Mrs. Shortman had left this meeting together, and, crossing the Serpentine, struck a line over the grass.

"Mrs. Shortman," said Gregory, "don't you think we're all a little mad?"

He was carrying his hat in his hand, and his fine grizzled hair, rumpled in the excitement of the meeting, had not yet subsided on his head.

"Yes, Mr. Vigil. I don't exactly — —"

"We are all a little mad! What did that woman, Lady Maiden, mean by talking as she did? I detest her!"

"Oh, Mr. Vigil! She has the best intentions!"

"Intentions?" said Gregory. "I loathe her! What did we go to her stuffy drawing-room for? Look at that sky!"

Mrs. Shortman looked at the sky.

"But, Mr. Vigil," she said earnestly, "things would never get done. Sometimes I think you look at everything too much in the light of the way it ought to be!"

"The Milky Way," said Gregory.

Mrs. Shortman pursed her lips; she found it impossible to habituate herself to Gregory's habit of joking.

They had scant talk for the rest of their journey to the S. R. W. C., where Miss Mallow, at the typewriter, was reading a novel.

"There are several letters for you, Mr. Vigil"

"Mrs. Shortman says I am unpractical," answered Gregory. "Is that true, Miss Mallow?"

The colour in Miss Mallow's cheeks spread to her sloping shoulders.

"Oh no. You're most practical, only — perhaps — I don't know, perhaps you do try to do rather impossible things, Mr. Vigil."

"Bilcock Buildings!"

There was a minute's silence. Then Mrs. Shortman at her bureau beginning to dictate, the typewriter started clicking.

Gregory, who had opened a letter, was seated with his head in his hands. The voice ceased, the typewriter ceased, but Gregory did not stir. Both women, turning a little in their seats, glanced at him. Their eyes caught each other's and they looked away at once. A few seconds later they were looking at him again. Still Gregory did not stir. An anxious appeal began to creep into the women's eyes.

"Mr. Vigil," said Mrs. Shortman at last, "Mr. Vigil, do you think—"

Gregory raised his face; it was flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Read that, Mrs. Shortman."

Handing her a pale grey letter stamped with an eagle and the motto 'Strenuus aureaque penna' he rose and paced the room. And as with his long, light stride he was passing to and fro, the woman at the bureau conned steadily the writing, the girl at the typewriter sat motionless with a red and jealous face.

Mrs. Shortman folded the letter, placed it on the top of the bureau, and said without raising her eyes —

"Of course, it is very sad for the poor little girl; but surely, Mr. Vigil, it must always be, so as to check, to check — —"

Gregory stopped, and his shining eyes disconcerted her; they seemed to her unpractical. Sharply lifting her voice, she went on:

"If there were no disgrace, there would be no way of stopping it. I know the country better than you do, Mr. Vigil."

Gregory put his hands to his ears.

"We must find a place for her at once."

The window was fully open, so that he could not open it any more, and he stood there as though looking for that place in the sky. And the sky he looked at was very blue, and large white birds of cloud were flying over it.

He turned from the window, and opened another letter.

"LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,

"May 24, 1892.

"MY DEAR VIGIL,

"I gathered from your ward when I saw her yesterday that she has not told you of what, I fear, will give you much pain. I asked her point-blank whether she wished the matter kept from you, and her answer was, 'He had better know — only I'm sorry for him.' In sum it is this: Bellow has either got wind of our watching him, or someone must have put him up to it; he has anticipated us and brought a suit against your ward, joining George Pendyce in the cause. George brought the citation to me. If necessary he's prepared to swear there's nothing in it. He takes, in fact, the usual standpoint of the 'man of honour.'

"I went at once to see your ward. She admitted that the charge is true. I asked her if she wished the suit defended, and a counter-suit brought against her husband. Her answer to that was: 'I absolutely don't care.' I got nothing from her but this, and, though it sounds odd, I believe it to be true. She appears to be in a reckless mood, and to have no particular ill-will against her husband.

"I want to see you, but only after you have turned this matter over carefully. It is my duty to put some considerations before you. The suit, if brought, will be a very unpleasant matter for George, a still more unpleasant, even disastrous one, for his people. The innocent in such cases are almost always the greatest sufferers. If the cross-suit is instituted, it will assume at once, considering their position in Society, the proportions of a 'cause celebre', and probably occupy the court and the daily presses anything from three days to a week, perhaps more, and you know what that means. On the other hand, not to defend the suit, considering what we know, is, apart from ethics, revolting to my instincts as a fighter. My advice, therefore, is to make every effort to prevent matters being brought into court at all.

"I am an older man than you by thirteen years. I have a sincere regard for you, and I wish to save you pain. In the course of our interviews I have observed your ward very closely, and at the risk of giving you offence, I am going to speak out my mind. Mrs. Bellew is a rather remarkable woman. From two or three allusions that you have made in my presence, I believe that she is altogether different from what you think. She is, in my opinion, one of those very vital persons upon whom our judgments, censures, even our sympathies, are wasted. A woman of this sort, if she comes of a county family, and is thrown by circumstances with Society people, is always bound to be conspicuous. If you would realise something of this, it would, I believe, save you a great deal of pain. In short, I beg of you not to take her, or her circumstances, too seriously. There are quite a number of such men and women as her husband and herself, and they are always certain to be more or less before the public eye. Whoever else goes down, she will swim, simply because she can't help it. I want you to see things as they are.

"I ask you again, my dear Vigil, to forgive me for writing thus, and to believe that my sole desire is to try and save you unnecessary suffering.

"Come and see me as soon as you have reflected:

"I am,

"Your sincere friend,

"EDMUND PARAMOR."

Gregory made a movement like that of a blind man. Both women were on their feet at once.

"What is it, Mr. Vigil? Can I get you anything?"

"Thanks; nothing, nothing. I've had some rather bad news. I'll go out and get some air. I shan't be back to-day."

He found his hat and went.

He walked towards the Park, unconsciously attracted towards the biggest space, the freshest air; his hands were folded behind him, his head bowed. And since, of all things, Nature is ironical, it was fitting that he should seek the Park this day when it was gayest. And far in the Park, as near the centre as might be, he lay down on the grass. For a long time he lay without moving, his hands over his eyes, and in spite of Mr. Paramor's reminder that his suffering was unnecessary, he suffered.

And mostly he suffered from black loneliness, for he was a very lonely man, and now he had lost that which he had thought he had. It is difficult to divide suffering, difficult to say how much he suffered, because, being in love with her, he had secretly thought she must love him a little, and how much he suffered because his private portrait of her, the portrait that he, and he alone, had painted, was scored through with the knife. And he lay first on his face, and then on his back, with his hand always over his eyes. And around him were other men lying on the grass, and some were lonely, and some hungry, and some asleep, and some were lying there for the pleasure of doing nothing and for the sake of the hot sun on their cheeks; and by the side of some lay their girls, and it was these that Gregory could not bear to see, for his spirit and his senses were a-hungered. In the plantations close by were pigeons, and never for a moment did they stop cooing; never did the blackbirds cease their courting songs; the sun its hot, sweet burning; the clouds above their love-chase in the sky. It was the day without a past, without a future, when it is not good for man to be alone. And no man looked at him, because it was no man's business, but a woman here and there cast a glance on that long, tweed-suited figure with the hand over the eyes, and wondered, perhaps, what was behind that hand. Had they but known, they would have smiled their woman's smile that he should so have mistaken one of their sex.

Gregory lay quite still, looking at the sky, and because he was a loyal man he did not blame her, but slowly, very slowly, his spirit, like a spring stretched to the point of breaking, came back upon itself, and since he could not bear to see things as they were, he began again to see them as they were not.

'She has been forced into this,' he thought. 'It is George Pendyce's fault. To me she is, she must be, the same!'

He turned again on to his face. And a small dog who had lost its master sniffed at his boots, and sat down a little way off, to wait till Gregory could do something for him, because he smelled that he was that sort of man.

CHAPTER VII

DOUBTFUL POSITION AT WORSTED SKEYNES

Then George's answer came at last, the flags were in full bloom round the Scotch garden at Worsted Skeynes. They grew in masses and of all shades, from deep purple to pale grey, and their scent, very penetrating, very delicate, floated on the wind.

While waiting for that answer, it had become Mr. Pendyce's habit to promenade between these beds, his hand to his back, for he was still a little stiff, followed at a distance of seven paces by the spaniel John, very black, and moving his rubbery nostrils uneasily from side to side.

In this way the two passed every day the hour from twelve to one. Neither could have said why they walked thus, for Mr. Pendyce had a horror of idleness, and the spaniel John disliked the scent of irises; both, in fact, obeyed that part of themselves which is superior to reason. During this hour, too, Mrs. Pendyce, though longing to walk between her flowers, also obeyed that part of her, superior to reason, which told her that it would be better not.

But George's answer came at last.

"STOICS' CLUB. "DEAR FATHER,

"Yes, Bellew is bringing a suit. I am taking steps in the matter. As to the promise you ask for, I can give no promise of the sort. You may tell Bellew I will see him d — d first.

"Your affectionate son,

"GEORGE PENDYCE."

Mr. Pendyce received this at the breakfast-table, and while he read it there was a hush, for all had seen the handwriting on the envelope.

Mr. Pendyce read it through twice, once with his glasses on and once without, and when he had finished the second reading he placed it in his breast pocket. No word escaped him; his eyes, which had sunk a little the last few days, rested angrily on his wife's white face. Bee and Norah looked down, and, as if they understood, the four dogs were still. Mr. Pendyce pushed his plate back, rose, and left the room.

Norah looked up.

"What's the matter, Mother?"

Mrs. Pendyce was swaying. She recovered herself in a moment.

"Nothing, dear. It's very hot this morning, don't you think? I'll Just go to my room and take some sal volatile."

She went out, followed by old Roy, the Skye; the spaniel John, who had been cut off at the door by his master's abrupt exit, preceded her. Norah and Bee pushed back their plates.

"I can't eat, Norah," said Bee. "It's horrible not to know what's going on."

Norah answered

"It's perfectly brutal not being a man. You might just as well be a dog as a girl, for anything anyone tells you!"

Mrs. Pendyce did not go to her room; she went to the library. Her husband, seated at his table, had George's letter before him. A pen was in his hand, but he was not writing.

"Horace," she said softly, "here is poor John!"

Mr. Pendyce did not answer, but put down the hand that did not hold his pen. The spaniel John covered it with kisses.

"Let me see the letter, won't you?"

Mr. Pendyce handed it to her without a word. She touched his shoulder gratefully, for his unusual silence went to her heart. Mr. Pendyce took no notice, staring at his pen as though surprised that, of its own accord, it did not write his answer; but suddenly he flung it down and looked round, and his look seemed to say: 'You brought this fellow into the world; now see the result!'

He had had so many days to think and put his finger on the doubtful spots of his son's character. All that week he had become more and more certain of how, without his wife, George would have been exactly like himself. Words sprang to his lips, and kept on dying there. The doubt whether she would agree with him, the feeling that she sympathised with her son, the certainty that something even in himself responded to those words: "You can tell Bellew I will see him d — d first!" — all this, and the thought, never out of his mind, 'The name — the estate!' kept him silent. He turned his head away, and took up his pen again.

Mrs. Pendyce had read the letter now three times, and instinctively had put it in her bosom. It was not hers, but Horace must know it by heart, and in his anger he might tear it up. That letter, for which they had waited so long; told her nothing; she had known all there was to tell. Her hand had fallen from Mr. Pendyce's shoulder, and she did not put it back, but ran her fingers through and through each other, while the sunlight, traversing the narrow windows, caressed her from her hair down to her knees. Here and there that stream of sunlight formed little pools in her eyes, giving them a touching, anxious brightness; in a curious heart-shaped locket of carved steel, worn by her mother and her grandmother before her, containing now, not locks of their son's hair, but a curl of George's; in her diamond rings, and a bracelet of amethyst and pearl which she wore for the love of pretty things. And the warm sunlight disengaged from her a scent of lavender. Through the library door a scratching noise told that the dear dogs knew she was not in her bedroom. Mr. Pendyce, too, caught that scent of lavender, and in some vague way it augmented his discomfort. Her silence, too, distressed him. It did not occur to him that his silence was distressing her. He put down his pen.

"I can't write with you standing there, Margery!"

Mrs. Pendyce moved out of the sunlight.

"George says he is taking steps. What does that mean, Horace?"

This question, focusing his doubts, broke down the Squire's dumbness.

"I won't be treated like this!" he said. "I'll go up and see him myself!"

He went by the 10.20, saying that he would be down again by the 5.55

Soon after seven the same evening a dogcart driven by a young groom and drawn by a raking chestnut mare with a blaze face, swung into the railway-station at Worsted Skeynes, and drew up before the booking-office. Mr. Pendyce's brougham, behind a brown horse, coming a little later, was obliged to range itself behind. A minute before the train's arrival a wagonette and a pair of bays, belonging to Lord Quarryman, wheeled in, and, filing past the other two, took up its place in front. Outside this little row of vehicles the station fly and two farmers' gigs presented their backs to the station buildings. And in this arrangement there was something harmonious and fitting, as though Providence itself had guided them all and assigned to each its place. And Providence had only made one error — that of placing Captain Bellew's dogcart precisely opposite the booking-office, instead of Lord Quarryman's wagonette, with Mr. Pendyce's brougham next.

Mr. Pendyce came out first; he stared angrily at the dogcart, and moved to his own carriage. Lord Quarryman came out second. His massive sun-burned head — the back of which, sparsely adorned by hairs, ran perfectly straight into his neck — was crowned by a grey top-hat. The skirts of his grey coat were square-shaped, and so were the toes of his boots.

"Hallo, Pendyce!" he called out heartily; "didn't see you on the platform. How's your wife?"

Mr. Pendyce, turning to answer, met the little burning eyes of Captain Bellew, who came out third. They failed to salute each other, and Bellow, springing into his cart, wrenched his mare round, circled the farmers' gigs, and, sitting forward, drove off at a furious pace. His groom, running at full speed, clung to the cart and leaped on to the step behind. Lord Quarryman's wagonette backed itself into the place left vacant. And the mistake of Providence was rectified.

"Cracked chap, that fellow Bellew. D'you see anything of him?"

Mr. Pendyce answered:

"No; and I want to see less. I wish he'd take himself off!"

His lordship smiled.

"A huntin' country seems to breed fellows like that; there's always one of 'em to every pack of hounds. Where's his wife now? Good-lookin' woman; rather warm member, eh?"

It seemed to Mr. Pendyce that Lord Quarryman's eyes searched his own with a knowing look, and muttering "God knows!" he vanished into his brougham.

Lord Quarryman looked kindly at his horses.

He was not a man who reflected on the whys, the wherefores, the becauses, of this life. The good God had made him Lord Quarryman, had made his eldest son Lord Quantock; the good God had made the Gaddesdon hounds — it was enough!

When Mr. Pendyce reached home he went to his dressing-room. In a corner by the bath the spaniel John lay surrounded by an assortment of his master's slippers, for it was thus alone that he could soothe in measure the bitterness of separation. His dark brown eye was fixed upon the door, and round it gleamed a crescent moon of white. He came to the Squire fluttering his tail, with a slipper in his mouth, and his eye said plainly: 'Oh, master, where have you been? Why have you been so long? I have been expecting you ever since half-past ten this morning!'

Mr. Pendyce's heart opened a moment and closed again. He said "John!" and began to dress for dinner.

Mrs. Pendyce found him tying his white tie. She had plucked the first rosebud from her garden; she had plucked it because she felt sorry for him, and because of the excuse it would give her to go to his dressing-room at once.

"I've brought you a buttonhole, Horace. Did you see him?"

"No."

Of all answers this was the one she dreaded most. She had not believed that anything would come of an interview; she had trembled all day long at the thought of their meeting; but now that they had not met she knew by the sinking in her heart that anything was better than uncertainty. She waited as long as she could, then burst out:

"Tell me something, Horace!"

Mr. Pendyce gave her an angry glance.

"How can I tell you, when there's nothing to tell? I went to his club. He's not living there now. He's got rooms, nobody knows where. I waited all the afternoon. Left a message at last for him to come down here to-morrow. I've sent for Paramor, and told him to come down too. I won't put up with this sort of thing."

Mrs. Pendyce looked out of the window, but there was nothing to see save the ha-ha, the coverts, the village spire, the cottage roofs, which for so long had been her world.

"George won't come down here," she said.

"George will do what I tell him."

Again Mrs. Pendyce shook her head, knowing by instinct that she was right.

Mr. Pendyce stopped putting on his waist-coat.

"George had better take care," he said; "he's entirely dependent on me."

And as if with those words he had summed up the situation, the philosophy of a system vital to his son, he no longer frowned. On Mrs. Pendyce those words had a strange effect. They stirred within her terror. It was like seeing her son's back bared to a lifted whip-lash; like seeing the door shut against him on a snowy night. But besides terror they stirred within her a more poignant feeling yet, as though someone had dared to show a whip to herself, had dared to defy that something more precious than life in her soul, that something which was of her blood, so utterly and secretly passed by the centuries into her fibre that no one had ever thought of defying it before. And there flashed before her with ridiculous concreteness the thought: 'I've got three hundred a year of my own!' Then the whole feeling left her, just as in dreams a mordant sensation grips and passes, leaving a dull ache, whose cause is forgotten, behind.

"There's the gong, Horace," she said. "Cecil Tharp is here to dinner. I asked the Barters, but poor Rose didn't feel up to it. Of course they are expecting it very soon now. They talk of the 15th of June."

Mr. Pendyce took from his wife his coat, passing his arms down the satin sleeves.

"If I could get the cottagers to have families like that," he said, "I shouldn't have much trouble about labour. They're a pig-headed lot — do nothing that they're told. Give me some eau-de-Cologne, Margery."

Mrs. Pendyce dabbed the wicker flask on her husband’s handkerchief.

“Your eyes look tired,” she said. “Have you a headache, dear?”

CHAPTER VIII

COUNCIL AT WORSTED SKEYNES

It was on the following evening — the evening on which he was expecting his son and Mr. Paramor that the Squire leaned forward over the dining-table and asked:

"What do you say, Barter? I'm speaking to you as a man of the world."

The Rector bent over his glass of port and moistened his lower lip.

"There's no excuse for that woman," he answered. "I always thought she was a bad lot."

Mr. Pendyce went on:

"We've never had a scandal in my family. I find the thought of it hard to bear, Barter — I find it hard to bear — —"

The Rector emitted a low sound. He had come from long usage to have a feeling like affection for his Squire.

Mr. Pendyce pursued his thoughts.

"We've gone on," he said, "father and son for hundreds of years. It's a blow to me, Barter."

Again the Rector emitted that low sound.

"What will the village think?" said Mr. Pendyce; "and the farmers — I mind that more than anything. Most of them knew my dear old father — not that he was popular. It's a bitter thing."

The Rector said:

"Well, well, Pendyce, perhaps it won't come to that."

He looked a little shamefaced, and his light eyes were full of something like contrition.

"How does Mrs. Pendyce take it?"

The Squire looked at him for the first time.

"Ah!" he said; "you never know anything about women. I'd as soon trust a woman to be just as I'd — I'd finish that magnum; it'd give me gout in no time."

The Rector emptied his glass.

"I've sent for George and my solicitor," pursued the Squire; "they'll be here directly."

Mr. Barter pushed his chair back, and raising his right ankle on to his left leg, clasped his hands round his right knee; then, leaning forward, he stared up under his jutting brows at Mr. Pendyce. It was the attitude in which he thought best.

Mr. Pendyce ran on:

"I've nursed the estate ever since it came to me; I've carried on the tradition as best I could; I've not been as good a man, perhaps, as I should have wished, but I've always tried to remember my old father's words: 'I'm done for, Horry; the estate's in your hands now.'" He cleared his throat.

For a full minute there was no sound save the ticking of the clock. Then the spaniel John, coming silently from under the sideboard, fell heavily down against his master's leg with a lengthy snore of satisfaction. Mr. Pendyce looked down.

"This fellow of mine," he muttered, "is getting fat."

It was evident from the tone of his voice that he desired his emotion to be forgotten. Something very deep in Mr. Barter respected that desire.

"It's a first-rate magnum," he said.

Mr. Pendyce filled his Rector's glass.

"I forget if you knew Paramor. He was before your time. He was at Harrow with me."

The Rector took a prolonged sip.

"I shall be in the way," he said. "I'll take myself off'."

The Squire put out his hand affectionately.

"No, no, Barter, don't you go. It's all safe with you. I mean to act. I can't stand this uncertainty. My wife's cousin Vigil is coming too — he's her guardian. I wired for him. You know Vigil? He was about your time."

The Rector turned crimson, and set his underlip. Having scented his enemy, nothing would now persuade him to withdraw; and the conviction that he had only done his duty, a little shaken by the Squire's confidence, returned as though by magic.

"Yes, I know him."

"We'll have it all out here," muttered Mr. Pendyce, "over this port. There's the carriage. Get up, John."

The spaniel John rose heavily, looked sardonically at Mr. Barter, and again flopped down against his master's leg.

"Get up, John," said Mr. Pendyce again. The spaniel John snored.

'If I move, you'll move too, and uncertainty will begin for me again,' he seemed to say.

Mr. Pendyce disengaged his leg, rose, and went to the door. Before reaching it he turned and came back to the table.

"Barter," he said, "I'm not thinking of myself — I'm not thinking of myself — we've been here for generations — it's the principle." His face had the least twist to one side, as though conforming to a kink in his philosophy; his eyes looked sad and restless.

And the Rector, watching the door for the sight of his enemy, also thought:

'I'm not thinking of myself — I'm satisfied that I did right — I'm Rector of this parish it's the principle.'

The spaniel John gave three short barks, one for each of the persons who entered the room. They were Mrs. Pendyce, Mr. Paramor, and Gregory Vigil.

"Where's George?" asked the Squire, but no one answered him.

The Rector, who had resumed his seat, stared at a little gold cross which he had taken out of his waistcoat pocket. Mr. Paramor lifted a vase and sniffed at the rose it contained; Gregory walked to the window.

When Mr. Pendyce realised that his son had not come, he went to the door and held it open.

"Be good enough to take John out, Margery," he said. "John!"

The spaniel John, seeing what lay before him, rolled over on his back.

Mrs. Pendyce fixed her eyes on her husband, and in those eyes she put all the words which the nature of a lady did not suffer her to speak.

'I claim to be here. Let me stay; it is my right. Don't send me away.' So her eyes spoke, and so those of the spaniel John, lying on his back, in which attitude he knew that he was hard to move.

Mr. Pendyce turned him over with his foot.

"Get up, John! Be good enough to take John out, Margery."

Mrs. Pendyce flushed, but did not move.

"John," said Mr. Pendyce, "go with your mistress." The spaniel John fluttered a drooping tail. Mr. Pendyce pressed his foot to it.

"This is not a subject for women."

Mrs. Pendyce bent down.

"Come, John," she said. The spaniel John, showing the whites of his eyes, and trying to back through his collar, was assisted from the room. Mr. Pendyce closed the door behind them.

"Have a glass of port, Vigil; it's the '47. My father laid it down in '56, the year before he died. Can't drink it myself — I've had to put down two hogsheads of the Jubilee wine. Paramor, fill your glass. Take that chair next to Paramor, Vigil. You know Barter?"

Both Gregory's face and the Rector's were very red.

"We're all Harrow men here," went on Mr. Pendyce. And suddenly turning to Mr. Paramor, he said: "Well?"

Just as round the hereditary principle are grouped the State, the Church, Law, and Philanthropy, so round the dining-table at Worsted Skeynes sat the Squire, the Rector, Mr. Paramor, and Gregory Vigil, and none of them wished to be the first to speak. At last Mr. Paramor, taking from his pocket Bellew's note and George's answer, which were pinned in strange alliance, returned them to the Squire.

"I understand the position to be that George refuses to give her up; at the same time he is prepared to defend the suit and deny everything. Those are his instructions to me." Taking up the vase again, he sniffed long and deep at the rose.

Mr. Pendyce broke the silence.

"As a gentleman," he said in a voice sharpened by the bitterness of his feelings, "I suppose he's obliged — —"

Gregory, smiling painfully, added:

"To tell lies."

Mr. Pendyce turned on him at once.

"I've nothing to say about that, Vigil. George has behaved abominably. I don't uphold him; but if the woman wishes the suit defended he can't play the cur — that's what I was brought up to believe."

Gregory leaned his forehead on his hand.

"The whole system is odious — —" he was beginning.

Mr. Paramor chimed in.

"Let us keep to the facts; without the system."

The Rector spoke for the first time.

"I don't know what you mean about the system; both this man and this woman are guilty — —"

Gregory said in a voice that quivered with rage:

"Be so kind as not to use the expression, 'this woman.'"

The Rector glowered.

"What expression then — —"

Mr. Pendyce's voice, to which the intimate trouble of his thoughts lent a certain dignity, broke in:

"Gentlemen, this is a question concerning the honour of my house."

There was another and a longer silence, during which Mr. Paramor's eyes haunted from face to face, while beyond the rose a smile writhed on his lips.

"I suppose you have brought me down here, Pendyce, to give you my opinion," he said at last. "Well; don't let these matters come into court. If there is anything you can do to prevent it, do it. If your pride stands in the way, put it in your pocket. If your sense of truth stands in the way, forget it. Between personal delicacy and our law of divorce there is no relation; between absolute truth and our law of divorce there is no relation. I repeat, don't let these matters come into court. Innocent and guilty, you will all suffer; the innocent will suffer more than the guilty, and nobody will benefit. I have come to this conclusion deliberately. There are cases in which I should give the opposite opinion. But in this case, I repeat, there's nothing to be gained by it. Once more, then, don't let these matters come into court. Don't give people's tongues a chance. Take my advice, appeal to George again to give you that promise. If he refuses, well, we must try and bluff Bellew out of it."

Mr. Pendyce had listened, as he had formed the habit of listening to Edmund Paramor, in silence. He now looked up and said:

"It's all that red-haired ruffian's spite. I don't know what you were about to stir things up, Vigil. You must have put him on the scent." He looked moodily at Gregory. Mr. Barter, too, looked at Gregory with a sort of half-ashamed defiance.

Gregory, who had been staring at his untouched wineglass, turned his face, very flushed, and began speaking in a voice that emotion and anger caused to tremble. He avoided looking at the Rector, and addressed himself to Mr. Paramor.

"George can't give up the woman who has trusted herself to him; that would be playing the cur, if you like. Let them go and live together honestly until they can be married. Why do you all speak as if it were the man who mattered? It is the woman that we should protect!"

The Rector first recovered speech.

"You're talking rank immorality," he said almost good-humouredly.

Mr. Pendyce rose.

"Marry her!" he cried. "What on earth — that's worse than all — the very thing we're trying to prevent! We've been here, father and son — father and son — for generations!"

"All the more shame," burst out Gregory, "if you can't stand by a woman at the end of them —— !"

Mr. Paramor made a gesture of reproof.

"There's moderation in all things," he said. "Are you sure that Mrs. Bellew requires protection? If you are right, I agree; but are you right?"

"I will answer for it," said Gregory.

Mr. Paramor paused a full minute with his head resting on his hand.

"I am sorry," he said at last, "I must trust to my own judgment."

The Squire looked up.

"If the worst comes to the worst, can I cut the entail, Paramor?"

"No."

"What? But that's all wrong — that's — —"

"You can't have it both ways," said Mr. Paramor.

The Squire looked at him dubiously, then blurted out:

"If I choose to leave him nothing but the estate, he'll soon find himself a beggar. I beg your pardon, gentlemen; fill your glasses! I'm forgetting everything!"

The Rector filled his glass.

"I've said nothing so far," he began; "I don't feel that it's my business. My conviction is that there's far too much divorce nowadays. Let this woman go back to her husband, and let him show her where she's to blame" — his voice and his eyes hardened—"then let them forgive each other like Christians. You talk," he said to Gregory, "about standing up for the woman. I've no patience with that; it's the way immorality's fostered in these days. I raise my voice against this sentimentalism. I always have, and I always shall!"

Gregory jumped to his feet.

"I've told you once before," he said, "that you were indelicate; I tell you so again."

Mr. Barter got up, and stood bending over the table, crimson in the face, staring at Gregory, and unable to speak.

"Either you or I," he said at last, stammering with passion, "must leave this room!"

Gregory tried to speak; then turning abruptly, he stepped out on to the terrace, and passed from the view of those within.

The Rector said:

"Good-night, Pendyce; I'm going, too!"

The Squire shook the hand held out to him with a face perplexed to sadness. There was silence when Mr. Barter had left the room.

The Squire broke it with a sigh.

"I wish we were back at Oxenham's, Paramor. This serves me right for deserting the old house. What on earth made me send George to Eton?"

Mr. Paramor buried his nose in the vase. In this saying of his old schoolfellow was the whole of the Squire's creed:

'I believe in my father, and his father, and his father's father, the makers and keepers of my estate; and I believe in myself and my son and my son's son. And I believe that we have made the country, and shall keep the country what it is. And I believe in the Public Schools, and especially the Public School that I was at. And I believe in my social equals and the country house, and in things as they are, for ever and ever. Amen.'

Mr. Pendyce went on:

"I'm not a Puritan, Paramor; I dare say there are allowances to be made for George. I don't even object to the woman herself; she may be too good for Bellew; she must be too good for a fellow like that! But for George to marry her would be ruination. Look at Lady Rose's case! Anyone but a star-gazing fellow like Vigil must see that! It's taboo! It's sheer taboo! And think — think of my — my grandson! No, no, Paramor; no, no, by God!"

The Squire covered his eyes with his hand.

Mr. Paramor, who had no son himself, answered with feeling:

"Now, now, old fellow; it won't come to that!"

"God knows what it will come to, Paramor! My nerve's shaken! You know yourself that if there's a divorce he'll be bound to marry her!"

To this Mr. Paramor made no reply, but pressed his lips together.

"There's your poor dog whining," he said.

And without waiting for permission he opened the door. Mrs. Pendyce and the spaniel John came in. The Squire looked up and frowned. The spaniel John, panting with delight, rubbed against him. 'I have been through torment, master,' he seemed to say. 'A second separation at present is not possible for me!'

Mrs. Pendyce stood waiting silently, and Mr. Paramor addressed himself to her.

"You can do more than any of us, Mrs. Pendyce, both with George and with this man Bellew — and, if I am not mistaken, with his wife."

The Squire broke in:

"Don't think that I'll have any humble pie eaten to that fellow Bellew!"

The look Mr. Paramor gave him at those words, was like that of a doctor diagnosing a disease. Yet there was nothing in the expression of the Squire's face with its thin grey whiskers and moustache, its twist to the left, its swan-like eyes, decided jaw, and sloping brow, different from what this idea might bring on the face of any country gentleman.

Mrs. Pendyce said eagerly

"Oh, Mr. Paramor, if I could only see George!"

She longed so for a sight of her son that her thoughts carried her no further.

“See him!” cried the Squire. “You’ll go on spoiling him till he’s disgraced us all!”

Mrs. Pendyce turned from her husband to his solicitor. Excitement had fixed an unwonted colour in her cheeks; her lips twitched as if she wished to speak.

Mr. Paramor answered for her:

“No, Pendyce; if George is spoilt, the system is to blame.”

“System!” said the Squire. “I’ve never had a system for him. I’m no believer in systems! I don’t know what you’re talking of. I have another son, thank God!”

Mrs. Pendyce took a step forward.

“Horace,” she said, “you would never — —”

Mr. Pendyce turned from his wife, and said sharply:

“Paramor, are you sure I can’t cut the entail?”

“As sure,” said Mr. Paramor, “as I sit here!”

CHAPTER IX

DEFINITION OF “PENDYCITIS”

Gregory walked long in the Scotch garden with his eyes on the stars. One, larger than all the rest, over the larches, shone on him ironically, for it was the star of love. And on his beat between the yew-trees that, living before Pendyces came to Worsted Skeynes, would live when they were gone, he cooled his heart in the silver light of that big star. The irises restrained their perfume lest it should whip his senses; only the young larch-trees and the far fields sent him their fugitive sweetness through the dark. And the same brown owl that had hooted when Helen Bellew kissed George Pendyce in the conservatory hooted again now that Gregory walked grieving over the fruits of that kiss.

His thoughts were of Mr. Barter, and with the injustice natural to a man who took a warm and personal view of things, he painted the Rector in colours darker than his cloth.

‘Indelicate, meddlesome,’ he thought. ‘How dare he speak of her like that!’

Mr. Paramor’s voice broke in on his meditations.

“Still cooling your heels? Why did you play the deuce with us in there?”

“I hate a sham,” said Gregory. “This marriage of my ward’s is a sham. She had better live honestly with the man she really loves!”

“So you said just now,” returned Mr. Paramor. “Would you apply that to everyone?”

“I would.”

“Well,” said Mr. Paramor with a laugh, “there is nothing like an idealist for-making hay! You once told me, if I remember, that marriage was sacred to you!”

“Those are my own private feelings, Paramor. But here the mischief’s done already. It is a sham, a hateful sham, and it ought to come to an end!”

“That’s all very well,” replied Mr. Paramor, “but when you come to put it into practice in that wholesale way it leads to goodness knows what. It means reconstructing marriage on a basis entirely different from the present. It’s marriage on the basis of the heart, and not on the basis of property. Are you prepared to go to that length?”

“I am.”

“You’re as much of an extremist one way as Barter is the other. It’s you extremists who do all the harm. There’s a golden mean, my friend. I agree that something ought to be done. But what you don’t see is that laws must suit those they are intended to govern. You’re too much in the stars, Vigil. Medicine must be graduated to the patient. Come, man, where’s your sense of humour? Imagine your conception of marriage applied to Pendyce and his sons, or his Rector, or his tenants, and the labourers on his estate.”

“No, no,” said Gregory; “I refuse to believe — —”

“The country classes,” said Mr. Paramor quietly, “are especially backward in such matters. They have strong, meat-fed instincts, and what with the county Members, the Bishops, the Peers, all the hereditary force of the country, they still rule the roast. And there’s a certain disease — to make a very poor joke, call it ‘Pendycitis’ with which most of these people are infected. They’re ‘crass.’ They do things, but they do them the wrong way! They muddle through with the greatest possible amount of unnecessary labour and suffering! It’s part of the hereditary principle. I haven’t had to do with them thirty five years for nothing!”

Gregory turned his face away.

“Your joke is very poor,” he said. “I don’t believe they are like that! I won’t admit it. If there is such a disease, it’s our business to find a remedy.”

“Nothing but an operation will cure it,” said Mr. Paramor; “and before operating there’s a preliminary process to be gone through. It was discovered by Lister.”

Gregory answered

“Paramor, I hate your pessimism!”

Mr. Paramor’s eyes haunted Gregory’s back.

“But I am not a pessimist,” he said. “Far from it.

“‘When daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree — —’”

Gregory turned on him.

“How can you quote poetry, and hold the views you do? We ought to construct — —”

“You want to build before you’ve laid your foundations,” said Mr. Paramor. “You let your feelings carry you away, Vigil. The state of the marriage laws is only a symptom. It’s this disease, this grudging narrow spirit in men, that makes such laws necessary. Unlovely men, unlovely laws — what can you expect?”

“I will never believe that we shall be content to go on living in a slough of — of — —”

“Provincialism!” said Mr. Paramor. “You should take to gardening; it makes one recognise what you idealists seem to pass over — that men, my dear friend, are, like plants, creatures of heredity and environment; their growth is slow. You can’t get grapes from thorns, Vigil, or figs from thistles — at least, not in one generation — however busy and hungry you may be!”

“Your theory degrades us all to the level of thistles.”

“Social laws depend for their strength on the harm they have it in their power to inflict, and that harm depends for its strength on the ideals held by the man on whom the harm falls. If you dispense with the marriage tie, or give up your property and take to

Brotherhood, you'll have a very thistley time, but you won't mind that if you're a fig. And so on ad lib. It's odd, though, how soon the thistles that thought themselves figs get found out. There are many things I hate, Vigil. One is extravagance, and another humbug!"

But Gregory stood looking at the sky.

"We seem to have wandered from the point," said Mr. Paramor, "and I think we had better go in. It's nearly eleven."

Throughout the length of the low white house there were but three windows lighted, three eyes looking at the moon, a fairy shallop sailing the night sky. The cedar-trees stood black as pitch. The old brown owl had ceased his hooting. Mr. Paramor gripped Gregory by the arm.

"A nightingale! Did you hear him down in that spinney? It's a sweet place, this! I don't wonder Pendyce is fond of it. You're not a fisherman, I think? Did you ever watch a school of fishes coasting along a bank? How blind they are, and how they follow their leader! In our element we men know just about as much as the fishes do. A blind lot, Vigil! We take a mean view of things; we're damnably provincial!"

Gregory pressed his hands to his forehead.

"I'm trying to think," he said, "what will be the consequences to my ward of this divorce."

"My friend, listen to some plain speaking. Your ward and her husband and George Pendyce are just the sort of people for whom our law of divorce is framed. They've all three got courage, they're all reckless and obstinate, and — forgive me — thick-skinned. Their case, if fought, will take a week of hard swearing, a week of the public's money and time. It will give admirable opportunities to eminent counsel, excellent reading to the general public, first-rate sport all round.

"The papers will have a regular carnival. I repeat, they are the very people for whom our law of divorce is framed. There's a great deal to be said for publicity, but all the same it puts a premium on insensibility, and causes a vast amount of suffering to innocent people. I told you once before, to get a divorce, even if you deserve it, you mustn't be a sensitive person. Those three will go through it all splendidly, but every scrap of skin will be torn off you and our poor friends down here, and the result will be a drawn battle at the end! That's if it's fought, and if it comes on I don't see how we can let it go unfought; it's contrary to my instincts. If we let it go undefended, mark my words, your ward and George Pendyce will be sick of each other before the law allows them to marry, and George, as his father says, for the sake of 'morality,' will have to marry a woman who is tired of him, or of whom he is tired. Now you've got it straight from the shoulder, and I'm going up to bed. It's a heavy dew. Lock this door after you."

Mr. Paramor made his way into the conservatory. He stopped and came back.

"Pendyce," he said, "perfectly understands all I've been telling you. He'd give his eyes for the case not to come on, but you'll see he'll rub everything up the wrong way, and it'll be a miracle if we succeed. That's 'Pendycitis'! We've all got a touch of it. Good-night!"

Gregory was left alone outside the country house with his big star. And as his thoughts were seldom of an impersonal kind he did not reflect on "Pendycitis," but on Helen Bellew. And the longer he thought the more he thought of her as he desired to think, for this was natural to him; and ever more ironical grew the twinkling of his star above the spinney where the nightingale was singing.

CHAPTER X

GEORGE GOES FOR THE GLOVES

On the Thursday of the Epsom Summer Meeting, George Pendyce sat in the corner of a first-class railway-carriage trying to make two and two into five. On a sheet of Stoics' Club note-paper his racing-debts were stated to a penny — one thousand and forty five pounds overdue, and below, seven hundred and fifty lost at the current meeting. Below these again his private debts were indicated by the round figure of one thousand pounds. It was round by courtesy, for he had only calculated those bills which had been sent in, and Providence, which knows all things, preferred the rounder figure of fifteen hundred. In sum, therefore, he had against him a total of three thousand two hundred and ninety-five pounds. And since at Tattersalls and the Stock Exchange, where men are engaged in perpetual motion, an almost absurd punctiliousness is required in the payment of those sums which have for the moment inadvertently been lost, seventeen hundred and ninety-five of this must infallibly be raised by Monday next. Indeed, only a certain liking for George, a good loser and a good winner, and the fear of dropping a good customer, had induced the firm of bookmakers to let that debt of one thousand and forty-five stand over the Epsom Meeting.

To set against these sums (in which he had not counted his current trainer's bill, and the expenses, which he could not calculate, of the divorce suit), he had, first, a bank balance which he might still overdraw another twenty pounds; secondly, the Ambler and two bad selling platers; and thirdly (more considerable item), X, or that which he might, or indeed must, win over the Ambler's race this afternoon.

Whatever else, it was not pluck that was lacking in the character of George Pendyce. This quality was in his fibre, in the consistency of his blood, and confronted with a situation which, to some men, and especially to men not brought up on the hereditary plan, might have seemed desperate, he exhibited no sign of anxiety or distress. Into the consideration of his difficulties he imported certain principles: (1) He did not intend to be posted at Tattersalls. Sooner than that he would go to the Jews; the entail was all he could look to borrow on; the Hebrews would force him to pay through the nose. (2) He did not intend to show the white feather, and in backing his horse meant to "go for the gloves." (3) He did not intend to think of the future; the thought of the present was quite bad enough.

The train bounded and swung as though rushing onwards to a tune, and George sat quietly in his corner.

Amongst his fellows in the carriage was the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow, who, though not a racing-man, took a kindly interest in our breed of horses, which by attendance at the principal meetings he hoped to improve.

"Your horse going to run, George?"

George nodded.

"I shall have a fiver on him for luck. I can't afford to bet. Saw your mother at the Foxholme garden-party last week. You seen them lately?"

George shook his head and felt an odd squeeze: at his heart.

"You know they had a fire at old Peacock's farm; I hear the Squire and Barter did wonders. He's as game as a pebble, the Squire."

Again George nodded, and again felt that squeeze at his heart.

"Aren't they coming to town this season?"

"Haven't heard," answered George. "Have a cigar?"

Winlow took the cigar, and cutting it with a small penknife, scrutinised George's square face with his leisurely eyes. It needed a physiognomist to penetrate its impassivity. Winlow thought to himself:

'I shouldn't be surprised if what they say about old George is true.'... "Had a good meeting so far?"

"So-so."

They parted on the racecourse. George went at once to see his trainer and thence into Tattersalls' ring. He took with him that equation with X, and sought the society of two gentlemen quietly dressed, one of whom was making a note in a little book with a gold pencil. They greeted him respectfully, for it was to them that he owed the bulk of that seventeen hundred and ninety-five pounds.

"What price will you lay against my horse?"

"Evens, Mr. Pendyce," replied the gentleman with the gold pencil, "to a monkey."

George booked the bet. It was not his usual way of doing business, but to-day everything seemed different, and something stronger than custom was at work.

'I am going for the gloves,' he thought; 'if it doesn't come off", I'm done anyhow.'

He went to another quietly dressed gentleman with a diamond pin and a Jewish face. And as he went from one quietly dressed gentleman to another there preceded him some subtle messenger, who breathed the words, 'Mr. Pendyce is going for the gloves,' so that at each visit he found they had greater confidence than ever in his horse. Soon he had promised to pay two thousand pounds if the Ambler lost, and received the assurance of eminent gentlemen, quietly dressed, that they would pay him fifteen hundred if the Ambler won. The odds now stood at two to one on, and he had found it impossible to back the Ambler for "a place," in accordance with his custom.

'Made a fool of myself,' he thought; 'ought never to have gone into the ring at all; ought to have let Barney's work it quietly. It doesn't matter!'

He still required to win three hundred pounds to settle on the Monday, and laid a final bet of seven hundred to three hundred and fifty pounds upon his horse. Thus, without spending a penny, simply by making a few promises, he had solved the equation with X.

On leaving the ring, he entered the bar and drank some whisky. He then went to the paddock. The starting-bell for the second race had rung; there was hardly anyone there, but in a far corner the Ambler was being led up and down by a boy.

George glanced round to see that no acquaintances were near, and joined in this promenade. The Ambler turned his black, wild eye, crescented with white, threw up his head, and gazed far into the distance.

'If one could only make him understand!' thought George.

When his horse left the paddock for the starting-post George went back to the stand. At the bar he drank some more whisky, and heard someone say:

"I had to lay six to four. I want to find Pendyce; they say he's backed it heavily."

George put down his glass, and instead of going to his usual place, mounted slowly to the top of the stand.

'I don't want them buzzing round me,' he thought.

At the top of the stand — that national monument, visible for twenty miles around — he knew himself to be safe. Only "the many" came here, and amongst the many he thrust himself till at the very top he could rest his glasses on a rail and watch the colours. Besides his own peacock blue there was a straw, a blue with white stripes, a red with white stars.

They say that through the minds of drowning men troop ghosts of past experience. It was not so with George; his soul was fastened on that little daub of peacock blue. Below the glasses his lips were colourless from hard compression; he moistened them continually. The four little Coloured daubs stole into line, the flag fell.

"They're off!" That roar, like the cry of a monster, sounded all around. George steadied his glasses on the rail. Blue with white stripes was leading, the Ambler lying last. Thus they came round the further bend. And Providence, as though determined that someone should benefit by his absorption, sent a hand sliding under George's elbows, to remove the pin from his tie and slide away. Round Tattenham Corner George saw his horse take the lead. So, with straw closing up, they came into the straight. The Ambler's jockey looked back and raised his whip; in that instant, as if by magic, straw drew level; down came the whip on the Ambler's flank; again as by magic straw was in front. The saying of his old jockey darted through George's mind: "Mark my words, sir, that 'orse knows what's what, and when they're like that they're best let alone."

"Sit still, you fool!" he muttered.

The whip came down again; straw was two lengths in front.

Someone behind said:

"The favourite's beat! No, he's not, by Jove!" For as though George's groan had found its way to the jockey's ears, he dropped his whip. The Ambler sprang forward. George saw that he was gaining. All his soul went out to his horse's struggle. In each of those fifteen seconds he died and was born again; with each stride all that was loyal and brave in his nature leaped into flame, all that was base sank, for he himself was racing with his horse, and the sweat poured down his brow. And his lips babbled broken sounds that no one heard, for all around were babbling too.

Locked together, the Ambler and straw ran home. Then followed a hush, for no one knew which of the two had won. The numbers went up "Seven-Two-Five."

"The favourite's second! Beaten by a nose!" said a voice.

George bowed his head, and his whole spirit felt numb. He closed his glasses and moved with the crowd to the stairs. A voice behind him said:

"He'd have won in another stride!"

Another answered:

"I hate that sort of horse. He curled up at the whip."

George ground his teeth.

"Curse you!" he muttered, "you little Cockney; what do you know about a horse?"

The crowd surged; the speakers were lost to sight.

The long descent from the stand gave him time. No trace of emotion showed on his face when he appeared in the paddock. Blacksmith the trainer stood by the Ambler's stall.

"That idiot Tipping lost us the race, sir," he began with quivering lips. "If he'd only left him alone, the horse would have won in a canter. What on earth made him use his whip? He deserves to lose his license. He — —"

The gall and bitterness of defeat surged into George's brain.

"It's no good your talking, Blacksmith," he said; "you put him up. What the devil made you quarrel with Swells?"

The little man's chin dropped in sheer surprise.

George turned away, and went up to the jockey, but at the sick look on the poor youth's face the angry words died off his tongue.

"All right, Tipping; I'm not going to rag you." And with the ghost of a smile he passed into the Ambler's stall. The groom had just finished putting him to rights; the horse stood ready to be led from the field of his defeat. The groom moved out, and George went to the Ambler's head. There is no place, no corner, on a racecourse where a man may show his heart. George did but lay his forehead against the velvet of his horse's muzzle, and for one short second hold it there. The Ambler awaited the end of that brief caress, then with a snort threw up his head, and with his wild, soft eyes seemed saying, 'You fools! what do you know of me?'

George stepped to one side.

"Take him away," he said, and his eyes followed the Ambler's receding form.

A racing-man of a different race, whom he knew and did not like, came up to him as he left the paddock.

"I suppothe you won't thell your horse, Pendythe?" he said. "I'll give you five thou. for him. He ought never to have lotht; the beating won't help him with the handicappers a little bit."

'You carrion crow!' thought George.

"Thanks; he's not for sale," he answered.

He went back to the stand, but at every step and in each face, he seemed to see the equation which now he could only solve with X2. Thrice he went into the bar. It was on the last of these occasions that he said to himself: "The horse must go. I shall never have a horse like him again."

Over that green down which a hundred thousand feet had trodden brown, which a hundred thousand hands had strewn with bits of paper, cigar-ends, and the fragments of discarded food, over the great approaches to the battlefield, where all was pathway leading to and from the fight, those who make livelihood in such a fashion, least and littlest followers, were bawling, hawking, whining to the warriors flushed with victory or wearied by defeat: Over that green down, between one-legged men and ragged acrobats, women with babies at the breast, thimble-riggers, touts, walked George Pendyce, his mouth hard set and his head bent down.

“Good luck, Captain, good luck to-morrow; good luck, good luck!... For the love of Gawd, your lordship!... Roll, bowl, or pitch!”

The sun, flaming out after long hiding, scorched the back of his neck; the free down wind, fouled by foetid odours, brought to his ears the monster’s last cry, “They’re off!”

A voice hailed him.

George turned and saw Winlow, and with a curse and a smile he answered:

“Hallo!”

The Hon. Geoffrey ranged alongside, examining George’s face at leisure.

“Afraid you had a bad race, old chap! I hear you’ve sold the Ambler to that fellow Guilderstein.”

In George’s heart something snapped.

‘Already?’ he thought. ‘The brute’s been crowing. And it’s that little bounder that my horse — my horse....’

He answered calmly:

“Wanted the money.”

Winlow, who was not lacking in cool discretion, changed the subject.

Late that evening George sat in the Stoics’ window overlooking Piccadilly. Before his eyes, shaded by his hand, the hansoms passed, flying East and West, each with the single pale disc of face, or the twin discs of faces close together; and the gentle roar of the town came in, and the cool air refreshed by night. In the light of the lamps the trees of the Green Park stood burnished out of deep shadow where nothing moved; and high over all, the stars and purple sky seemed veiled with golden gauze. Figures without end filed by. Some glanced at the lighted windows and the man in the white shirt-front sitting there. And many thought: ‘Wish I were that swell, with nothing to do but step into his father’s shoes;’ and to many no thought came. But now and then some passer murmured to himself: “Looks lonely sitting there.”

And to those faces gazing up, George’s lips were grim, and over them came and went a little bitter smile; but on his forehead he felt still the touch of his horse’s muzzle, and his eyes, which none could see, were dark with pain.

CHAPTER XI

MR. BARTER TAKES A WALK

The event at the Rectory was expected every moment. The Rector, who practically never suffered, disliked the thought and sight of others' suffering. Up to this day, indeed, there had been none to dislike, for in answer to inquiries his wife had always said "No, dear, no; I'm all right — really, it's nothing." And she had always said it smiling, even when her smiling lips were white. But this morning in trying to say it she had failed to smile. Her eyes had lost their hopelessly hopeful shining, and sharply between her teeth she said: "Send for Dr. Wilson, Russell."

The Rector kissed her, shutting his eyes, for he was afraid of her face with its lips drawn back, and its discoloured cheeks. In five minutes the groom was hastening to Cornmarket on the roan cob, and the Rector stood in his study, looking from one to another of his household gods, as though calling them to his assistance. At last he took down a bat and began oiling it. Sixteen years ago, when Husell was born, he had been overtaken by sounds that he had never to this day forgotten; they had clung to the nerves of his memory, and for no reward would he hear them again. They had never been uttered since, for like most wives, his wife was a heroine; but, used as he was to this event, the Rector had ever since suffered from panic. It was as though Providence, storing all the anxiety which he might have felt throughout, let him have it with a rush at the last moment. He put the bat back into its case, corked the oil-bottle, and again stood looking at his household gods. None came to his aid. And his thoughts were as they had nine times been before. 'I ought not to go out. I ought to wait for Wilson. Suppose anything were to happen. Still, nurse is with her, and I can do nothing. Poor Rose — poor darling! It's my duty to —— What's that? I'm better out of the way.'

Softly, without knowing that it was softly, he opened the door; softly, without knowing it was softly, he stepped to the hat-rack and took his black straw hat; softly, without knowing it was softly, he went out, and, unfaltering, hurried down the drive.

Three minutes later he appeared again, approaching the house faster than he had set forth.

He passed the hall door, ran up the stairs, and entered his wife's room.

"Rose dear, Rose, can I do anything?"

Mrs. Barter put out her hand, a gleam of malice shot into her eyes. Through her set lips came a vague murmur, and the words:

"No, dear, nothing. Better go for your walk."

Mr. Barter pressed his lips to her quivering hand, and backed from the room. Outside the door he struck at the air with his fist, and, running downstairs, was once more lost to sight. Faster and faster he walked, leaving the village behind, and among the country sights and sounds and scents — his nerves began to recover. He was able to think again of other things: of Cecil's school report — far from satisfactory; of old Hermon in the village, whom he suspected of overdoing his bronchitis with an eye to port; of the return match with Coldingham, and his belief that their left-hand bowler only wanted "hitting"; of the new edition of hymn-books, and the slackness of the upper village in attending church — five households less honest and ductile than the rest, a foreign look about them, dark people, un-English. In thinking of these things he forgot what he wanted to forget; but hearing the sound of wheels, he entered a field as though to examine the crops until the vehicle had passed.

It was not Wilson, but it might have been, and at the next turning he unconsciously branched off the Cornmarket road.

It was noon when he came within sight of Coldingham, six miles from Worsted Skeynes. He would have enjoyed a glass of beer, but, unable to enter the public-house, he went into the churchyard instead. He sat down on a bench beneath a sycamore opposite the Winlow graves, for Coldingham was Lord Montrossor's seat, and it was here that all the Winlows lay. Bees were busy above them in the branches, and Mr. Barter thought:

'Beautiful site. We've nothing like this at Worsted Skeynes....'

But suddenly he found that he could not sit there and think. Suppose his wife were to die! It happened sometimes; the wife of John Tharp of Bletchingham had died in giving birth to her tenth child! His forehead was wet, and he wiped it. Casting an angry glance at the Winlow graves, he left the seat.

He went down by the further path, and came out on the green. A cricket-match was going on, and in spite of himself the Rector stopped. The Coldingham team were in the field. Mr. Barter watched. As he had thought, that left-hand bowler bowled a good pace, and "came in" from the off, but his length was poor, very poor! A determined batsman would soon knock him off! He moved into line with the wickets to see how much the fellow "came in," and he grew so absorbed that he did not at first notice the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow in pads and a blue and green blazer, smoking a cigarette astride of a camp-stool.

"Ah, Winlow, it's your team against the village. Afraid I can't stop to see you bat. I was just passing — matter I had to attend to — must get back!"

The real solemnity of his face excited Winlow's curiosity.

"Can't you stop and have lunch with us?"

"No, no; my wife — Must get back!"

Winlow murmured:

"Ah yes, of course." His leisurely blue eyes, always in command of the situation, rested on the Rector's heated face. "By the way," he said, "I'm afraid George Pendyce is rather hard hit. Been obliged to sell his horse. I saw him at Epsom the week before last."

The Rector brightened.

"I made certain he'd come to grief over that betting," he said. "I'm very sorry — very sorry indeed."

"They say," went on Winlow, "that he dropped four thousand over the Thursday race.

"He was pretty well dipped before, I know. Poor old George! such an awfully good chap!"

"Ah," repeated Mr. Barter, "I'm very sorry — very sorry indeed. Things were bad enough as it was."

A ray of interest illumined the leisureliness of the Hon. Geoffrey's eyes.

"You mean about Mrs. —— H'm, yes?" he said. "People are talking; you can't stop that. I'm so sorry for the poor Squire, and Mrs. Pendyce. I hope something'll be done."

The Rector frowned.

"I've done my best," he said. "Well hit, sir! I've always said that anyone with a little pluck can knock off that lefthand man you think so much of. He 'comes in' a bit, but he bowls a shocking bad length. Here I am dawdling. I must get back!"

And once more that real solemnity came over Mr. Barter's face.

"I suppose you'll be playing for Coldingham against us on Thursday? Good-bye!"

Nodding in response to Winlow's salute, he walked away.

He avoided the churchyard, and took a path across the fields. He was hungry and thirsty. In one of his sermons there occurred this passage: "We should habituate ourselves to hold our appetites in check. By constantly accustoming our selves to abstinence little abstinences in our daily life — we alone can attain to that true spirituality without which we cannot hope to know God." And it was well known throughout his household and the village that the Rector's temper was almost dangerously spiritual if anything detained him from his meals. For he was a man physiologically sane and healthy to the core, whose digestion and functions, strong, regular, and straightforward as the day, made calls upon him which would not be denied. After preaching that particular sermon, he frequently for a week or more denied himself a second glass of ale at lunch, or his after-dinner cigar, smoking a pipe instead. And he was perfectly honest in his belief that he attained a greater spirituality thereby, and perhaps indeed he did. But even if he did not, there was no one to notice this, for the majority of his flock accepted his spirituality as matter of course, and of the insignificant minority there were few who did not make allowance for the fact that he was their pastor by virtue of necessity, by virtue of a system which had placed him there almost mechanically, whether he would or no. Indeed, they respected him the more that he was their Rector, and could not be removed, and were glad that theirs was no common Vicar like that of Coldingham, dependent on the caprices of others. For, with the exception of two bad characters and one atheist, the whole village, Conservatives or Liberals (there were Liberals now that they were beginning to believe that the ballot was really secret), were believers in the hereditary system.

Insensibly the Rector directed himself towards Bletchingham, where there was a temperance house. At heart he loathed lemonade and gingerbeer in the middle of the day, both of which made his economy cold and uneasy, but he felt he could go nowhere else. And his spirits rose at the sight of Bletchingham spire.

'Bread and cheese,' he thought. 'What's better than bread and cheese? And they shall make me a cup of coffee.'

In that cup of coffee there was something symbolic and fitting to his mental state. It was agitated and thick, and impregnated with the peculiar flavour of country coffee. He swallowed but little, and resumed his march. At the first turning he passed the village school, whence issued a rhythmic but discordant hum, suggestive of some dull machine that had served its time. The Rector paused to listen. Leaning on the wall of the little play-yard, he tried to make out the words that, like a religious chant, were being intoned within. It sounded like, "Twice two's four, twice four's six, twice six's eight," and he passed on, thinking, 'A fine thing; but if we don't take care we shall go too far; we shall unfit them for their stations,' and he frowned. Crossing a stile, he took a footpath. The air was full of the singing of larks, and the bees were pulling down the clover-stalks. At the bottom of the field was a little pond overhung with willows. On a bare strip of pasture, within thirty yards, in the full sun, an old horse was tethered to a peg. It stood with its face towards the pond, baring its yellow teeth, and stretching out its head, all bone and hollows, to the water which it could not reach. The Rector stopped. He did not know the horse personally, for it was three fields short of his parish, but he saw that the poor beast wanted water. He went up, and finding that the knot of the halter hurt his fingers, stooped down and wrenched at the peg. While he was thus straining and tugging, crimson in the face, the old horse stood still, gazing at him out of his bleary eyes. Mr. Barter sprang upright with a jerk, the peg in his hand, and the old horse started back.

"So ho, boy!" said the Rector, and angrily he muttered: "A shame to tie the poor beast up here in the sun. I should like to give his owner a bit of my mind!"

He led the animal towards the water. The old horse followed tranquilly enough, but as he had done nothing to deserve his misfortune, neither did he feel any gratitude towards his deliverer. He drank his fill, and fell to grazing. The Rector experienced a sense of disillusionment, and drove the peg again into the softer earth under the willows; then raising himself, he looked hard at the old horse.

The animal continued to graze. The Rector took out his handkerchief, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and frowned. He hated ingratitude in man or beast.

Suddenly he realised that he was very tired.

"It must be over by now," he said to himself, and hastened on in the heat across the fields.

The Rectory door was open. Passing into the study, he sat down a moment to collect his thoughts. People were moving above; he heard a long moaning sound that filled his heart with terror.

He got up and rushed to the bell, but did not ring it, and ran upstairs instead. Outside his wife's room he met his children's old nurse. She was standing on the mat, with her hands to her ears, and the tears were rolling down her face.

"Oh, sir!" she said—"oh, sir!"

The Rector glared.

"Woman!" he cried—"woman!"

He covered his ears and rushed downstairs again. There was a lady in the hall. It was Mrs. Pendyce, and he ran to her, as a hurt child runs to its mother.

"My wife," he said—"my poor wife! God knows what they're doing to her up there, Mrs. Pendyce!" and he hid his face in his hands.

She, who had been a Totteridge, stood motionless; then, very gently putting her gloved hand on his thick arm, where the muscles stood out from the clenching of his hands, she said:

"Dear Mr. Barter, Dr. Wilson is so clever! Come into the drawing-room!"

The Rector, stumbling like a blind man, suffered himself to be led. He sat down on the sofa, and Mrs. Pendyce sat down beside him, her hand still on his arm; over her face passed little quivers, as though she were holding herself in. She repeated in her gentle voice:

"It will be all right — it will be all right. Come, come!"

In her concern and sympathy there was apparent, not aloofness, but a faint surprise that she should be sitting there stroking the Rector's arm.

Mr. Barter took his hands from before his face.

"If she dies," he said in a voice unlike his own, "I'll not bear it."

In answer to those words, forced from him by that which is deeper than habit, Mrs. Pendyce's hand slipped from his arm and rested on the shiny chintz covering of the sofa, patterned with green and crimson. Her soul shrank from the violence in his voice.

"Wait here," she said. "I will go up and see."

To command was foreign to her nature, but Mr. Barter, with a look such as a little rueful boy might give, obeyed.

When she was gone he stood listening at the door for some sound — for any sound, even the sound of her dress — but there was none, for her petticoat was of lawn, and the Rector was alone with a silence that he could not bear. He began to pace the room in his thick boots, his hands clenched behind him, his forehead butting the air, his lips folded; thus a bull, penned for the first time, turns and turns, showing the whites of its full eyes.

His thoughts drove here and there, fearful, angered, without guidance; he did not pray. The words he had spoken so many times left him as though of malice. "We are all in the hands of God! — we are all in the hands of God!" Instead of them he could think of nothing but the old saying Mr. Paramor had used in the Squire's dining-room, "There is moderation in all things," and this with cruel irony kept humming in his ears. "Moderation in all things — moderation in all things!" and his wife lying there — his doing, and....

There was a sound. The Rector's face, so brown and red, could not grow pale, but his great fists relaxed. Mrs. Pendyce was standing in the doorway with a peculiar half-pitiful, half-excited smile.

"It's all right — a boy. The poor dear has had a dreadful time!"

The Rector looked at her, but did not speak; then abruptly he brushed past her in the doorway, hurried into his study and locked the door. Then, and then only, he kneeled down, and remained there many minutes, thinking of nothing.

CHAPTER XII

THE SQUIRE MAKES UP HIS MIND

That same evening at nine o'clock, sitting over the last glass of a pint of port, Mr. Barter felt an irresistible longing for enjoyment, an impulse towards expansion and his fellow-men.

Taking his hat and buttoning his coat — for though the June evening was fine the easterly breeze was eager — he walked towards the village.

Like an emblem of that path to God of which he spoke on Sundays, the grey road between trim hedges threaded the shadow of the elm-trees where the rooks had long since gone to bed. A scent of wood-smoke clung in the air; the cottages appeared, the forge, the little shops facing the village green. Lights in the doors and windows deepened; a breeze, which hardly stirred the chestnut leaves, fled with a gentle rustling through the aspens. Houses and trees, houses and trees! Shelter through the past and through the days to come!

The Rector stopped the first man he saw.

"Fine weather for the hay, Aiken! How's your wife doing — a girl? Ah, ha! You want some boys! You heard of our event at the Rectory? I'm thankful to say — —"

From man to man and house to house he soothed his thirst for fellowship, for the lost sense of dignity that should efface again the scar of suffering. And above him the chestnuts in their breathing stillness, the aspens with their tender rustling, seemed to watch and whisper: "Oh, little men! oh, little men!"

The moon, at the end of her first quarter, sailed out of the shadow of the churchyard — the same young moon that had sailed in her silver irony when the first Barter preached, the first Pendyce was Squire at Worsted Skeynes; the same young moon that, serene, ineffable, would come again when the last Barter slept, the last Pendyce was gone, and on their gravestones, through the amethystine air, let fall her gentle light.

The Rector thought:

'I shall set Stedman to work on that corner. We must have more room; the stones there are a hundred and fifty years old if they're a day. You can't read a single word. They'd better be the first to go.'

He passed on along the paddock footway leading to the Squire's.

Day was gone, and only the moonbeams lighted the tall grasses.

At the Hall the long French windows of the dining-room were open; the Squire was sitting there alone, brooding sadly above the remnants of the fruit he had been eating. Flanking him on either wall hung a silent company, the effigies of past Pendyces; and at the end, above the oak and silver of the sideboard, the portrait of his wife was looking at them under lifted brows, with her faint wonder.

He raised his head.

"Ah, Barter! How's your wife?"

"Doing as well as can be expected."

"Glad to hear that! A fine constitution — wonderful vitality. Port or claret?"

"Thanks; just a glass of port."

"Very trying for your nerves. I know what it is. We're different from the last generation; they thought nothing of it. When Charles was born my dear old father was out hunting all day. When my wife had George, it made me as nervous as a cat!"

The Squire stopped, then hurriedly added:

"But you're so used to it."

Mr. Barter frowned.

"I was passing Coldingham to-day," he said. "I saw Winlow. He asked after you."

"Ah! Winlow! His wife's a very nice woman. They've only the one child, I think?"

The Rector winced.

"Winlow tells me," he said abruptly, "that George has sold his horse."

The Squire's face changed. He glanced suspiciously at Mr. Barter, but the Rector was looking at his glass.

"Sold his horse! What's the meaning of that? He told you why, I suppose?"

The Rector drank off his wine.

"I never ask for reasons," he said, "where racing-men are concerned. It's my belief they know no more what they're about than so many dumb animals."

"Ah! racing-men!" said Mr. Pendyce. "But George doesn't bet."

A gleam of humour shot into the Rector's eyes. He pressed his lips together.

The Squire rose.

"Come now, Barter!" he said.

The Rector blushed. He hated tale-bearing — that is, of course, in the case of a man; the case of a woman was different — and just as, when he went to Bellew he had been careful not to give George away, so now he was still more on his guard.

"No, no, Pendyce."

The Squire began to pace the room, and Mr. Barter felt something stir against his foot; the spaniel John emerging at the end, just where the moonlight shone, a symbol of all that was subservient to the Squire, gazed up at his master with tragic eyes. 'Here, again,' they seemed to say, 'is something to disturb me!'

The Squire broke the silence.

"I've always counted on you, Barter; I count on you as I would on my own brother. Come, now, what's this about George?"

'After all,' thought the Rector, 'it's his father!'—"I know nothing but what they say," he blurted forth; "they talk of his having lost a lot of money. I dare say it's all nonsense. I never set much store by rumour. And if he's sold the horse, well, so much the better. He won’t be tempted to gamble again.”

But Horace Pendyce made no answer. A single thought possessed his bewildered, angry mind:

‘My son a gambler! Worsted Skeynes in the hands of a gambler!’

The Rector rose.

“It’s all rumour. You shouldn’t pay any attention. I should hardly think he’s been such a fool. I only know that I must get back to my wife. Good-night.”

And, nodding but confused, Mr. Barter went away through the French window by which he had come.

The Squire stood motionless.

A gambler!

To him, whose existence was bound up in Worsted Skeynes, whose every thought had some direct or indirect connection with it, whose son was but the occupier of that place he must at last vacate, whose religion was ancestor-worship, whose dread was change, no word could be so terrible. A gambler!

It did not occur to him that his system was in any way responsible for George’s conduct. He had said to Mr. Paramor: “I never had a system; I’m no believer in systems.” He had brought him up simply as a gentleman. He would have preferred that George should go into the Army, but George had failed; he would have preferred that George should devote himself to the estate, marry, and have a son, instead of idling away his time in town, but George had failed; and so, beyond furthering his desire to join the Yeomanry, and getting him proposed for the Stoics’ Club, what was there he could have done to keep him out of mischief? And now he was a gambler!

Once a gambler always a gambler!

To his wife’s face, looking down from the wall, he said:

“He gets it from you!”

But for all answer the face stared gently.

Turning abruptly, he left the room, and the spaniel John, for whom he had been too quick, stood with his nose to the shut door, scenting for someone to come and open it.

Mr. Pendyce went to his study, took some papers from a locked drawer, and sat a long time looking at them. One was the draft of his will, another a list of the holdings at Worsted Skeynes, their acreage and rents, a third a fair copy of the settlement, re-settling the estate when he had married. It was at this piece of supreme irony that Mr. Pendyce looked longest. He did not read it, but he thought:

‘And I can’t cut it! Paramor says so! A gambler!’

That “crassness” common to all men in this strange world, and in the Squire intensified, was rather a process than a quality — obedience to an instinctive dread of what was foreign to himself, an instinctive fear of seeing another’s point of view, an instinctive belief in precedent. And it was closely allied to his most deep and moral quality — the power of making a decision. Those decisions might be “crass” and stupid, conduce to unnecessary suffering, have no relation to morality or reason; but he could make them, and he could stick to them. By virtue of this power he was where he was, had been for centuries, and hoped to be for centuries to come. It was in his blood. By this alone he kept at bay the destroying forces that Time brought against him, his order, his inheritance; by this alone he could continue to hand down that inheritance to his son. And at the document which did hand it down he looked with angry and resentful eyes.

Men who conceive great resolutions do not always bring them forth with the ease and silence which they themselves desire. Mr. Pendyce went to his bedroom determined to say no word of what he had resolved to do. His wife was asleep. The Squire’s entrance wakened her, but she remained motionless, with her eyes closed, and it was the sight of that immobility, when he himself was so disturbed, which drew from him the words:

“Did you know that George was a gambler?”

By the light of the candle in his silver candlestick her dark eyes seemed suddenly alive.

“He’s been betting; he’s sold his horse. He’d never have sold that horse unless he were pushed. For all I know, he may be posted at Tattersalls!”

The sheets shivered as though she who lay within them were struggling. Then came her voice, cool and gentle:

“All young men bet, Horace; you must know that!”

The Squire at the foot of the bed held up the candle; the movement had a sinister significance.

“Do you defend him?” it seemed to say. “Do you defy me?”

Gripping the bed-rail, he cried:

“I’ll have no gambler and profligate for my son! I’ll not risk the estate!”

Mrs. Pendyce raised herself, and for many seconds stared at her husband. Her heart beat furiously. It had come! What she had been expecting all these days had come! Her pale lips answered:

“What do you mean? I don’t understand you, Horace.”

Mr. Pendyce’s eyes searched here and therefor what, he did not know.

“This has decided me,” he said. “I’ll have no half-measures. Until he can show me he’s done with that woman, until he can prove he’s given up this betting, until — until the heaven’s fallen, I’ll have no more to do with him!”

To Margery Pendyce, with all her senses quivering, that saying, “Until the heaven’s fallen,” was frightening beyond the rest. On the lips of her husband, those lips which had never spoken in metaphors, never swerved from the direct and commonplace, nor deserted the shibboleth of his order, such words had an evil and malignant sound.

He went on:

“I’ve brought him up as I was brought up myself. I never thought to have had a scamp for my son!”

Mrs. Pendyce’s heart stopped fluttering.

“How dare you, Horace!” she cried.

The Squire, letting go the bed-rail, paced to and fro. There was something savage in the sound of his footsteps through the utter silence.

"I've made up my mind," he said. "The estate — —"

There broke from Mrs. Pendyce a torrent of words:

"You talk of the way you brought George up! You — you never understood him! You — you never did anything for him! He just grew up like you all grow up in this — —" But no word followed, for she did not know herself what was that against which her soul had blindly fluttered its wings. "You never loved him as I do! What do I care about the estate? I wish it were sold! D'you think I like living here? D'you think I've ever liked it? D'you think I've ever — —" But she did not finish that saying: D'you think I've ever loved you? "My boy a scamp! I've heard you laugh and shake your head and say a hundred times: 'Young men will be young men!' You think I don't know how you'd all go on if you dared! You think I don't know how you talk among yourselves! As for gambling, you'd gamble too, if you weren't afraid! And now George is in trouble — —"

As suddenly as it had broken forth the torrent of her words dried up.

Mr. Pendyce had come back to the foot of the bed, and once more gripped the rail whereon the candle, still and bright, showed them each other's faces, very changed from the faces that they knew. In the Squire's lean brown throat, between the parted points of his stiff collar, a string seemed working. He stammered:

"You — you're talking like a madwoman! My father would have cut me off, his father would have cut him off! By God! do you think I'll stand quietly by and see it all played ducks and drakes with, and see that woman here, and see her son, a — a bastard, or as bad as a bastard, in my place? You don't know me!"

The last words came through his teeth like the growl of a dog. Mrs. Pendyce made the crouching movement of one who gathers herself to spring.

"If you give him up, I shall go to him; I will never come back!"

The Squire's grip on the rail relaxed; in the light of the candle, still and steady and bright — his jaw could be seen to fall. He snapped his teeth together, and turning abruptly, said:

"Don't talk such rubbish!"

Then, taking the candle, he went into his dressing-room.

And at first his feelings were simple enough; he had merely that sore sensation, that sense of raw offence, as at some gross and violent breach of taste.

'What madness,' he thought, 'gets into women! It would serve her right if I slept here!'

He looked around him. There was no place where he could sleep, not even a sofa, and taking up the candle, he moved towards the door. But a feeling of hesitation and forlornness rising, he knew not whence, made him pause irresolute before the window.

The young moon, riding low, shot her light upon his still, lean figure, and in that light it was strange to see how grey he looked — grey from head to foot, grey, and sad, and old, as though in summary of all the squires who in turn had looked upon that prospect frosted with young moonlight to the boundary of their lands. Out in the paddock he saw his old hunter Bob, with his head turned towards the house; and from the very bottom of his heart he sighed.

In answer to that sigh came a sound of something falling outside against the door. He opened it to see what might be there. The spaniel John, lying on a cushion of blue linen, with his head propped up against the wall, darkly turned his eyes.

'I am here, master,' he seemed to say; 'it is late — I was about to go to sleep; it has done me good, however, to see you;' and hiding his eyes from the light under a long black ear, he drew a stertorous breath. Mr. Pendyce shut-to the door. He had forgotten the existence of his dog. But, as though with the sight of that faithful creature he had regained belief in all that he was used to, in all that he was master of, in all that was — himself, he opened the bedroom door and took his place beside his wife.

And soon he was asleep.

PART III

CHAPTER I

MRS. PENDYCE'S ODYSSEY

But Mrs. Pendyce did not sleep. That blessed anodyne of the long day spent in his farmyards and fields was on her husband's eyes — no anodyne on hers; and through them, all that was deep, most hidden, sacred, was laid open to the darkness. If only those eyes could have been seen that night! But if the darkness had been light, nothing of all this so deep and sacred would have been there to see, for more deep, more sacred still, in Margery Pendyce, was the instinct of a lady. So elastic and so subtle, so interwoven of consideration for others and consideration for herself, so old, so very old, this instinct wrapped her from all eyes, like a suit of armour of the finest chain. The night must have been black indeed when she took that off and lay without it in the darkness.

With the first light she put it on again, and stealing from bed, bathed long and stealthily those eyes which felt as though they had been burned all night; thence went to the open window and leaned out. Dawn had passed, the birds were at morning music. Down there in the garden her flowers were meshed with the grey dew, and the trees were grey, spun with haze; dim and spectrelike, the old hunter, with his nose on the paddock rail, dozed in the summer mist.

And all that had been to her like prison out there, and all that she had loved, stole up on the breath of the unaired morning, and kept beating in her face, fluttering at the white linen above her heart like the wings of birds flying.

The first morning song ceased, and at the silence the sun smiled out in golden irony, and everything was shot with colour. A wan glow fell on Mrs. Pendyce's spirit, that for so many hours had been heavy and grey in lonely resolution. For to her gentle soul, unused to action, shrinking from violence, whose strength was the gift of the ages, passed into it against her very nature, the resolution she had formed was full of pain. Yet painful, even terrible in its demand for action, it did not waver, but shone like a star behind the dark and heavy clouds. In Margery Pendyce (who had been a Totteridge) there was no irascible and acrid "people's blood," no fierce misgivings, no ill-digested beer and cider — it was pure claret in her veins — she had nothing thick and angry in her soul to help her; that which she had resolved she must carry out, by virtue of a thin, fine flame, breathing far down in her — so far that nothing could extinguish it, so far that it had little warmth. It was not "I will not be overridden" that her spirit felt, but "I must not be over-ridden, for if I am over-ridden, I, and in me something beyond me, more important than myself, is all undone." And though she was far from knowing this, that something was her country's civilisation, its very soul, the meaning of it all gentleness, balance. Her spirit, of that quality so little gross that it would never set up a mean or petty quarrel, make mountains out of mole-hills, distort proportion, or get images awry, had taken its stand unconsciously, no sooner than it must, no later than it ought, and from that stand would not recede. The issue had passed beyond mother love to that self-love, deepest of all, which says:

"Do this, or forfeit the essence of your soul"

And now that she stole to her bed again, she looked at her sleeping husband whom she had resolved to leave, with no anger, no reproach, but rather with a long, incurious look which told nothing even to herself.

So, when the morning came of age and it was time to rise, by no action, look, or sign, did she betray the presence of the unusual in her soul. If this which was before her must be done, it would be carried out as though it were of no import, as though it were a daily action; nor did she force herself to quietude, or pride herself thereon, but acted thus from instinct, the instinct for avoiding fuss and unnecessary suffering that was bred in her.

Mr. Pendyce went out at half-past ten accompanied by his bailiff and the spaniel John. He had not the least notion that his wife still meant the words she had spoken overnight. He had told her again while dressing that he would have no more to do with George, that he would cut him out of his will, that he would force him by sheer rigour to come to heel, that, in short, he meant to keep his word, and it would have been unreasonable in him to believe that a woman, still less his wife, meant to keep hers.

Mrs. Pendyce spent the early part of the morning in the usual way. Half an hour after the Squire went out she ordered the carriage round, had two small trunks, which she had packed herself, brought down, and leisurely, with her little green bag, got in. To her maid, to the butler Bester, to the coachman Benson, she said that she was going up to stay with Mr. George. Norah and Bee were at the Tharps', so that there was no one to take leave of but old Roy, the Skye; and lest that leave-taking should prove too much for her, she took him with her to the station.

For her husband she left a little note, placing it where she knew he must see it at once, and no one else see it at all.

"DEAR HORACE,

"I have gone up to London to be with George. My address will be Green's Hotel, Bond Street. You will remember what I said last night. Perhaps you did not quite realise that I meant it. Take care of poor old Roy, and don't let them give him too much meat this hot weather. Jackman knows better than Ellis how to manage the roses this year. I should like to be told how poor Rose Barter gets on. Please do not worry about me. I shall write to dear Gerald when necessary, but I don't feel like writing to him or the girls at present.

"Good-bye, dear Horace; I am sorry if I grieve you.

"Your wife,

"MARGERY PENDYCE."

Just as there was nothing violent in her manner of taking this step, so there was nothing violent in her conception of it. To her it was not running away, a setting of her husband at defiance; there was no concealment of address, no melodramatic "I cannot come back to you." Such methods, such pistol-holdings, would have seemed to her ridiculous. It is true that practical details, such as the financial consequences, escaped the grasp of her mind, but even in this, her view, or rather lack of view, was really the wide, the even one. Horace would not let her starve: the idea was inconceivable. There was, too, her own three hundred a year. She had, indeed, no idea how much this meant, or what it represented, neither was she concerned, for she said to herself, "I should be quite happy in a cottage with Roy and my flowers;" and though, of course, she had not the smallest experience to go by, it was quite possible that she was right. Things which to others came only by money, to a Totteridge came without, and even if they came not, could well be dispensed with — for to this quality of soul, this gentle self-sufficiency, had the ages worked to bring her.

Yet it was hastily and with her head bent that she stepped from the carriage at the station, and the old Skye, who from the brougham seat could just see out of the window, from the tears on his nose that were not his own, from something in his heart that was, knew this was no common parting and whined behind the glass.

Mrs. Pendyce told her cabman to drive to Green's Hotel, and it was only after she had arrived, arranged her things, washed, and had lunch, that the beginnings of confusion and home-sickness stirred within her. Up to then a simmering excitement had kept her from thinking of how she was to act, or of what she had hoped, expected, dreamed, would come of her proceedings. Taking her sunshade, she walked out into Bond Street.

A passing man took off his hat.

'Dear me,' she thought, 'who was that? I ought to know!'

She had a rather vague memory for faces, and though she could not recall his name, felt more at home at once, not so lonely and adrift. Soon a quaint brightness showed in her eyes, looking at the toilettes of the passers-by, and at each shop-front, more engrossing than the last. Pleasure, like that which touches the soul of a young girl at her first dance, the souls of men landing on strange shores, touched Margery Pendyce. A delicious sense of entering the unknown, of braving the unexpected, and of the power to go on doing this delightfully for ever, enveloped her with the gay London air of this bright June day. She passed a perfume shop, and thought she had never smelt anything so nice. And next door she lingered long looking at some lace; and though she said to herself, "I must not buy anything; I shall want all my money for poor George," it made no difference to that sensation of having all things to her hand.

A list of theatres, concerts, operas confronted her in the next window, together with the effigies of prominent artistes. She looked at them with an eagerness that might have seemed absurd to anyone who saw her standing there. Was there, indeed, all this going on all day and every day, to be seen and heard for so few shillings? Every year, religiously, she had visited the opera once, the theatre twice, and no concerts; her husband did not care for music that was "classical." While she was standing there a woman begged of her, looking very tired and hot, with a baby in her arms so shrivelled and so small that it could hardly be seen. Mrs. Pendyce took out her purse and gave her half a crown, and as she did so felt a gush of feeling which was almost rage.

'Poor little baby!' she thought. 'There must be thousands like that, and I know nothing of them!'

She smiled to the woman, who smiled back at her; and a fat Jewish youth in a shop doorway, seeing them smile, smiled too, as though he found them charming. Mrs. Pendyce had a feeling that the town was saying pretty things to her, and this was so strange and pleasant that she could hardly believe it, for Worsted Skeynes had omitted to say that sort of thing to her for over thirty years. She looked in the window of a hat shop, and found pleasure in the sight of herself. The window was kind to her grey linen, with black velvet knots and guipure, though it was two years old; but, then, she had only been able to wear it once last summer, owing to poor Hubert's death. The window was kind, too, to her cheeks, and eyes, which had that touching brightness, and to the silver-powdered darkness of her hair. And she thought: 'I don't look so very old!' But her own hat reflected in the hat-shop window displeased her now; it turned down all round, and though she loved that shape, she was afraid it was not fashionable this year. And she looked long in the window of that shop, trying to persuade herself that the hats in there would suit her, and that she liked what she did not like. In other shop windows she looked, too. It was a year since she had seen any, and for thirty-four years past she had only seen them in company with the Squire or with her daughters, none of whom cared much for shops.

The people, too, were different from the people that she saw when she went about with Horace or her girls. Almost all seemed charming, having a new, strange life, in which she — Margery Pendyce — had unaccountably a little part; as though really she might come to know them, as though they might tell her something of themselves, of what they felt and thought, and even might stand listening, taking a kindly interest in what she said. This, too, was strange, and a friendly smile became fixed upon her face, and of those who saw it — shop-girls, women of fashion, coachmen, clubmen, policemen — most felt a little warmth about their hearts; it was pleasant to see on the lips of that faded lady with the silvered arching hair under a hat whose brim turned down all round.

So Mrs. Pendyce came to Piccadilly and turned westward towards George's club. She knew it well, for she never failed to look at the windows when she passed, and once — on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee — had spent a whole day there to see that royal show.

She began to tremble as she neared it, for though she did not, like the Squire, torture her mind with what might or might not come to pass, care had nested in her heart.

George was not in his club, and the porter could not tell her where he was. Mrs. Pendyce stood motionless. He was her son; how could she ask for his address? The porter waited, knowing a lady when he saw one. Mrs. Pendyce said gently:

"Is there a room where I could write a note, or would it be — —"

"Certainly not, ma'am. I can show you to a room at once."

And though it was only a mother to a son, the porter preceded her with the quiet discretion of one who aids a mistress to her lover; and perhaps he was right in his view of the relative values of love, for he had great experience, having lived long in the best society.

On paper headed with the fat white "Stoics' Club," so well known on George's letters, Mrs. Pendyce wrote what she had to say. The little dark room where she sat was without sound, save for the buzzing of a largish fly in a streak of sunlight below the blind. It was dingy in colour; its furniture was old. At the Stoics' was found neither the new art nor the resplendent drapings of those larger clubs sacred to the middle classes. The little writing-room had an air of mourning: "I am so seldom used; but be at home in me; you might find me tucked away in almost any country-house!"

Yet many a solitary Stoic had sat there and written many a note to many a woman. George, perhaps, had written to Helen Bellew at that very table with that very pen, and Mrs. Pendyce's heart ached jealously.

"DEAREST GEORGE" (she wrote),

"I have something very particular to tell you. Do come to me at Green's Hotel. Come soon, my dear. I shall be lonely and unhappy till I see you.

"Your loving

"MARGERY PENDYCE."

And this note, which was just what she would have sent to a lover, took that form, perhaps unconsciously, because she had never had a lover thus to write to.

She slipped the note and half a crown diffidently into the porter's hand; refused his offer of some tea, and walked vaguely towards the Park.

It was five o'clock; the sun was brighter than ever. People in carriages and people on foot in one leisurely, unending stream were filing in at Hyde Park Corner. Mrs. Pendyce went, too, and timidly — she was unused to traffic — crossed to the further side and took a chair. Perhaps George was in the Park and she might see him; perhaps Helen Bellew was there, and she might see her; and the thought of this made her heart beat and her eyes under their uplifted brows stare gently at each figure-old men and young men, women of the world, fresh young girls. How charming they looked, how sweetly they were dressed! A feeling of envy mingled with the joy she ever felt at seeing pretty things; she was quite unconscious that she herself was pretty under that hat whose brim turned down all round. But as she sat a leaden feeling slowly closed her heart, varied by nervous flutterings, when she saw someone whom she ought to know. And whenever, in response to a salute, she was forced to bow her head, a blush rose in her cheeks, a wan smile seemed to make confession:

"I know I look a guy; I know it's odd for me to be sitting here alone!"

She felt old — older than she had ever felt before. In the midst of this gay crowd, of all this life and sunshine, a feeling of loneliness which was almost fear — a feeling of being utterly adrift, cut off from all the world — came over her; and she felt like one of her own plants, plucked up from its native earth, with all its poor roots hanging bare, as though groping for the earth to cling to. She knew now that she had lived too long in the soil that she had hated; and was too old to be transplanted. The custom of the country — that weighty, wingless creature born of time and of the earth — had its limbs fast twined around her. It had made of her its mistress, and was not going to let her go.

CHAPTER II

THE SON AND THE MOTHER

Harder than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle is it for a man to become a member of the Stoics' Club, except by virtue of the hereditary principle; for unless he be nourished he cannot be elected, and since by the club's first rule he may have no occupation whatsoever, he must be nourished by the efforts of those who have gone before. And the longer they have gone before the more likely he is to receive no blackballs.

Yet without entering into the Stoics' Club it is difficult for a man to attain that supreme outward control which is necessary to conceal his lack of control within; and, indeed, the club is an admirable instance of how Nature places the remedy to hand for the disease. For, perceiving how George Pendyce and hundreds of other young men "to the manner born" had lived from their birth up in no connection whatever with the struggles and sufferings of life, and fearing lest, when Life in her careless and ironical fashion brought them into abrupt contact with ill-bred events they should make themselves a nuisance by their cries of dismay and wonder, Nature had devised a mask and shaped it to its highest form within the portals of the Stoics' Club. With this mask she clothed the faces of these young men whose souls she doubted, and called them — gentlemen. And when she, and she alone, heard their poor squeaks behind that mask, as Life placed clumsy feet on them, she pitied them, knowing that it was not they who were in fault, but the unpruned system which had made them what they were. And in her pity she endowed many of them with thick skins, steady feet, and complacent souls, so that, treading in well-worn paths their lives long, they might slumber to their deaths in those halls where their fathers had slumbered to their deaths before them. But sometimes Nature (who was not yet a Socialist) rustled her wings and heaved a sigh, lest the excesses and excrescences of their system should bring about excesses and excrescences of the opposite sort. For extravagance of all kinds was what she hated, and of that particular form of extravagance which Mr. Paramor so vulgarly called "Pendycitis" she had a horror.

It may happen that for long years the likeness between father and son will lie dormant, and only when disintegrating forces threaten the links of the chain binding them together will that likeness leap forth, and by a piece of Nature's irony become the main factor in destroying the hereditary principle for which it is the silent, the most worthy, excuse.

It is certain that neither George nor his father knew the depth to which this "Pendycitis" was rooted in the other; neither suspected, not even in themselves, the amount of essential bulldog at the bottom of their souls, the strength of their determination to hold their own in the way that would cause the greatest amount of unnecessary suffering. They did not deliberately desire to cause unnecessary suffering; they simply could not help an instinct passed by time into their fibre, through atrophy of the reasoning powers and the constant mating, generation after generation, of those whose motto had been, "Kings of our own dunghills." And now George came forward, defying his mother's belief that he was a Totteridge, as champion of the principle in tail male; for in the Totteridges, from whom in this stress he diverged more and more towards his father's line, there was some freer strain, something non-provincial, and this had been so ever since Hubert de-Totteridge had led his private crusade, from which he had neglected to return. With the Pendyces it had been otherwise; from immemorial time "a county family," they had construed the phrase literally, had taken no poetical licences. Like innumerable other county families, they were perforce what their tradition decreed — provincial in their souls.

George, a man-about-town, would have stared at being called provincial, but a man cannot stare away his nature. He was provincial enough to keep Mrs. Bellew bound when she herself was tired of him, and consideration for her, and for his own self-respect asked him to give her up. He had been keeping her bound for two months or more. But there was much excuse for him. His heart was sore to breaking-point; he was sick with longing, and deep, angry wonder that he, of all men, should be cast aside like a worn-out glove. Men tired of women daily — that was the law. But what was this? His dogged instinct had fought against the knowledge as long as he could, and now that it was certain he fought against it still. George was a true Pendyce!

To the world, however, he behaved as usual. He came to the club about ten o'clock to eat his breakfast and read the sporting papers. Towards noon a hansom took him to the railway-station appropriate to whatever race-meeting was in progress, or, failing that, to the cricket-ground at Lord's, or Prince's Tennis Club. Half-past six saw him mounting the staircase at the Stoics' to that card-room where his effigy still hung, with its look of "Hard work, hard work; but I must keep it going!" At eight he dined, a bottle of champagne screwed deep down into ice, his face flushed with the day's sun, his shirt-front and his hair shining with gloss. What happier man in all great London!

But with the dark the club's swing-doors opened for his passage into the lighted streets, and till next morning the world knew him no more. It was then that he took revenge for all the hours he wore a mask. He would walk the pavements for miles trying to wear himself out, or in the Park fling himself down on a chair in the deep shadow of the trees, and sit there with his arms folded and his head bowed down. On other nights he would go into some music-hall, and amongst the glaring lights, the vulgar laughter, the scent of painted women, try for a moment to forget the face, the laugh, the scent of that woman for whom he craved. And all the time he was jealous, with a dumb, vague jealousy of he knew not whom; it was not his nature to think impersonally, and he could not believe that a woman would drop him except for another man. Often he went to her Mansions, and walked round and round casting a stealthy stare at her windows. Twice he went up to her door, but came away without ringing the bell. One evening, seeing a light in her sitting-room, he rang, but there came no answer. Then an evil spirit leaped up in him, and he rang again and again. At last he went away to his room — a studio he had taken near — and began to write to her. He was long composing that letter, and many times tore it up; he despised the expression of feelings in writing. He only tried because his heart wanted relief so badly. And this, in the end, was all that he produced:

"I know you were in to-night. It's the only time I've come. Why couldn't you have let me in? You've no right to treat me like this. You are leading me the life of a dog."

GEORGE.

The first light was silvering the gloom above the river, the lamps were paling to the day, when George went out and dropped this missive in the letter-box. He came back to the river and lay down on an empty bench under the plane-trees of the Embankment, and while he lay there one of those without refuge or home, who lie there night after night, came up unseen and looked at him.

But morning comes, and with it that sense of the ridiculous, so merciful to suffering men. George got up lest anyone should see a Stoic lying there in his evening clothes; and when it became time he put on his mask and sallied forth. At the club he found his mother's note, and set out for her hotel.

Mrs. Pendyce was not yet down, but sent to ask him to come up. George found her standing in her dressing-gown in the middle of the room, as though she knew not where to place herself for this, their meeting. Only when he was quite close did she move and throw her arms round his neck. George could not see her face, and his own was hidden from her, but through the thin dressing-gown he felt her straining to him, and her arms that had pulled his head down quivering; and for a moment it seemed to him as if he were dropping a burden. But only for a moment, for at the clinging of those arms his instinct took fright. And though she was smiling, the tears were in her eyes, and this offended him.

"Don't, mother!"

Mrs. Pendyce's answer was a long look. George could not bear it, and turned away.

"Well," he said gruffly, "when you can tell me what's brought you up — —"

Mrs. Pendyce sat down on the sofa. She had been brushing her hair; though silvered, it was still thick and soft, and the sight of it about her shoulders struck George. He had never thought of her having hair that would hang down.

Sitting on the sofa beside her, he felt her fingers stroking his, begging him not to take offence and leave her. He felt her eyes trying to see his eyes, and saw her lips trembling; but a stubborn, almost evil smile was fixed upon his face.

"And so, dear — and so," she stammered, "I told your father that I couldn't see that done, and so I came up to you."

Many sons have found no hardship in accepting all that their mothers do for them as a matter of right, no difficulty in assuming their devotion a matter of course, no trouble in leaving their own affections to be understood; but most sons have found great difficulty in permitting their mothers to diverge one inch from the conventional, to swerve one hair's breadth from the standard of propriety appropriate to mothers of men of their importance.

It is decreed of mothers that their birth pangs shall not cease until they die.

And George was shocked to hear his mother say that she had left his father to come to him. It affected his self-esteem in a strange and subtle way. The thought that tongues might wag about her revolted his manhood and his sense of form. It seemed strange, incomprehensible, and wholly wrong; the thought, too, gashed through his mind: 'She is trying to put pressure on me!'

"If you think I'll give her up, Mother — —" he said.

Mrs. Pendyce's fingers tightened.

"No, dear," she answered painfully; "of course, if she loves you so much, I couldn't ask you. That's why I — —"

George gave a grim little laugh.

"What on earth can you do, then? What's the good of your coming up like this? How are you to get on here all alone? I can fight my own battles. You'd much better go back."

Mrs. Pendyce broke in:

"Oh, George; I can't see you cast off from us! I must be with you!"

George felt her trembling all over. He got up and walked to the window. Mrs. Pendyce's voice followed:

"I won't try to separate you, George; I promise, dear. I couldn't, if she loves you, and you love her so!"

Again George laughed that grim little laugh. And the fact that he was deceiving her, meant to go on deceiving her, made him as hard as iron.

"Go back, Mother!" he said. "You'll only make things worse. This isn't a woman's business. Let father do what he likes; I can hold on!"

Mrs. Pendyce did not answer, and he was obliged to look round. She was sitting perfectly still with her hands in her lap, and his man's hatred of anything conspicuous happening to a woman, to his own mother of all people, took fiercer fire.

"Go back!" he repeated, "before there's any fuss! What good can you possibly do? You can't leave father; that's absurd! You must go!"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"I can't do that, dear."

George made an angry sound, but she was so motionless and pale that he dimly perceived how she was suffering, and how little he knew of her who had borne him.

Mrs. Pendyce broke the silence:

"But you, George dear? What is going to happen? How are you going to manage?" And suddenly clasping her hands: "Oh! what is coming?"

Those words, embodying all that had been in his heart so long, were too much for George. He went abruptly to the door.

"I can't stop now," he said; "I'll come again this evening."

Mrs. Pendyce looked up.

"Oh, George"

But as she had the habit of subordinating her feelings to the feelings of others, she said no more, but tried to smile.

That smile smote George to the heart.

"Don't worry, Mother; try and cheer up. We'll go to the theatre. You get the tickets!"

And trying to smile too, but turning lest he should lose his self-control, he went away.

In the hall he came on his uncle, General Pendyce. He came on him from behind, but knew him at once by that look of feeble activity about the back of his knees, by his sloping yet upright shoulders, and the sound of his voice, with its dry and querulous precision, as of a man whose occupation has been taken from him.

The General turned round.

"Ah, George," he said, "your mother's here, isn't she? Look at this that your father's sent me!"

He held out a telegram in a shaky hand.

"Margery up at Green's Hotel. Go and see her at once.

"HORACE."

And while George read the General looked at his nephew with eyes that were ringed by little circles of darker pigment, and had crow's-footed purses of skin beneath, earned by serving his country in tropical climes.

"What's the meaning of it?" he said. "Go and see her? Of course, I'll go and see her! Always glad to see your mother. But where's all the hurry?"

George perceived well enough that his father's pride would not let him write to her, and though it was for himself that his mother had taken this step, he sympathised with his father. The General fortunately gave him little time to answer.

"She's up to get herself some dresses, I suppose? I've seen nothing of you for a long time. When are you coming to dine with me? I heard at Epsom that you'd sold your horse. What made you do that? What's your father telegraphing to me like this for? It's not like him. Your mother's not ill, is she?"

George shook his head, and muttering something about "Sorry, an engagement — awful hurry," was gone.

Left thus abruptly to himself, General Pendyce summoned a page, slowly pencilled something on his card, and with his back to the only persons in the hall, waited, his hands folded on the handle of his cane. And while he waited he tried as far as possible to think of nothing. Having served his country, his time now was nearly all devoted to waiting, and to think fatigued and made him feel discontented, for he had had sunstroke once, and fever several times. In the perfect precision of his collar, his boots, his dress, his figure; in the way from time to time he cleared his throat, in the strange yellow driedness of his face between his carefully brushed whiskers, in the immobility of his white hands on his cane, he gave the impression of a man sucked dry by a system. Only his eyes, restless and opinionated, betrayed the essential Pendyce that was behind.

He went up to the ladies' drawing-room, clutching that telegram. It worried him. There was something odd about it, and he was not accustomed to pay calls in the morning. He found his sister-in-law seated at an open window, her face unusually pink, her eyes rather defiantly bright. She greeted him gently, and General Pendyce was not the man to discern what was not put under his nose. Fortunately for him, that had never been his practice.

"How are you, Margery?" he said. "Glad to see you in town. How's Horace? Look here what he's sent me!" He offered her the telegram, with the air of slightly avenging an offence; then added in surprise, as though he had just thought of it: "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Mrs. Pendyce read the telegram, and she, too, like George, felt sorry for the sender.

"Nothing, thanks, dear Charles," she said slowly. "I'm all right. Horace gets so nervous!"

General Pendyce looked at her; for a moment his eyes flickered, then, since the truth was so improbable and so utterly in any case beyond his philosophy, he accepted her statement.

"He shouldn't go sending telegrams like this," he said. "You might have been ill for all I could tell. It spoiled my breakfast!" For though, as a fact, it had not prevented his completing a hearty meal, he fancied that he felt hungry. "When I was quartered at Halifax there was a fellow who never sent anything but telegrams. Telegraph Jo they called him. He commanded the old Bluebottles. You know the old Bluebottles? If Horace is going to take to this sort of thing he'd better see a specialist; it's almost certain to mean a breakdown. You're up about dresses, I see. When do you come to town? The season's getting on."

Mrs. Pendyce was not afraid of her husband's brother, for though punctilious and accustomed to his own way with inferiors, he was hardly a man to inspire awe in his social equals. It was, therefore, not through fear that she did not tell him the truth, but through an instinct for avoiding all unnecessary suffering too strong for her, and because the truth was really untellable. Even to herself it seemed slightly ridiculous, and she knew the poor General would take it so dreadfully to heart.

"I don't know about coming up this season. The garden is looking so beautiful, and there's Bee's engagement. The dear child is so happy!"

The General caressed a whisker with his white hand.

"Ah yes," he said—"young Tharp! Let's see, he's not the eldest. His brother's in my old corps. What does this young fellow do with himself?"

Mrs. Pendyce answered:

"He's only farming. I'm afraid he'll have nothing to speak of, but he's a dear good boy. It'll be a long engagement. Of course, there's nothing in farming, and Horace insists on their having a thousand a year. It depends so much on Mr. Tharp. I think they could do perfectly well on seven hundred to start with, don't you, Charles?"

General Pendyce's answer was not more conspicuously to the point than usual, for he was a man who loved to pursue his own trains of thought.

"What about George?", he said. "I met him in the hall as I was coming in, but he ran off in the very deuce of a hurry. They told me at Epsom that he was hard hit."

His eyes, distracted by a fly for which he had taken a dislike, failed to observe his sister-in-law's face.

"Hard hit?" she repeated.

"Lost a lot of money. That won't do, you know, Margery — that won't do. A little mild gambling's one thing."

Mrs. Pendyce said nothing; her face was rigid: It was the face of a woman on the point of saying: "Do not compel me to hint that you are boring me!"

The General went on:

"A lot of new men have taken to racing that no one knows anything about. That fellow who bought George's horse, for instance; you'd never have seen his nose in Tattersalls when I was a young man. I find when I go racing I don't know half the colours. It spoils the pleasure. It's no longer the close borough that it was. George had better take care what he's about. I can't imagine what we're coming to!"

On Margery Pendyce's hearing, those words, "I can't imagine what we're coming to," had fallen for four-and-thirty years, in every sort of connection, from many persons. It had become part of her life, indeed, to take it for granted that people could imagine nothing; just as the solid food and solid comfort of Worsted Skeynes and the misty mornings and the rain had become part of her life. And it was only the fact that her nerves were on edge and her heart bursting that made those words seem intolerable that morning; but habit was even now too strong, and she kept silence.

The General, to whom an answer was of no great moment, pursued his thoughts.

"And you mark my words, Margery; the elections will go against us. The country's in a dangerous state."

Mrs. Pendyce said:

"Oh, do you think the Liberals will really get in?"

From custom there was a shade of anxiety in her voice which she did not feel.

"Think?" repeated General Pendyce. "I pray every night to God they won't!"

Folding both hands on the silver knob of his Malacca cane, he stared over them at the opposing wall; and there was something universal in that fixed stare, a sort of blank and not quite selfish apprehension. Behind his personal interests his ancestors had drilled into him the impossibility of imagining that he did not stand for the welfare of his country. Mrs. Pendyce, who had so often seen her husband look like that, leaned out of the window above the noisy street.

The General rose.

"Well," he said, "if I can't do anything for you, Margery, I'll take myself off; you're busy with your dressmakers. Give my love to Horace, and tell him not to send me another telegram like that."

And bending stiffly, he pressed her hand with a touch of real courtesy and kindness, took up his hat, and went away. Mrs. Pendyce, watching him descend the stairs, watching his stiff sloping shoulders, his head with its grey hair brushed carefully away from the centre parting, the backs of his feeble, active knees, put her hand to her breast and sighed, for with him she seemed to see descending all her past life, and that one cannot see unmoved.

CHAPTER III

MRS. BELLEW SQUARES HER ACCOUNTS

Mrs. Bellew sat on her bed smoothing out the halves of a letter; by her side was her jewel-case. Taking from it an amethyst necklet, an emerald pendant, and a diamond ring, she wrapped them in cottonwool, and put them in an envelope. The other jewels she dropped one by one into her lap, and sat looking at them. At last, putting two necklets and two rings back into the jewel-case, she placed the rest in a little green box, and taking that and the envelope, went out. She called a hansom, drove to a post-office, and sent a telegram:

PENDYCE, STOICS' CLUB.

"Be at studio six to seven. — H."

From the post-office she drove to her jeweller's, and many a man who saw her pass with the flush on her cheeks and the smouldering look in her eyes, as though a fire were alight within her, turned in his tracks and bitterly regretted that he knew not who she was, or whither going. The jeweller took the jewels from the green box, weighed them one by one, and slowly examined each through his lens. He was a little man with a yellow wrinkled face and a weak little beard, and having fixed in his mind the sum that he would give, he looked at his client prepared to mention less. She was sitting with her elbows on the counter, her chin resting in her hands, and her eyes were fixed on him. He decided somehow to mention the exact sum.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, madam; that is the utmost."

"Very well, but I must have it now in cash!"

The jeweller's eyes flickered.

"It's a large sum," he said—"most unusual. I haven't got such a sum in the place."

"Then please send out and get it, or I must go elsewhere."

The jeweller brought his hands together, and washed them nervously.

"Excuse me a moment; I'll consult my partner."

He went away, and from afar he and his partner spied her nervously. He came back with a forced smile. Mrs. Bellew was sitting as he had left her.

"It's a fortunate chance; I think we can just do it, madam."

"Give me notes, please, and a sheet of paper." The jeweller brought them.

Mrs. Bellew wrote a letter, enclosed it with the bank notes in the bulky envelope she had brought, addressed it, and sealed the whole.

"Call a cab, please!"

The jeweller called a cab.

"Chelsea Embankment!"

The cab bore her away.

Again in the crowded streets so full of traffic, people turned to look after her. The cabman, who put her down at the Albert Bridge, gazed alternately at the coins in his hands and the figure of his fare, and wheeling his cab towards the stand, jerked his thumb in her direction.

Mrs. Bellew walked fast down a street till, turning a corner, she came suddenly on a small garden with three poplar-trees in a row. She opened its green gate without pausing, went down a path, and stopped at the first of three green doors. A young man with a beard, resembling an artist, who was standing behind the last of the three doors, watched her with a knowing smile on his face. She took out a latch-key, put it in the lock, opened the door, and passed in.

The sight of her face seemed to have given the artist an idea. Propping his door open, he brought an easel and canvas, and setting them so that he could see the corner where she had gone in, began to sketch.

An old stone fountain with three stone frogs stood in the garden near that corner, and beyond it was a flowering currant-bush, and beyond this again the green door on which a slanting gleam of sunlight fell. He worked for an hour, then put his easel back and went out to get his tea.

Mrs. Bellew came out soon after he was gone. She closed the door behind her, and stood still. Taking from her pocket the bulky envelope, she slipped it into the letter-box; then bending down, picked up a twig, and placed it in the slit, to prevent the lid falling with a rattle. Having done this, she swept her hands down her face and breast as though to brush something from her, and walked away. Beyond the outer gate she turned to the left, and took the same street back to the river. She walked slowly, luxuriously, looking about her. Once or twice she stopped, and drew a deep breath, as though she could not have enough of the air. She went as far as the Embankment, and stood leaning her elbows on the parapet. Between the finger and thumb of one hand she held a small object on which the sun was shining. It was a key. Slowly, luxuriously, she stretched her hand out over the water, parted her thumb and finger, and let it fall.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. PENDYCE'S INSPIRATION

But George did not come to take his mother to the theatre, and she whose day had been passed in looking forward to the evening, passed that evening in a drawing-room full of furniture whose history she did not know, and a dining-room full of people eating in twos and threes and fours, at whom she might look, but to whom she must not speak, to whom she did not even want to speak, so soon had the wheel of life rolled over her wonder and her expectation, leaving it lifeless in her breast. And all that night, with one short interval of sleep, she ate of bitter isolation and futility, and of the still more bitter knowledge: "George does not want me; I'm no good to him!"

Her heart, seeking consolation, went back again and again to the time when he had wanted her; but it was far to go, to the days of holland suits, when all those things that he desired — slices of pineapple, Benson's old carriage-whip, the daily reading out of "Tom Brown's School-days," the rub with Elliman when he sprained his little ankle, the tuck-up in bed — were in her power alone to give.

This night she saw with fatal clearness that since he went to school he had never wanted her at all. She had tried so many years to believe that he did, till it had become part of her life, as it was part of her life to say her prayers night and morning; and now she found it was all pretence. But, lying awake, she still tried to believe it, because to that she had been bound when she brought him, firstborn, into the world. Her other son, her daughters, she loved them too, but it was not the same thing, quite; she had never wanted them to want her, because that part of her had been given once for all to George.

The street noises died down at last; she had slept two hours when they began again. She lay listening. And the noises and her thoughts became tangled in her exhausted brain — one great web of weariness, a feeling that it was all senseless and unnecessary, the emanation of cross-purposes and cross-grainedness, the negation of that gentle moderation, her own most sacred instinct. And an early wasp, attracted by the sweet perfumes of her dressing-table, roused himself from the corner where he had spent the night, and began to hum and hover over the bed. Mrs. Pendyce was a little afraid of wasps, so, taking a moment when he was otherwise engaged, she stole out, and fanned him with her nightdress-case till, perceiving her to be a lady, he went away. Lying down again, she thought: 'People will worry them until they sting, and then kill them; it's so unreasonable,' not knowing that she was putting all her thoughts on suffering in a single nutshell.

She breakfasted upstairs, unsolaced by any news from George. Then with no definite hope, but a sort of inner certainty, she formed the resolution to call on Mrs. Bellew. She determined, however, first to visit Mr. Paramor, and, having but a hazy notion of the hour when men begin to work, she did not dare to start till past eleven, and told her cabman to drive her slowly. He drove her, therefore, faster than his wont. In Leicester Square the passage of a Personage between two stations blocked the traffic, and on the footways were gathered a crowd of simple folk with much in their hearts and little in their stomachs, who raised a cheer as the Personage passed. Mrs. Pendyce looked eagerly from her cab, for she too loved a show.

The crowd dispersed, and the cab went on.

It was the first time she had ever found herself in the business apartment of any professional man less important than a dentist. From the little waiting-room, where they handed her the Times, which she could not read from excitement, she caught sight of rooms lined to the ceilings with leather books and black tin boxes, initialed in white to indicate the brand, and of young men seated behind lumps of paper that had been written on. She heard a perpetual clicking noise which roused her interest, and smelled a peculiar odour of leather and disinfectant which impressed her disagreeably. A youth with reddish hair and a pen in his hand passed through and looked at her with a curious stare immediately averted. She suddenly felt sorry for him and all those other young men behind the lumps of paper, and the thought went flashing through her mind, 'I suppose it's all because people can't agree.'

She was shown in to Mr. Paramor at last. In his large empty room, with its air of past grandeur, she sat gazing at three La France roses in a tumbler of water with the feeling that she would never be able to begin.

Mr. Paramor's eyebrows, which jutted from his clean, brown face like little clumps of pothooks, were iron-grey, and iron-grey his hair brushed back from his high forehead. Mrs. Pendyce wondered why he looked five years younger than Horace, who was his junior, and ten years younger than Charles, who, of course, was younger still. His eyes, which from iron-grey some inner process of spiritual manufacture had made into steel colour, looked young too, although they were grave; and the smile which twisted up the corners of his mouth looked very young.

"Well," he said, "it's a great pleasure to see you."

Mrs. Pendyce could only answer with a smile.

Mr. Paramor put the roses to his nose.

"Not so good as yours," he said, "are they? but the best I can do."

Mrs. Pendyce blushed with pleasure.

"My garden is looking so beautiful — —" Then, remembering that she no longer had a garden, she stopped; but remembering also that, though she had lost her garden, Mr. Paramor still had his, she added quickly: "And yours, Mr. Paramor — I'm sure it must be looking lovely."

Mr. Paramor drew out a kind of dagger with which he had stabbed some papers to his desk, and took a letter from the bundle.

"Yes," he said, "it's looking very nice. You'd like to see this, I expect."

"Bellew v. Bellew and Pendyce" was written at the top. Mrs. Pendyce stared at those words as though fascinated by their beauty; it was long before she got beyond them. For the first time the full horror of these matters pierced the kindly armour that lies between mortals and what they do not like to think of. Two men and a woman wrangling, fighting, tearing each other before the eyes of all the world. A woman and two men stripped of charity and gentleness, of moderation and sympathy-stripped of all that made life decent and lovable, squabbling like savages before the eyes of all the world. Two men, and one of them her son, and between them a woman whom both of them had loved! "Bellew v. Bellew and Pendyce"! And this would go down to fame in company with the pitiful stories she had read from time to time with a sort of offended interest; in company with “Snooks v. Snooks and Stiles,” “Horaday v. Horaday,” “Bethany v. Bethany and Sweetenham.” In company with all those cases where everybody seemed so dreadful, yet where she had often and often felt so sorry, as if these poor creatures had been fastened in the stocks by some malignant, loutish spirit, for all that would to come and jeer at. And horror filled her heart. It was all so mean, and gross, and common.

The letter contained but a few words from a firm of solicitors confirming an appointment. She looked up at Mr. Paramor. He stopped pencilling on his blotting-paper, and said at once:

“I shall be seeing these people myself tomorrow afternoon. I shall do my best to make them see reason.”

She felt from his eyes that he knew what she was suffering, and was even suffering with her.

“And if — if they won’t?”

“Then I shall go on a different tack altogether, and they must look out for themselves.”

Mrs. Pendyce sank back in her chair; she seemed to smell again that smell of leather and disinfectant, and hear a sound of incessant clicking. She felt faint, and to disguise that faintness asked at random, “What does ‘without prejudice’ in this letter mean?”

Mr. Paramor smiled.

“That’s an expression we always use,” he said. “It means that when we give a thing away, we reserve to ourselves the right of taking it back again.”

Mrs. Pendyce, who did not understand, murmured:

“I see. But what have they given away?”

Paramor put his elbows on the desk, and lightly pressed his finger-tips together.

“Well,” he said, “properly speaking, in a matter like this, the other side and I are cat and dog.

“We are supposed to know nothing about each other and to want to know less, so that when we do each other a courtesy we are obliged to save our faces by saying, ‘We don’t really do you one.’ D’you understand?”

Again Mrs. Pendyce murmured:

“I see.”

“It sounds a little provincial, but we lawyers exist by reason of provincialism. If people were once to begin making allowances for each other, I don’t know where we should be.”

Mrs. Pendyce’s eyes fell again on those words, “Bellew v. Bellew and Pendyce,” and again, as though fascinated by their beauty, rested there.

“But you wanted to see me about something else too, perhaps?” said Mr. Paramor.

A sudden panic came over her.

“Oh no, thank you. I just wanted to know what had been done. I’ve come up on purpose to see George. You told me that I — —”

Mr. Paramor hastened to her aid.

“Yes, yes; quite right — quite right.”

“Horace hasn’t come with me.”

“Good!”

“He and George sometimes don’t quite — —”

“Hit it off? They’re too much alike.”

“Do you think so? I never saw — —”

“Not in face, not in face; but they’ve both got — —”

Mr. Paramor’s meaning was lost in a smile; and Mrs. Pendyce, who did not know that the word “Pendycitis” was on the tip of his tongue, smiled vaguely too.

“George is very determined,” she said. “Do you think — oh, do you think, Mr. Paramor, that you will be able to persuade Captain Bellew’s solicitors — —”

Mr. Paramor threw himself back in his chair, and his hand covered what he had written on his blotting-paper.

“Yes,” he said slowly — —”oh yes, yes!”

But Mrs. Pendyce had had her answer. She had meant to speak of her visit to Helen Bellew, but now her thought was:

‘He won’t persuade them; I feel it. Let me get away!’

Again she seemed to hear the incessant clicking, to smell leather and disinfectant, to see those words, “Bellew v. Bellew and, Pendyce.”

She held out her hand.

Mr. Paramor took it in his own and looked at the floor.

“Good-bye,” he said-”good-bye. What’s your address — Green’s Hotel? I’ll come and tell you what I do. I know — I know!”

Mrs. Pendyce, on whom those words “I know — I know!” had a strange, emotionalising effect, as though no one had ever known before, went away with quivering lips. In her life no one had ever “known” — not indeed that she could or would complain of such a trifle, but the fact remained. And at this moment, oddly, she thought of her husband, and wondered what he was doing, and felt sorry for him.

But Mr. Paramor went back to his seat and stared at what he had written on his blotting paper. It ran thus:

“We stand on our petty rights here,
And our potty dignity there;
We make no allowance for others,
They make no allowance for us;
We catch hold of them by the ear,
They grab hold of us by the hair
The result is a bit of a muddle
That ends in a bit of a fuss.”

He saw that it neither rhymed nor scanned, and with a grave face he tore it up.

Again Mrs. Pendyce told her cabman to drive slowly, and again he drove her faster than usual; yet that drive to Chelsea seemed to last for ever, and interminable were the turnings which the cabman took, each one shorter than the last, as if he had resolved to see how much his horse's mouth could bear.

'Poor thing!' thought Mrs. Pendyce; 'its mouth must be so sore, and it's quite unnecessary.' She put her hand up through the trap. "Please take me in a straight line. I don't like corners."

The cabman obeyed. It worried him terribly to take one corner instead of the six he had purposed on his way; and when she asked him his fare, he charged her a shilling extra for the distance he had saved by going straight. Mrs. Pendyce paid it, knowing no better, and gave him sixpence over, thinking it might benefit the horse; and the cabman, touching his hat, said:

"Thank you, my lady," for to say "my lady" was his principle when he received eighteen pence above his fare.

Mrs. Pendyce stood quite a minute on the pavement, stroking the horse's nose and thinking:

'I must go in; it's silly to come all this way and not go in!'

But her heart beat so that she could hardly swallow.

At last she rang.

Mrs. Bellew was seated on the sofa in her little drawing-room whistling to a canary in the open window. In the affairs of men there is an irony constant and deep, mingled with the very springs of life. The expectations of Mrs. Pendyce, those timid apprehensions of this meeting which had racked her all the way, were lamentably unfulfilled. She had rehearsed the scene ever since it came into her head; the reality seemed unfamiliar. She felt no nervousness and no hostility, only a sort of painful interest and admiration. And how could this or any other woman help falling in love with George?

The first uncertain minute over, Mrs. Bellew's eyes were as friendly as if she had been quite within her rights in all she had done; and Mrs. Pendyce could not help meeting friendliness halfway.

"Don't be angry with me for coming. George doesn't know. I felt I must come to see you. Do you think that you two quite know all you're doing? It seems so dreadful, and it's not only yourselves, is it?"

Mrs. Bellew's smile vanished.

"Please don't say 'you two,'" she said.

Mrs. Pendyce stammered:

"I don't understand."

Mrs. Bellew looked her in the face and smiled; and as she smiled she seemed to become a little coarser.

"Well, I think it's quite time you did! I don't love your son. I did once, but I don't now. I told him so yesterday, once for all."

Mrs. Pendyce heard those words, which made so vast, so wonderful a difference — words which should have been like water in a wilderness — with a sort of horror, and all her spirit flamed up into her eyes.

"You don't love him?" she cried.

She felt only a blind sense of insult and affront.

This woman tire of George? Tire of her son? She looked at Mrs. Bellew, on whose face was a kind of inquisitive compassion, with eyes that had never before held hatred.

"You have tired of him? You have given him up? Then the sooner I go to him the better! Give me the address of his rooms, please."

Helen Bellew knelt down at the bureau and wrote on an envelope, and the grace of the woman pierced Mrs. Pendyce to the heart.

She took the paper. She had never learned the art of abuse, and no words could express what was in her heart, so she turned and went out.

Mrs. Bellew's voice sounded quick and fierce behind her.

"How could I help getting tired? I am not you. Now go!"

Mrs. Pendyce wrenched open the outer door. Descending the stairs, she felt for the bannister. She had that awful sense of physical soreness and shrinking which violence, whether their own or others', brings to gentle souls.

CHAPTER V

THE MOTHER AND THE SON

To Mrs. Pendyce, Chelsea was an unknown land, and to find her way to George's rooms would have taken her long had she been by nature what she was by name, for Pendyces never asked their way to anything, or believed what they were told, but found out for themselves with much unnecessary trouble, of which they afterwards complained.

A policeman first, and then a young man with a beard, resembling an artist, guided her footsteps. The latter, who was leaning by a gate, opened it.

"In here," he said; "the door in the corner on the right."

Mrs. Pendyce walked down the little path, past the ruined fountain with its three stone frogs, and stood by the first green door and waited. And while she waited she struggled between fear and joy; for now that she was away from Mrs. Bellew she no longer felt a sense of insult. It was the actual sight of her that had aroused it, so personal is even the most gentle heart.

She found the rusty handle of a bell amongst the creeper-leaves, and pulled it. A cracked metallic tinkle answered her, but no one came; only a faint sound as of someone pacing to and fro. Then in the street beyond the outer gate a coster began calling to the sky, and in the music of his prayers the sound was lost. The young man with a beard, resembling an artist, came down the path.

"Perhaps you could tell me, sir, if my son is out?"

"I've not seen him go out; and I've been painting here all the morning."

Mrs. Pendyce looked with wonder at an easel which stood outside another door a little further on. It seemed to her strange that her son should live in such a place.

"Shall I knock for you?" said the artist. "All these knockers are stiff."

"If you would be so kind!"

The artist knocked.

"He must be in," he said. "I haven't taken my eyes off his door, because I've been painting it."

Mrs. Pendyce gazed at the door.

"I can't get it," said the artist. "It's worrying me to death."

Mrs. Pendyce looked at him doubtfully.

"Has he no servant?" she said.

"Oh no," said the artist; "it's a studio. The light's all wrong. I wonder if you would mind standing just as you are for one second; it would help me a lot!"

He moved back and curved his hand over his eyes, and through Mrs. Pendyce there passed a shiver.

'Why doesn't George open the door?' she thought. 'What — what is this man doing?'

The artist dropped his hand.

"Thanks so much!" he said. "I'll knock again. There! that would raise the dead!"

And he laughed.

An unreasoning terror seized on Mrs. Pendyce.

"Oh," she stammered, "I must get in — I must get in!"

She took the knocker herself, and fluttered it against the door.

"You see," said the artist, "they're all alike; these knockers are as stiff' as pokers."

He again curved his hand over his eyes. Mrs. Pendyce leaned against the door; her knees were trembling violently.

'What is happening?' she thought. 'Perhaps he's only asleep, perhaps —— Oh God!'

She beat the knocker with all her force. The door yielded, and in the space stood George. Choking back a sob, Mrs. Pendyce went in. He banged the door behind her.

For a full minute she did not speak, possessed still by that strange terror and by a sort of shame. She did not even look at her son, but cast timid glances round his room. She saw a gallery at the far end, and a conical roof half made of glass. She saw curtains hanging all the gallery length, a table with tea-things and decanters, a round iron stove, rugs on the floor, and a large full-length mirror in the centre of the wall. A silver cup of flowers was reflected in that mirror. Mrs. Pendyce saw that they were dead, and the sense of their vague and nauseating odour was her first definite sensation.

"Your flowers are dead, my darling," she said. "I must get you some fresh!"

Not till then did she look at George. There were circles under his eyes; his face was yellow; it seemed to her that it had shrunk. This terrified her, and she thought:

'I must show nothing; I must keep my head!'

She was afraid — afraid of something desperate in his face, of something desperate and headlong, and she was afraid of his stubbornness, the dumb, unthinking stubbornness that holds to what has been because it has been, that holds to its own when its own is dead. She had so little of this quality herself that she could not divine where it might lead him; but she had lived in the midst of it all her married life, and it seemed natural that her son should be in danger from it now.

Her terror called up her self-possession. She drew George down on the sofa by her side, and the thought flashed through her: 'How many times has he not sat here with that woman in his arms!'

"You didn't come for me last night, dear! I got the tickets, such good ones!"

George smiled.

"No," he said; "I had something else to see to!"

At sight of that smile Margery Pendyce's heart beat till she felt sick, but she, too, smiled.

"What a nice place you have here, darling!"

“There’s room to walk about.”

Mrs. Pendyce remembered the sound she had heard of pacing to and fro. From his not asking her how she had found out where he lived she knew that he must have guessed where she had been, that there was nothing for either of them to tell the other. And though this was a relief, it added to her terror — the terror of that which is desperate. All sorts of images passed through her mind. She saw George back in her bedroom after his first run with the hounds, his chubby cheek scratched from forehead to jaw, and the bloodstained pad of a cub fox in his little gloved hand. She saw him sauntering into her room the last day of the 1880 match at Lord’s, with a battered top-hat, a blackened eye, and a cane with a light-blue tassel. She saw him deadly pale with tightened lips that afternoon after he had escaped from her, half cured of laryngitis, and stolen out shooting by himself, and she remembered his words: “Well, Mother, I couldn’t stand it any longer; it was too beastly slow!”

Suppose he could not stand it now! Suppose he should do something rash! She took out her handkerchief.

“It’s very hot in here, dear; your forehead is quite wet!”

She saw his eyes turn on her suspiciously, and all her woman’s wit stole into her own eyes, so that they did not flicker, but looked at him with matter-of-fact concern.

“That skylight is what does it,” he said. “The sun gets full on there.”

Mrs. Pendyce looked at the skylight.

“It seems odd to see you here, dear, but it’s very nice — so unconventional. You must let me put away those poor flowers!” She went to the silver cup and bent over them. “My dear boy, they’re quite nasty! Do throw them outside somewhere; it’s so dreadful, the smell of old flowers!”

She held the cup out, covering her nose with her handkerchief.

George took the cup, and like a cat spying a mouse, Mrs. Pendyce watched him take it out into the garden. As the door closed, quicker, more noiseless than a cat, she slipped behind the curtains.

‘I know he has a pistol,’ she thought.

She was back in an instant, gliding round the room, hunting with her eyes and hands, but she saw nothing, and her heart lightened, for she was terrified of all such things.

‘It’s only these terrible first hours,’ she thought.

When George came back she was standing where he had left her. They sat down in silence, and in that silence, the longest of her life, she seemed to feel all that was in his heart, all the blackness and bitter aching, the rage of defeat and starved possession, the lost delight, the sensation of ashes and disgust; and yet her heart was full enough already of relief and shame, compassion, jealousy, love, and deep longing. Only twice was the silence broken. Once when he asked her whether she had lunched, and she who had eaten nothing all day answered:

“Yes, dear — yes.”

Once when he said:

“You shouldn’t have come here, Mother; I’m a bit out of sorts!”

She watched his face, dearest to her in all the world, bent towards the floor, and she so yearned to hold it to her breast that, since she dared not, the tears stole up, and silently rolled down her cheeks. The stillness in that room, chosen for remoteness, was like the stillness of a tomb, and, as in a tomb, there was no outlook on the world, for the glass of the skylight was opaque.

That deathly stillness settled round her heart; her eyes fixed themselves on the skylight, as though beseeching it to break and let in sound. A cat, making a pilgrimage from roof to roof, the four dark moving spots of its paws, the faint blur of its body, was all she saw. And suddenly, unable to bear it any longer, she cried:

“Oh, George, speak to me! Don’t put me away from you like this!”

George answered:

“What do you want me to say, Mother?”

“Nothing — only — —”

And falling on her knees beside her son, she pulled his head down against her breast, and stayed rocking herself to and fro, silently shifting closer till she could feel his head lie comfortably; so, she had his face against her heart, and she could not bear to let it go. Her knees hurt her on the boarded floor, her back and all her body ached; but not for worlds would she relax an inch, believing that she could comfort him with her pain, and her tears fell on his neck. When at last he drew his face away she sank down on the floor, and could not rise, but her fingers felt that the bosom of her dress was wet. He said hoarsely:

“It’s all right, Mother; you needn’t worry!”

For no reward would she have looked at him just then, but with a deeper certainty than reason she knew that he was safe.

Stealthily on the sloping skylight the cat retraced her steps, its four paws dark moving spots, its body a faint blur.

Mrs. Pendyce rose.

“I won’t stay now, darling. May I use your glass?”

Standing before that mirror, smoothing back her hair, passing her handkerchief over her cheeks and eyes and lips, she thought:

‘That woman has stood here! That woman has smoothed her hair, looking in this glass, and wiped his kisses from her cheeks! May God give to her the pain that she has given to my son!’

But when she had wished that wish she shivered.

She turned to George at the door with a smile that seemed to say:

‘It’s no good to weep, or try and tell you what is in my heart, and so, you see, I’m smiling. Please smile, too, so as to comfort me a little.’

George put a small paper parcel in her hand and tried to smile.

Mrs. Pendyce went quickly out. Bewildered by the sunlight, she did not look at this parcel till she was beyond the outer gate. It contained an amethyst necklace, an emerald pendant, and a diamond ring. In the little grey street that led to this garden with its poplars, old fountain, and green gate, the jewels glowed and sparkled as though all light and life had settled there. Mrs. Pendyce, who loved colour and glowing things, saw that they were beautiful.

That woman had taken them, used their light and colour, and then flung them back! She wrapped them again in the paper, tied the string, and went towards the river. She did not hurry, but walked with her eyes steadily before her. She crossed the Embankment, and stood leaning on the parapet with her hands over the grey water. Her thumb and fingers unclosed; the white parcel dropped, floated a second, and then disappeared.

Mrs. Pendyce looked round her with a start.

A young man with a beard, whose face was familiar, was raising his hat.

“So your son was in,” he said. “I’m very glad. I must thank you again for standing to me just that minute; it made all the difference. It was the relation between the figure and the door that I wanted to get. Good-morning!”

Mrs. Pendyce murmured “Good-morning,” following him with startled eyes, as though he had caught her in the commission of a crime. She had a vision of those jewels, buried, poor things! in the grey slime, a prey to gloom, and robbed for ever of their light and colour. And, as though she had sinned, wronged the gentle essence of her nature, she hurried away.

CHAPTER VI

GREGORY LOOKS AT THE SKY

Gregory Vigil called Mr. Paramor a pessimist it was because, like other people, he did not know the meaning of, the term; for with a confusion common to the minds of many persons who have been conceived in misty moments, he thought that, to see things as they were, meant, to try and make them worse. Gregory had his own way of seeing things that was very dear to him — so dear that he would shut his eyes sooner than see them any other way. And since things to him were not the same as things to Mr. Paramor, it cannot, after all, be said that he did not see things as they were. But dirt upon a face that he wished to be clean he could not see — a fluid in his blue eyes dissolved that dirt while the image of the face was passing on to their retinae. The process was unconscious, and has been called idealism. This was why the longer he reflected the more agonisedly certain he became that his ward was right to be faithful to the man she loved, right to join her life to his. And he went about pressing the blade of this thought into his soul.

About four o'clock on the day of Mrs. Pendyce's visit to the studio a letter was brought him by a page-boy.

"GREEN'S HOTEL,

"Thursday.

"DEAR GRIG,

"I have seen Helen Bellew, and have just come from George. We have all been living in a bad dream. She does not love him — perhaps has never loved him. I do not know; I do not wish to judge. She has given him up. I will not trust myself to say anything about that. From beginning to end it all seems so unnecessary, such a needless, cross-grained muddle. I write this line to tell you how things really are, and to beg you, if you have a moment to spare, to look in at George's club this evening and let me know if he is there and how he seems. There is no one else that I could possibly ask to do this for me. Forgive me if this letter pains you.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"MARGERY PENDYCE."

To those with the single eye, the narrow personal view of all things human, by whom the irony underlying the affairs of men is unseen and unenjoyed, whose simple hearts afford that irony its most precious smiles, who; vanquished by that irony, remain invincible — to these no blow of Fate, no reversal of their ideas, can long retain importance. The darts stick, quaver, and fall off, like arrows from chain-armour, and the last dart, slipping upwards under the harness, quivers into the heart to the cry of "What — you! No, no; I don't believe you're here!"

Such as these have done much of what has had to be done in this old world, and perhaps still more of what has had to be undone.

When Gregory received this letter he was working on the case of a woman with the morphia habit. He put it into his pocket and went on working. It was all he was capable of doing.

"Here is the memorandum, Mrs. Shortman. Let them take her for six weeks. She will come out a different woman."

Mrs. Shortman, supporting her thin face in her thin hand, rested her glowing eyes on Gregory.

"I'm afraid she has lost all moral sense," she said. "Do you know, Mr. Vigil, I'm almost afraid she never had any!"

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Shortman turned her eyes away.

"I'm sometimes tempted to think," she said, "that there are such people. I wonder whether we allow enough for that. When I was a girl in the country I remember the daughter of our vicar, a very pretty creature. There were dreadful stories about her, even before she was married, and then we heard she was divorced. She came up to London and earned her own living by playing the piano until she married again. I won't tell you her name, but she is very well known, and nobody has ever seen her show the slightest signs of being ashamed. If there is one woman like that there may be dozens, and I sometimes think we waste — —"

Gregory said dryly:

"I have heard you say that before."

Mrs. Shortman bit her lips.

"I don't think," she said, "that I grudge my efforts or my time."

Gregory went quickly up, and took her hand.

"I know that — oh, I know that," he said with feeling.

The sound of Miss Mallow furiously typing rose suddenly from the corner. Gregory removed his hat from the peg on which it hung.

"I must go now," he said. "Good-night."

Without warning, as is the way with hearts, his heart had begun to bleed, and he felt that he must be in the open air. He took no omnibus or cab, but strode along with all his might, trying to think, trying to understand. But he could only feel-confused and battered feelings, with now and then odd throbs of pleasure of which he was ashamed. Whether he knew it or not, he was making his way to Chelsea, for though a man's eyes may be fixed on the stars, his feet cannot take him there, and Chelsea seemed to them the best alternative. He was not alone upon this journey, for many another man was going there, and many a man had been and was coming now away, and the streets were the one long streaming crowd of the summer afternoon. And the men he met looked at Gregory, and Gregory looked at them, and neither saw the other, for so it is written of men, lest they pay attention to cares that are not their own. The sun that scorched his face fell on their backs, the breeze that cooled his back blew on their cheeks. For the careless world, too, was on its way, along the pavement of the universe, one of millions going to Chelsea, meeting millions coming away....

"Mrs. Bellew at home?"

He went into a room fifteen feet square and perhaps ten high, with a sulky canary in a small gilt cage, an upright piano with an open operatic score, a sofa with piled-up cushions, and on it a woman with a flushed and sullen face, whose elbows were resting on her knees, whose chin was resting on her hand, whose gaze was fixed on nothing. It was a room of that size, with all these things, but Gregory took into it with him some thing that made it all seem different to Gregory. He sat down by the window with his eyes carefully averted, and spoke in soft tones broken by something that sounded like emotion. He began by telling her of his woman with the morphia habit, and then he told her that he knew everything. When he had said this he looked out of the window, where builders had left by inadvertence a narrow strip of sky. And thus he avoided seeing the look on her face, contemptuous, impatient, as though she were thinking: ‘You are a good fellow, Gregory, but for Heaven’s sake do see things for once as they are! I have had enough of it.’ And he avoided seeing her stretch her arms out and spread the fingers, as an angry cat will stretch and spread its toes. He told her that he did not want to worry her, but that when she wanted him for anything she must send for him — he was always there; and he looked at her feet, so that he did not see her lip curl. He told her that she would always be the same to him, and he asked her to believe that. He did not see the smile which never left her lips again while he was there — the smile he could not read, because it was the smile of life, and of a woman that he did not understand. But he did see on that sofa a beautiful creature for whom he had longed for years, and so he went away, and left her standing at the door with her teeth fastened on her lip: And since with him Gregory took his eyes, he did not see her reseated on the sofa, just as she had been before he came in, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hand, her moody eyes like those of a gambler staring into the distance....

In the streets of tall houses leading away from Chelsea were many men, some, like Gregory, hungry for love, and some hungry for bread — men in twos and threes, in crowds, or by themselves, some with their eyes on the ground, some with their eyes level, some with their eyes on the sky, but all with courage and loyalty of one poor kind or another in their hearts. For by courage and loyalty alone it is written that man shall live, whether he goes to Chelsea or whether he comes away. Of all these men, not one but would have smiled to hear Gregory saying to himself: “She will always be the same to me! She will always be the same to me!” And not one that would have grinned....

It was getting on for the Stoics’ dinner hour when Gregory found himself in Piccadilly, and, Stoic after Stoic, they were getting out of cabs and passing the club doors. The poor fellows had been working hard all day on the racecourse, the cricket-ground, at Hurlingham, or in the Park; some had been to the Royal Academy, and on their faces was a pleasant look: “Ah, God is good — we can rest at last!” And many of them had had no lunch, hoping to keep their weights down, and many who had lunched had not done themselves as well as might be hoped, and some had done themselves too well; but in all their hearts the trust burned bright that they might do themselves better at dinner, for their God was good, and dwelt between the kitchen and the cellar of the Stoics’ Club. And all — for all had poetry in their souls — looked forward to those hours in paradise when, with cigars between their lips, good wine below, they might dream the daily dream that comes to all true Stoics for about fifteen shillings or even less, all told.

From a little back slum, within two stones’ throw of the god of the Stoics’ Club, there had come out two seamstresses to take the air; one was in consumption, having neglected to earn enough to feed herself properly for some years past, and the other looked as if she would be in consumption shortly, for the same reason. They stood on the pavement, watching the cabs drive up. Some of the Stoics saw them and thought: ‘Poor girls! they look awfully bad.’ Three or four said to themselves: “It oughtn’t to be allowed. I mean, it’s so painful to see; and it’s not as if one could do anything. They’re not beggars, don’t you know, and so what can one do?”

But most of the Stoics did not look at them at all, feeling that their soft hearts could not stand these painful sights, and anxious not to spoil their dinners. Gregory did not see them either, for it so happened that he was looking at the sky, and just then the two girls crossed the road and were lost among the passers-by, for they were not dogs, who could smell out the kind of man he was.

“Mr. Pendyce is in the club; I will send your name up, sir.” And rolling a little, as though Gregory’s name were heavy, the porter gave it to the boy, who went away with it.

Gregory stood by the empty hearth and waited, and while he waited, nothing struck him at all, for the Stoics seemed very natural, just mere men like himself, except that their clothes were better, which made him think: ‘I shouldn’t care to belong here and have to dress for dinner every night.’

“Mr. Pendyce is very sorry, sir, but he’s engaged.”

Gregory bit his lip, said “Thank you,” and went away.

‘That’s all Margery wants,’ he thought; ‘the rest is nothing to me,’ and, getting on a bus, he fixed his eyes once more on the sky.

But George was not engaged. Like a wounded animal taking its hurt for refuge to its lair, he sat in his favourite window overlooking Piccadilly. He sat there as though youth had left him, unmoving, never lifting his eyes. In his stubborn mind a wheel seemed turning, grinding out his memories to the last grain. And Stoics, who could not bear to see a man sit thus throughout that sacred hour, came up from time to time.

“Aren’t you going to dine, Pendyce?”

Dumb brutes tell no one of their pains; the law is silence. So with George. And as each Stoic came up, he only set his teeth and said:

“Presently, old chap.”

CHAPTER VII

TOUR WITH THE SPANIEL JOHN

Now the spaniel John — whose habit was to smell of heather and baked biscuits when he rose from a night's sleep — was in disgrace that Thursday. Into his long and narrow head it took time for any new idea to enter, and not till forty hours after Mrs. Pendyce had gone did he recognise fully that something definite had happened to his master. During the agitated minutes that this conviction took in forming, he worked hard. Taking two and a half brace of his master's shoes and slippers, and placing them in unaccustomed spots, he lay on them one by one till they were warm, then left them for some bird or other to hatch out, and returned to Mr. Pendyce's door. It was for all this that the Squire said, "John!" several times, and threatened him with a razorstrop. And partly because he could not bear to leave his master for a single second — the scolding had made him love him so — and partly because of that new idea, which let him have no peace, he lay in the hall waiting.

Having once in his hot youth inadvertently followed the Squire's horse, he could never be induced to follow it again. He both personally disliked this needlessly large and swift form of animal, and suspected it of designs upon his master; for when the creature had taken his master up, there was not a smell of him left anywhere — not a whiff of that pleasant scent that so endeared him to the heart. As soon, therefore, as the horse appeared, the spaniel John would lie down on his stomach with his forepaws close to his nose, and his nose close to the ground; nor until the animal vanished could he be induced to abandon an attitude in which he resembled a couching Sphinx.

But this afternoon, with his tail down, his lips pouting, his shoulders making heavy work of it, his nose lifted in deprecation of that ridiculous and unnecessary plane on which his master sat, he followed at a measured distance. In such-wise, aforetime, the village had followed the Squire and Mr. Barter when they introduced into it its one and only drain.

Mr. Pendyce rode slowly; his feet, in their well-blacked boots, his nervous legs in Bedford cord and mahogany-coloured leggings, moved in rhyme to the horse's trot. A long-tailed coat fell clean and full over his thighs; his back and shoulders were a wee bit bent to lessen motion, and above his neat white stock under a grey bowler hat his lean, grey-whiskered and moustachioed face, with harassed eyes, was preoccupied and sad. His horse, a brown blood mare, ambled lazily, head raking forward, and bang tail floating outward from her hocks. And so, in the June sunshine, they went, all three, along the leafy lane to Worsted Scotton....

On Tuesday, the day that Mrs. Pendyce had left, the Squire had come in later than usual, for he felt that after their difference of the night before, a little coolness would do her no harm. The first hour of discovery had been as one confused and angry minute, ending in a burst of nerves and the telegram to General Pendyce. He took the telegram himself, returning from the village with his head down, a sudden prey to a feeling of shame — an odd and terrible feeling that he never remembered to have felt before, a sort of fear of his fellow-creatures. He would have chosen a secret way, but there was none, only the highroad, or the path across the village green, and through the churchyard to his paddocks. An old cottager was standing at the turnstile, and the Squire made for him with his head down, as a bull makes for a fence. He had meant to pass in silence, but between him and this old broken husbandman there was a bond forged by the ages. Had it meant death, Mr. Pendyce could not have passed one whose fathers had toiled for his fathers, eaten his fathers' bread, died with his fathers, without a word and a movement of his hand.

"Evenin', Squire; nice evenin'. Faine weather fur th' hay!"

The voice was warped and wavery.

'This is my Squire,' it seemed to say, 'whatever ther' be agin him!'

Mr. Pendyce's hand went up to his hat.

"Evenin', Hermon. Aye, fine weather for the hay! Mrs. Pendyce has gone up to London. We young bachelors, ha!"

He passed on.

Not until he had gone some way did he perceive why he had made that announcement. It was simply because he must tell everyone, everyone; then no one could be astonished.

He hurried on to the house to dress in time for dinner, and show all that nothing was amiss. Seven courses would have been served him had the sky fallen; but he ate little, and drank more claret than was his wont. After dinner he sat in his study with the windows open, and in the mingled day and lamp light read his wife's letter over again. As it was with the spaniel John, so with his master — a new idea penetrated but slowly into his long and narrow head.

She was cracked about George; she did not know what she was doing; would soon come to her senses. It was not for him to take any steps. What steps, indeed, could he take without confessing that Horace Pendyce had gone too far, that Horace Pendyce was in the wrong? That had never been his habit, and he could not alter now. If she and George chose to be stubborn, they must take the consequences, and fend for themselves.

In the silence and the lamplight, growing mellower each minute under the green silk shade, he sat confusedly thinking of the past. And in that dumb reverie, as though of fixed malice, there came to him no memories that were not pleasant, no images that were not fair. He tried to think of her unkindly, he tried to paint her black; but with the perversity born into the world when he was born, to die when he was dead, she came to him softly, like the ghost of gentleness, to haunt his fancy. She came to him smelling of sweet scents, with a slight rustling of silk, and the sound of her expectant voice, saying, "Yes, dear?" as though she were not bored. He remembered when he brought her first to Worsted Skeynes thirty-four years ago, "That timid, and like a rose, but a lady every hinch, the love!" as his old nurse had said.

He remembered her when George was born, like wax for whiteness and transparency, with eyes that were all pupils, and a hovering smile. So many other times he remembered her throughout those years, but never as a woman faded, old; never as a woman of the past. Now that he had not got her, for the first time Mr. Pendyce realised that she had not grown old, that she was still to him "timid, and like a rose, but a lady every hinch, the love!" And he could not bear this thought; it made him feel so miserable and lonely in the lamplight, with the grey moths hovering round, and the spaniel John asleep upon his foot.

So, taking his candle, he went up to bed. The doors that barred away the servants' wing were closed. In all that great remaining space of house his was the only candle, the only sounding footstep. Slowly he mounted as he had mounted many thousand times, but never once like this, and behind him, like a shadow, mounted the spaniel John.

And She that knows the hearts of men and dogs, the Mother from whom all things come, to whom they all go home, was watching, and presently, when they were laid, the one in his deserted bed, the other on blue linen, propped against the door, She gathered them to sleep.

But Wednesday came, and with it Wednesday duties. They who have passed the windows of the Stoics' Club and seen the Stoics sitting there have haunting visions of the idle landed classes. These visions will not let them sleep, will not let their tongues to cease from bitterness, for they so long to lead that "idle" life themselves. But though in a misty land illusions be our cherished lot, that we may all think falsely of our neighbours and enjoy ourselves, the word "idle" is not at all the word.

Many and heavy tasks weighed on the Squire at Worsted Skeynes. There was the visit to the stables to decide as to firing Beldame's hock, or selling the new bay horse because he did not draw men fast enough, and the vexed question of Bruggan's oats or Beal's, talked out with Benson, in a leather belt and flannel shirt-sleeves, like a corpulent, white-whiskered boy. Then the long sitting in the study with memorandums and accounts, all needing care, lest So-and-so should give too little for too little, or too little for too much; and the smart walk across to Jarvis, the head keeper, to ask after the health of the new Hungarian bird, or discuss a scheme whereby in the last drive so many of those creatures he had nurtured from their youth up might be deterred from flying over to his friend Lord Quarryman. And this took long, for Jarvis's feelings forced him to say six times, "Well, Mr. Pendyce, sir, what I say is we didn't oughter lose s'many birds in that last drive;" and Mr. Pendyce to answer: "No, Jarvis, certainly not. Well, what do you suggest?" And that other grievous question — how to get plenty of pheasants and plenty of foxes to dwell together in perfect harmony — discussed with endless sympathy, for, as the Squire would say, "Jarvis is quite safe with foxes." He could not bear his covers to be drawn blank.

Then back to a sparing lunch, or perhaps no lunch at all, that he might keep fit and hard; and out again at once on horseback or on foot to the home farm or further, as need might take him, and a long afternoon, with eyes fixed on the ribs of bullocks, the colour of swedes, the surfaces of walls or gates or fences.

Then home again to tea and to the Times, which had as yet received but fleeting glances, with close attention to all those Parliamentary measures threatening, remotely, the existing state of things, except, of course, that future tax on wheat so needful to the betterment of Worsted Skeynes. There were occasions, too, when they brought him tramps to deal with, to whom his one remark would be, "Hold out your hands, my man," which, being found unwarped by honest toil, were promptly sent to gaol. When found so warped, Mr. Pendyce was at a loss, and would walk up and down, earnestly trying to discover what his duty was to them. There were days, too, almost entirely occupied by sessions, when many classes of offenders came before him, to whom he meted justice according to the heinousness of the offence, from poaching at the top down and down to wife-beating at the bottom; for, though a humane man, tradition did not suffer him to look on this form of sport as really criminal — at any rate, not in the country.

It was true that all these matters could have been settled in a fraction of the time by a young and trained intelligence, but this would have wronged tradition, disturbed the Squire's settled conviction that he was doing his duty, and given cause for slanderous tongues to hint at idleness. And though, further, it was true that all this daily labour was devoted directly or indirectly to interests of his own, what was that but doing his duty to the country and asserting the prerogative of every Englishman at all costs to be provincial?

But on this Wednesday the flavour of the dish was gone. To be alone amongst his acres, quite alone — to have no one to care whether he did anything at all, no one to whom he might confide that Beldame's hock was to be fired, that Peacock was asking for more gates, was almost more than he could bear. He would have wired to the girls to come home, but he could not bring himself to face their questions. Gerald was at Gib! George — George was no son of his! — and his pride forbade him to write to her who had left him thus to solitude and shame. For deep down below his stubborn anger it was shame that the Squire felt — shame that he should have to shun his neighbours, lest they should ask him questions which, for his own good name and his own pride, he must answer with a lie; shame that he should not be master in his own house — still more, shame that anyone should see that he was not. To be sure, he did not know that he felt shame, being unused to introspection, having always kept it at arm's length. For he always meditated concretely, as, for instance, when he looked up and did not see his wife at breakfast, but saw Bester making coffee, he thought, 'That fellow knows all about it, I shouldn't wonder!' and he felt angry for thinking that. When he saw Mr. Barter coming down the drive he thought, 'Confound it! I can't meet him,' and slipped out, and felt angry that he had thus avoided him. When in the Scotch garden he came on Jackman syringing the rose-trees, he said to him, "Your mistress has gone to London," and abruptly turned away, angry that he had been obliged by a mysterious impulse to tell him that:

So it was, all through that long, sad day, and the only thing that gave him comfort was to score through, in the draft of his will, bequests to his eldest son, and busy himself over drafting a clause to take their place:

"Forasmuch as my eldest son, George Hubert, has by conduct unbecoming to a gentleman and a Pendyce, proved himself unworthy of my confidence, and forasmuch as to my regret I am unable to cut the entail of my estate, I hereby declare that he shall in no way participate in any division of my other property or of my personal effects, conscientiously believing that it is my duty so to do in the interests of my family and of the country, and I make this declaration without anger."

For, all the anger that he was balked of feeling against his wife, because he missed her so, was added to that already felt against his son.

By the last post came a letter from General Pendyce. He opened it with fingers as shaky as his brother's writing.

"ARMY AND NAVY CLUB. "DEAR HORACE,

"What the deuce and all made you send that telegram? It spoiled my breakfast, and sent me off in a tearing hurry, to find Margery perfectly well. If she'd been seedy or anything I should have been delighted, but there she was, busy about her dresses and what not, and I dare say she thought me a lunatic for coming at that time in the morning. You shouldn't get into the habit of sending telegrams. A telegram is a thing that means something — at least, I've always thought so. I met George coming away from her in a deuce of a hurry. I can't write any more now. I'm just going to have my lunch.

"Your affectionate brother,

"CHARLES PENDYCE."

She was well. She had been seeing George. With a hardened heart the Squire went up to bed.

And Wednesday came to an end....

And so on the Thursday afternoon the brown blood mare carried Mr. Pendyce along the lane, followed by the spaniel John. They passed the Firs, where Bellew lived, and, bending sharply to the right, began to mount towards the Common; and with them mounted the image of that fellow who was at the bottom of it all — an image that ever haunted the Squire's mind nowadays; a ghost, high-shouldered, with little burning eyes, clipped red moustaches, thin bowed legs. A plague spot on that system which he loved, a whipping-post to heredity, a scourge like Attila the Hun; a sort of damnable caricature of all that a country gentleman should be — of his love of sport and open air, of his "hardness" and his pluck; of his powers of knowing his own mind, and taking his liquor like a man; of his creed, now out of date, of gallantry. Yes — a kind of cursed bogey of a man, a spectral follower of the hounds, a desperate character — a man that in old days someone would have shot; a drinking, white-faced devil who despised Horace Pendyce, whom Horace Pendyce hated, yet could not quite despise. "Always one like that in a hunting country!" A black dog on the shoulders of his order. 'Post equitem sedet' Jaspar Bellew!

The Squire came out on the top of the rise, and all Worsted Scotton was in sight. It was a sandy stretch of broom and gorse and heather, with a few Scotch firs; it had no value at all, and he longed for it, as a boy might long for the bite someone else had snatched out of his apple. It distressed him lying there, his and yet not his, like a wife who was no wife — as though Fortune were enjoying her at his expense. Thus was he deprived of the fulness of his mental image; for as with all men, so with the Squire, that which he loved and owned took definite form — a some thing that he saw. Whenever the words "Worsted Skeynes" were in his mind — and that was almost always — there rose before him an image defined and concrete, however indescribable; and what ever this image was, he knew that Worsted Scotton spoiled it. It was true that he could not think of any use to which to put the Common, but he felt deeply that it was pure dog-in-the-mangerism of the cottagers, and this he could not stand. Not one beast in two years had fattened on its barrenness. Three old donkeys alone eked out the remnants of their days. A bundle of firewood or old bracken, a few peat sods from one especial corner, were all the selfish peasants gathered. But the cottagers were no great matter — he could soon have settled them; it was that fellow Peacock whom he could not settle, just because he happened to abut on the Common, and his fathers had been nasty before him. Mr. Pendyce rode round looking at the fence his father had put up, until he came to the portion that Peacock's father had pulled down; and here, by a strange fatality — such as will happen even in printed records — he came on Peacock himself standing in the gap, as though he had foreseen this visit of the Squire's. The mare stopped of her own accord, the spaniel John at a measured distance lay down to think, and all those yards away he could be heard doing it, and now and then swallowing his tongue.

Peacock stood with his hands in his breeches' pockets. An old straw hat was on his head, his little eyes were turned towards the ground; and his cob, which he had tied to what his father had left standing of the fence, had his eyes, too, turned towards the ground, for he was eating grass. Mr. Pendyce's fight with his burning stable had stuck in the farmer's "gizzard" ever since. He felt that he was forgetting it day by day — would soon forget it altogether. He felt the old sacred doubts inherited from his fathers rising every hour within him. And so he had come up to see what looking at the gap would do for his sense of gratitude. At sight of the Squire his little eyes turned here and there, as a pig's eyes turn when it receives a blow behind. That Mr. Pendyce should have chosen this moment to come up was as though Providence, that knoweth all things, knew the natural thing for Mr. Pendyce to do.

"Afternoon, Squire. Dry weather; rain's badly wanted. I'll get no feed if this goes on."

Mr. Pendyce answered:

"Afternoon, Peacock. Why, your fields are first-rate for grass."

They hastily turned their eyes away, for at that moment they could not bear to see each other.

There was a silence; then Peacock said:

"What about those gates of mine, Squire?" and his voice quavered, as though gratitude might yet get the better of him.

The Squire's irritable glance swept over the unfenced space to right and left, and the thought flashed through his mind:

'Suppose I were to give the beggar those gates, would he — would he let me enclose the Scotton again?'

He looked at that square, bearded man, and the infallible instinct, christened so wickedly by Mr. Paramor, guided him.

"What's wrong with your gates, man, I should like to know?"

Peacock looked at him full this time; there was no longer any quaver in his voice, but a sort of rough good-humour.

"Wy, the 'arf o' them's as rotten as matchwood!" he said; and he took a breath of relief, for he knew that gratitude was dead within his soul.

"Well, I wish mine at the home farm were half as good. Come, John!" and, touching the mare with his heel, Mr. Pendyce turned; but before he had gone a dozen paces he was back.

"Mrs. Peacock well, I hope? Mrs. Pendyce has gone up to London."

And touching his hat, without waiting for Peacock's answer, he rode away. He took the lane past Peacock's farm across the home paddocks, emerging on the cricket-ground, a field of his own which he had caused to be converted.

The return match with Coldingham was going on, and, motionless on his horse, the Squire stopped to watch. A tall figure in the "long field" came leisurely towards him. It was the Hon. Geoffrey Winlow. Mr. Pendyce subdued an impulse to turn the mare and ride away.

"We're going to give you a licking, Squire! How's Mrs. Pendyce? My wife sent her love."

On the Squire's face in the full sun was more than the sun's flush.

"Thanks," he said, "she's very well. She's gone up to London."

"And aren't you going up yourself this season?"

The Squire crossed those leisurely eyes with his own.

"I don't think so," he said slowly.

The Hon. Geoffrey returned to his duties.

"We got poor old Barter for a 'blob'!" he said over his shoulder.

The Squire became aware that Mr. Barter was approaching from behind.

"You see that left-hand fellow?" he said, pouting. "Just watch his foot. D'you mean to say that wasn't a no-ball? He bowled me with a no-ball. He's a rank no-batter. That fellow Locke's no more an umpire than — —"

He stopped and looked earnestly at the bowler.

The Squire 'did not answer, sitting on his mare as though carved in stone. Suddenly his throat clicked.

"How's your wife?" he said. "Margery would have come to see her, but — but she's gone up to London."

The Rector did not turn his head.

"My wife? Oh, going on first-rate. There's another! I say, Winlow, this is too bad!"

The Hon. Geoffrey's pleasant voice was heard:

"Please not to speak to the man at the wheel!"

The Squire turned the mare and rode away; and the spaniel John, who had been watching from a measured distance, followed after, his tongue lolling from his mouth.

The Squire turned through a gate down the main aisle of the home covert, and the nose and the tail of the spaniel John, who scented creatures to the left and right, were in perpetual motion. It was cool in there. The June foliage made one long colonnade, broken by a winding river of sky. Among the oaks and hazels; the beeches and the elms, the ghostly body of a birch-tree shone here and there, captured by those grosser trees which seemed to cluster round her, proud of their prisoner, loth to let her go, that subtle spirit of their wood. They knew that, were she gone, their forest lady, wilder and yet gentler than themselves — they would lose credit, lose the grace and essence of their corporate being.

The Squire dismounted, tethered his horse, and sat under one of those birch-trees, on the fallen body of an elm. The spaniel John also sat and loved him with his eyes. And sitting there they thought their thoughts, but their thoughts were different.

For under this birch-tree Horace Pendyce had stood and kissed his wife the very day he brought her home to Worsted Skeynes, and though he did not see the parallel between her and the birch-tree that some poor imaginative creature might have drawn, yet was he thinking of that long past afternoon. But the spaniel John was not thinking of it; his recollection was too dim, for he had been at that time twenty-eight years short of being born.

Mr. Pendyce sat there long with his horse and with his dog, and from out the blackness of the spaniel John, who was more than less asleep, there shone at times an eye turned on his master like some devoted star. The sun, shining too, gilded the stem of the birch-tree. The birds and beasts began their evening stir all through the undergrowth, and rabbits, popping out into the ride, looked with surprise at the spaniel John, and popped in back again. They knew that men with horses had no guns, but could not bring themselves to trust that black and hairy thing whose nose so twitched whenever they appeared. The gnats came out to dance, and at their dancing, every sound and scent and shape became the sounds and scents and shapes of evening; and there was evening in the Squire's heart.

Slowly and stiffly he got up from the log and mounted to ride home. It would be just as lonely when he got there, but a house is better than a wood, where the gnats dance, the birds and creatures stir and stir, and shadows lengthen; where the sun steals upwards on the tree-stems, and all is careless of its owner, Man.

It was past seven o'clock when he went to his study. There was a lady standing at the window, and Mr. Pendyce said:

"I beg your pardon?"

The lady turned; it was his wife. The Squire stopped with a hoarse sound, and stood silent, covering his eyes with his hand.

CHAPTER VIII

ACUTE ATTACK OF ‘PENDYCITIS’

Mrs. Pendyce felt very faint when she hurried away from Chelsea. She had passed through hours of great emotion, and eaten nothing.

Like sunset clouds or the colours in mother-o’-pearl, so, it is written, shall be the moods of men — interwoven as the threads of an embroidery, less certain than an April day, yet with a rhythm of their own that never fails, and no one can quite scan.

A single cup of tea on her way home, and her spirit revived. It seemed suddenly as if there had been a great ado about nothing! As if someone had known how stupid men could be, and been playing a fantasia on that stupidity. But this gaiety of spirit soon died away, confronted by the problem of what she should do next.

She reached her hotel without making a decision. She sat down in the reading-room to write to Gregory, and while she sat there with her pen in her hand a dreadful temptation came over her to say bitter things to him, because by not seeing people as they were he had brought all this upon them. But she had so little practice in saying bitter things that she could not think of any that were nice enough, and in the end she was obliged to leave them out. After finishing and sending off the note she felt better. And it came to her suddenly that, if she packed at once, there was just time to catch the 5.55 to Worsted Skeynes.

As in leaving her home, so in returning, she followed her instinct, and her instinct told her to avoid unnecessary fuss and suffering.

The decrepit station fly, mouldy and smelling of stables, bore her almost lovingly towards the Hall. Its old driver, clean-faced, cheery, somewhat like a bird, drove her almost furiously, for, though he knew nothing, he felt that two whole days and half a day were quite long enough for her to be away. At the lodge gate old Roy, the Skye, was seated on his haunches, and the sight of him set Mrs. Pendyce trembling as though till then she had not realised that she was coming home.

Home! The long narrow lane without a turning, the mists and stillness, the driving rain and hot bright afternoons; the scents of wood smoke and hay and the scent of her flowers; the Squire’s voice, the dry rattle of grass-cutters, the barking of dogs, and distant hum of threshing; and Sunday sounds — church bells and rooks, and Mr. Barter’s preaching; the tastes, too, of the very dishes! And all these scents and sounds and tastes, and the feel of the air to her cheeks, seemed to have been for ever in the past, and to be going on for ever in the time to come.

She turned red and white by turns, and felt neither joy nor sadness, for in a wave the old life came over her. She went at once to the study to wait for her husband to come in. At the hoarse sound he made, her heart beat fast, while old Roy and the spaniel John growled gently at each other.

“John,” she murmured, “aren’t you glad to see me, dear?”

The spaniel John, without moving, beat his tail against his master’s foot.

The Squire raised his head at last.

“Well, Margery?” was all he said.

It shot through her mind that he looked older, and very tired!

The dinner-gong began to sound, and as though attracted by its long monotonous beating, a swallow flew in at one of the narrow windows and fluttered round the room. Mrs. Pendyce’s eyes followed its flight.

The Squire stepped forward suddenly and took her hand.

“Don’t run away from me again, Margery!” he said; and stooping down, he kissed it.

At this action, so unlike her husband, Mrs. Pendyce blushed like a girl. Her eyes above his grey and close-cropped head seemed grateful that he did not reproach her, glad of that caress.

“I have some news to tell you, Horace. Helen Bellew has given George up!”

The Squire dropped her hand.

“And quite time too,” he said. “I dare say George has refused to take his dismissal. He’s as obstinate as a mule.”

“I found him in a dreadful state.”

Mr. Pendyce asked uneasily:

“What? What’s that?”

“He looked so desperate.”

“Desperate?” said the Squire, with a sort of startled anger.

Mrs. Pendyce went on:

“It was dreadful to see his face. I was with him this afternoon-”

The Squire said suddenly:

“He’s not ill, is he?”

“No, not ill. Oh, Horace, don’t you understand? I was afraid he might do something rash. He was so — miserable.”

The Squire began to walk up and down.

“Is he is he safe now?” he burst out.

Mrs. Pendyce sat down rather suddenly in the nearest chair.

“Yes,” she said with difficulty, “I — I think so.”

“Think! What’s the good of that? What —— Are you feeling faint, Margery?”

Mrs. Pendyce, who had closed her eyes, said:

“No dear, it’s all right.”

Mr. Pendyce came close, and since air and quiet were essential to her at that moment, he bent over and tried by every means in his power to rouse her; and she, who longed to be let alone, sympathised with him, for she knew that it was natural that he should do this. In spite of his efforts the feeling of faintness passed, and, taking his hand, she stroked it gratefully.

“What is to be done now, Horace?”

“Done!” cried the Squire. “Good God! how should I know? Here you are in this state, all because of that d — d fellow Bellew and his d — d wife! What you want is some dinner.”

So saying, he put his arm around her, and half leading, half carrying, took her to her room.

They did not talk much at dinner, and of indifferent things, of Mrs. Barter, Peacock, the roses, and Beldame’s hock. Only once they came too near to that which instinct told them to avoid, for the Squire said suddenly:

“I suppose you saw that woman?”

And Mrs. Pendyce murmured:

“Yes.”

She soon went to her room, and had barely got into bed when he appeared, saying as though ashamed:

“I’m very early.”

She lay awake, and every now and then the Squire would ask her, “Are you asleep, Margery?” hoping that she might have dropped off, for he himself could not sleep. And she knew that he meant to be nice to her, and she knew, too, that as he lay awake, turning from side to side, he was thinking like herself: ‘What’s to be done next?’ And that his fancy, too, was haunted by a ghost, high-shouldered, with little burning eyes, red hair, and white freckled face. For, save that George was miserable, nothing was altered, and the cloud of vengeance still hung over Worsted Skeynes. Like some weary lesson she rehearsed her thoughts: ‘Now Horace can answer that letter of Captain Bellow’s, can tell him that George will not — indeed, cannot — see her again. He must answer it. But will he?’

She groped after the secret springs of her husband’s character, turning and turning and trying to understand, that she might know the best way of approaching him. And she could not feel sure, for behind all the little outside points of his nature, that she thought so “funny,” yet could comprehend, there was something which seemed to her as unknown, as impenetrable as the dark, a sort of thickness of soul, a sort of hardness, a sort of barbaric-what? And as when in working at her embroidery the point of her needle would often come to a stop against stiff buckram, so now was the point of her soul brought to a stop against the soul of her husband. ‘Perhaps,’ she thought, ‘Horace feels like that with me.’ She need not so have thought, for the Squire never worked embroideries, nor did the needle of his soul make voyages of discovery.

By lunch-time the next day she had not dared to say a word. ‘If I say nothing,’ she thought, ‘he may write it of his own accord.’

Without attracting his attention, therefore, she watched every movement of his morning. She saw him sitting at his bureau with a creased and crumpled letter, and knew it was Bellew’s; and she hovered about, coming softly in and out, doing little things here and there and in the hall, outside. But the Squire gave no sign, motionless as the spaniel John couched along the ground with his nose between his paws.

After lunch she could bear it no longer.

“What do you think ought to be done now, Horace?”

The Squire looked at her fixedly.

“If you imagine,” he said at last, “that I’ll have anything to do with that fellow Bellew, you’re very much mistaken.”

Mrs. Pendyce was arranging a vase of flowers, and her hand shook so that some of the water was spilled over the cloth. She took out her handkerchief and dabbed it up.

“You never answered his letter, dear,” she said.

The Squire put his back against the sideboard; his stiff figure, with lean neck and angry eyes, whose pupils were mere pin-points, had a certain dignity.

“Nothing shall induce me!” he said, and his voice was harsh and strong, as though he spoke for something bigger than himself. “I’ve thought it over all the morning, and I’m d — d if I do! The man is a ruffian. I won’t knuckle under to him!”

Mrs. Pendyce clasped her hands.

“Oh, Horace,” she said; “but for the sake of us all! Only just give him that assurance.”

“And let him crow over me!” cried the Squire. “By Jove, no!”

“But, Horace, I thought that was what you wanted George to do. You wrote to him and asked him to promise.”

The Squire answered:

“You know nothing about it, Margery; you know nothing about me. D’you think I’m going to tell him that his wife has thrown my son over — let him keep me gasping like a fish all this time, and then get the best of it in the end? Not if I have to leave the county — not if I — —”

But, as though he had imagined the most bitter fate of all, he stopped.

Mrs. Pendyce, putting her hands on the lapels of his coat, stood with her head bent. The colour had gushed into her cheeks, her eyes were bright with tears. And there came from her in her emotion a warmth and fragrance, a charm, as though she were again young, like the portrait under which they stood.

“Not if I ask you, Horace?”

The Squire’s face was suffused with dusky colour; he clenched his hands and seemed to sway and hesitate.

“No, Margery,” he said hoarsely; “it’s — it’s — I can’t!”

And, breaking away from her, he left the room.

Mrs. Pendyce looked after him; her fingers, from which he had torn his coat, began twining the one with the other.

CHAPTER IX

BELLEW BOWS TO A LADY

There was silence at the Firs, and in that silent house, where only five rooms were used, an old manservant sat in his pantry on a wooden chair, reading from an article out of Rural Life. There was no one to disturb him, for the master was asleep, and the housekeeper had not yet come to cook the dinner. He read slowly, through spectacles, engraving the words for ever on the tablets of his mind. He read about the construction and habits of the owl: “In the tawny, or brown, owl there is a manubrial process; the furcula, far from being joined to the keel of the sternum, consists of two stylets, which do not even meet; while the posterior margin of the sternum presents two pairs of projections, with corresponding fissures between.” The old manservant paused, resting his blinking eyes on the pale sunlight through the bars of his narrow window, so that a little bird on the window-sill looked at him and instantly flew away.

The old manservant read on again: “The pterylological characters of Photodilus seem not to have been investigated, but it has been found to want the tarsal loop, as well as the manubrial process, while its clavicles are not joined in a furcula, nor do they meet the keel, and the posterior margin of the sternum has processes and fissures like the tawny section.” Again he paused, and his gaze was satisfied and bland.

Up in the little smoking-room in a leather chair his master sat asleep. In front of him were stretched his legs in dusty riding-boots. His lips were closed, but through a little hole at one corner came a tiny puffing sound. On the floor by his side was an empty glass, between his feet a Spanish bulldog. On a shelf above his head reposed some frayed and yellow novels with sporting titles, written by persons in their inattentive moments. Over the chimneypiece presided the portrait of Mr. Jorrocks persuading his horse to cross a stream.

And the face of Jaspar Bellew asleep was the face of a man who has ridden far, to get away from himself, and to-morrow will have to ride far again. His sandy eyebrows twitched with his dreams against the dead-white, freckled skin above high cheekbones, and two hard ridges were fixed between his brows; now and then over the sleeping face came the look of one riding at a gate.

In the stables behind the house she who had carried him on his ride, having rummaged out her last grains of corn, lifted her nose and poked it through the bars of her loosebox to see what he was doing who had not carried her master that sweltering afternoon, and seeing that he was awake, she snorted lightly, to tell him there was thunder in the air. All else in the stables was deadly quiet; the shrubberies around were still; and in the hushed house the master slept.

But on the edge of his wooden chair in the silence of his pantry the old manservant read, “This bird is a voracious feeder,” and he paused, blinking his eyes and nervously puckering his lips, for he had partially understood....

Mrs. Pendyce was crossing the fields. She had on her prettiest frock, of smoky-grey crepe, and she looked a little anxiously at the sky. Gathered in the west a coming storm was chasing the whitened sunlight. Against its purple the trees stood blackish-green. Everything was very still, not even the poplars stirred, yet the purple grew with sinister, unmoving speed. Mrs. Pendyce hurried, grasping her skirts in both her hands, and she noticed that the cattle were all grouped under the hedge.

‘What dreadful-looking clouds!’ she thought. ‘I wonder if I shall get to the Firs before it comes?’ But though her frock made her hasten, her heart made her stand still, it fluttered so, and was so full. Suppose he were not sober! She remembered those little burning eyes, which had frightened her so the night he dined at Worsted Skeynes and fell out of his dogcart afterwards. A kind of legendary malevolence clung about his image.

‘Suppose he is horrid to me!’ she thought.

She could not go back now; but she wished — how she wished! — that it were over. A heat-drop splashed her glove. She crossed the lane and opened the Firs gate. Throwing frightened glances at the sky, she hastened down the drive. The purple was couched like a pall on the treetops, and these had begun to sway and moan as though struggling and weeping at their fate. Some splashes of warm rain were falling. A streak of lightning tore the firmament. Mrs. Pendyce rushed into the porch covering her ears with her hands.

‘How long will it last?’ she thought. ‘I’m so frightened!’...

A very old manservant, whose face was all puckers, opened the door suddenly to peer out at the storm, but seeing Mrs. Pendyce, he peered at her instead.

“Is Captain Bellew at home?”

“Yes, ma’am. The Captain’s in the study. We don’t use the drawing-room now. Nasty storm coming on, ma’am — nasty storm. Will you please to sit down a minute, while I let the Captain know?”

The hall was low and dark; the whole house was low and dark, and smelled a little of woodrot. Mrs. Pendyce did not sit down, but stood under an arrangement of three foxes’ heads, supporting two hunting-crops, with their lashes hanging down. And the heads of those animals suggested to her the thought: ‘Poor man! He must be very lonely here.’

She started. Something was rubbing against her knees: it was only an enormous bulldog. She stooped down to pat it, and having once begun, found it impossible to leave off, for when she took her hand away the creature pressed against her, and she was afraid for her frock.

“Poor old boy — poor old boy!” she kept on murmuring. “Did he want a little attention?”

A voice behind her said:

“Get out, Sam! Sorry to have kept you waiting. Won’t you come in here?”

Mrs. Pendyce, blushing and turning pale by turns, passed into a low, small, panelled room, smelling of cigars and spirits. Through the window, which was cut up into little panes, she could see the rain driving past, the shrubs bent and dripping from the downpour.

“Won’t you sit down?”

Mrs. Pendyce sat down. She had clasped her hands together; she now raised her eyes and looked timidly at her host.

She saw a thin, high-shouldered figure, with bowed legs a little apart, rumpled sandy hair, a pale, freckled face, and little dark blinking eyes.

“Sorry the room’s in such a mess. Don’t often have the pleasure of seeing a lady. I was asleep; generally am at this time of year!”

The bristly red moustache was contorted as though his lips were smiling.

Mrs. Pendyce murmured vaguely.

It seemed to her that nothing of this was real, but all some horrid dream. A clap of thunder made her cover her ears.

Bellew walked to the window, glanced at the sky, and came back to the hearth. His little burning eyes seemed to look her through and through. ‘If I don’t speak at once,’ she thought, ‘I never shall speak at all.’

“I’ve come,” she began, and with those words she lost her fright; her voice, that had been so uncertain hitherto, regained its trick of speech; her eyes, all pupil, stared dark and gentle at this man who had them all in his power—”I’ve come to tell you something, Captain Bellew!”

The figure by the hearth bowed, and her fright, like some evil bird, came guttering down on her again. It was dreadful, it was barbarous that she, that anyone, should have to speak of such things; it was barbarous that men and women should so misunderstand each other, and have so little sympathy and consideration; it was barbarous that she, Margery Pendyce, should have to talk on this subject that must give them both such pain. It was all so mean and gross and common! She took out her handkerchief and passed it over her lips.

“Please forgive me for speaking. Your wife has given my son up, Captain Bellew!”

Bellew did not move.

“She does not love him; she told me so herself! He will never see her again!”

How hateful, how horrible, how odious!

And still Bellew did not speak, but stood devouring her with his little eyes; and how long this went on she could not tell.

He turned his back suddenly, and leaned against the mantelpiece.

Mrs. Pendyce passed her hand over her brow to get rid of a feeling of unreality.

“That is all,” she said.

Her voice sounded to herself unlike her own.

‘If that is really all,’ she thought, ‘I suppose I must get up and go!’ And it flashed through her mind: ‘My poor dress will be ruined!’

Bellew turned round.

“Will you have some tea?”

Mrs. Pendyce smiled a pale little smile.

“No, thank you; I don’t think I could drink any tea.”

“I wrote a letter to your husband.”

“Yes.”

“He didn’t answer it.”

“No.”

Mrs. Pendyce saw him staring at her, and a desperate struggle began within her. Should she not ask him to keep his promise, now that George —— ? Was not that what she had come for? Ought she not — ought she not for all their sakes?

Bellew went up to the table, poured out some whisky, and drank it off.

“You don’t ask me to stop the proceedings,” he said.

Mrs. Pendyce’s lips were parted, but nothing came through those parted lips. Her eyes, black as sloes in her white face, never moved from his; she made no sound.

Bellew dashed his hand across his brow.

“Well, I will!” he said, “for your sake. There’s my hand on it. You’re the only lady I know!”

He gripped her gloved fingers, brushed past her, and she saw that she was alone.

She found her own way out, with the tears running down her face. Very gently she shut the hall door.

‘My poor dress!’ she thought. ‘I wonder if I might stand here a little? The rain looks nearly over!’

The purple cloud had passed, and sunk behind the house, and a bright white sky was pouring down a sparkling rain; a patch of deep blue showed behind the fir-trees in the drive. The thrushes were out already after worms. A squirrel scampering along a branch stopped and looked at Mrs. Pendyce, and Mrs. Pendyce looked absently at the squirrel from behind the little handkerchief with which she was drying her eyes.

‘That poor man!’ she thought ‘poor solitary creature! There’s the sun!’

And it seemed to her that it was the first time the sun had shone all this fine hot year. Gathering her dress in both hands, she stepped into the drive, and soon was back again in the fields.

Every green thing glittered, and the air was so rain-sweet that all the summer scents were gone, before the crystal scent of nothing. Mrs. Pendyce’s shoes were soon wet through.

‘How happy I am!’ she thought ‘how glad and happy I am!’

And the feeling, which was not as definite as this, possessed her to the exclusion of all other feelings in the rain-soaked fields.

The cloud that had hung over Worsted Skeynes so long had spent itself and gone. Every sound seemed to be music, every moving thing danced. She longed to get to her early roses, and see how the rain had treated them. She had a stile to cross, and when she was safely over she paused a minute to gather her skirts more firmly. It was a home-field she was in now, and right before her lay the country house. Long and low and white it stood in the glamourous evening haze, with two bright panes, where the sunlight fell, watching, like eyes, the confines of its acres; and behind it, to the left, broad, square, and grey among its elms, the village church. Around, above, beyond, was peace — the sleepy, misty peace of the English afternoon.

Mrs. Pendyce walked towards her garden. When she was near it, away to the right, she saw the Squire and Mr. Barter. They were standing together looking at a tree and — symbol of a subservient under-world — the spaniel John was seated on his tail, and he, too, was looking at the tree. The faces of the Rector and Mr. Pendyce were turned up at the same angle, and different as those faces and figures were in their eternal rivalry of type, a sort of essential likeness struck her with a feeling of surprise. It was as though a single spirit seeking for a body had met with these two shapes, and becoming confused, decided to inhabit both.

Mrs. Pendyce did not wave to them, but passed quickly, between the yew-trees, through the wicket-gate....

In her garden bright drops were falling one by one from every rose-leaf, and in the petals of each rose were jewels of water. A little down the path a weed caught her eye; she looked closer, and saw that there were several.

‘Oh,’ she thought, ‘how dreadfully they’ve let the weeds I must really speak to Jackman!’

A rose-tree, that she herself had planted, rustled close by, letting fall a shower of drops.

Mrs. Pendyce bent down, and took a white rose in her fingers. With her smiling lips she kissed its face. 1907.

THE INDIAN SUMMER
I

In the last day of May in the early 'nineties, about six o'clock of the evening, old Jolyon Forsyte sat under the oak tree below the terrace of his house at Robin Hill. He was waiting for the midges to bite him, before abandoning the glory of the afternoon. His thin brown hand, where blue veins stood out, held the end of a cigar in its tapering, long-nailed fingers — a pointed polished nail had survived with him from those earlier Victorian days when to touch nothing, even with the tips of the fingers, had been so distinguished. His domed forehead, great white moustache, lean cheeks, and long lean jaw were covered from the westering sunshine by an old brown Panama hat. His legs were crossed; in all his attitude was serenity and a kind of elegance, as of an old man who every morning put eau de Cologne upon his silk handkerchief. At his feet lay a woolly brown-and-white dog trying to be a Pomeranian — the dog Balthasar between whom and old Jolyon primal aversion had changed into attachment with the years. Close to his chair was a swing, and on the swing was seated one of Holly's dolls — called 'Duffer Alice'— with her body fallen over her legs and her doleful nose buried in a black petticoat. She was never out of disgrace, so it did not matter to her how she sat. Below the oak tree the lawn dipped down a bank, stretched to the fernery, and, beyond that refinement, became fields, dropping to the pond, the coppice, and the prospect —'Fine, remarkable'— at which Swithin Forsyte, from under this very tree, had stared five years ago when he drove down with Irene to look at the house. Old Jolyon had heard of his brother's exploit — that drive which had become quite celebrated on Forsyte 'Change. Swithin! And the fellow had gone and died, last November, at the age of only seventy-nine, renewing the doubt whether Forsytes could live for ever, which had first arisen when Aunt Ann passed away. Died! and left only Jolyon and James, Roger and Nicholas and Timothy, Julia, Hester, Susan! And old Jolyon thought: 'Eighty-five! I don't feel it — except when I get that pain.'

His memory went searching. He had not felt his age since he had bought his nephew Soames' ill-starred house and settled into it here at Robin Hill over three years ago. It was as if he had been getting younger every spring, living in the country with his son and his grandchildren — June, and the little ones of the second marriage, Jolly and Holly; living down here out of the racket of London and the cackle of Forsyte 'Change,' free of his boards, in a delicious atmosphere of no work and all play, with plenty of occupation in the perfecting and mellowing of the house and its twenty acres, and in ministering to the whims of Holly and Jolly. All the knots and crankiness, which had gathered in his heart during that long and tragic business of June, Soames, Irene his wife, and poor young Bosinney, had been smoothed out. Even June had thrown off her melancholy at last — witness this travel in Spain she was taking now with her father and her stepmother. Curiously perfect peace was left by their departure; blissful, yet blank, because his son was not there. Jo was never anything but a comfort and a pleasure to him nowadays — an amiable chap; but women, somehow — even the best — got a little on one's nerves, unless of course one admired them.

Far-off a cuckoo called; a wood-pigeon was cooing from the first elm-tree in the field, and how the daisies and buttercups had sprung up after the last mowing! The wind had got into the sou' west, too — a delicious air, sappy! He pushed his hat back and let the sun fall on his chin and cheek. Somehow, to-day, he wanted company — wanted a pretty face to look at. People treated the old as if they wanted nothing. And with the un-Forsytean philosophy which ever intruded on his soul, he thought: 'One's never had enough. With a foot in the grave one'll want something, I shouldn't be surprised!' Down here — away from the exigencies of affairs — his grandchildren, and the flowers, trees, birds of his little domain, to say nothing of sun and moon and stars above them, said, 'Open, sesame,' to him day and night. And sesame had opened — how much, perhaps, he did not know. He had always been responsive to what they had begun to call 'Nature,' genuinely, almost religiously responsive, though he had never lost his habit of calling a sunset a sunset and a view a view, however deeply they might move him. But nowadays Nature actually made him ache, he appreciated it so. Every one of these calm, bright, lengthening days, with Holly's hand in his, and the dog Balthasar in front looking studiously for what he never found, he would stroll, watching the roses open, fruit budding on the walls, sunlight brightening the oak leaves and saplings in the coppice, watching the water-lily leaves unfold and glisten, and the silvery young corn of the one wheat field; listening to the starlings and skylarks, and the Alderney cows chewing the cud, flicking slow their tufted tails; and every one of these fine days he ached a little from sheer love of it all, feeling perhaps, deep down, that he had not very much longer to enjoy it. The thought that some day — perhaps not ten years hence, perhaps not five — all this world would be taken away from him, before he had exhausted his powers of loving it, seemed to him in the nature of an injustice brooding over his horizon. If anything came after this life, it wouldn't be what he wanted; not Robin Hill, and flowers and birds and pretty faces — too few, even now, of those about him! With the years his dislike of humbug had increased; the orthodoxy he had worn in the 'sixties, as he had worn side-whiskers out of sheer exuberance, had long dropped off, leaving him reverent before three things alone — beauty, upright conduct, and the sense of property; and the greatest of these now was beauty. He had always had wide interests, and, indeed could still read The Times, but he was liable at any moment to put it down if he heard a blackbird sing. Upright conduct, property — somehow, they were tiring; the blackbirds and the sunsets never tired him, only gave him an uneasy feeling that he could not get enough of them. Staring into the stilly radiance of the early evening and at the little gold and white flowers on the lawn, a thought came to him: This weather was like the music of 'Orfeo,' which he had recently heard at Covent Garden. A beautiful opera, not like Meyerbeer, nor even quite Mozart, but, in its way, perhaps even more lovely; something classical and of the Golden Age about it, chaste and mellow, and the Ravogli 'almost worthy of the old days'— highest praise he could bestow. The yearning of Orpheus for the beauty he was losing, for his love going down to Hades, as in life love and beauty did go — the yearning which sang and throbbed through the golden music, stirred also in the lingering beauty of the world that evening. And with the tip of his cork-soled, elastic-sided boot he involuntarily stirred the ribs of the dog Balthasar, causing the animal to wake and attack his fleas; for though he was supposed to have none, nothing could persuade him of the fact. When he had finished he rubbed the place he had been scratching against his master's calf, and settled down again with his chin over the instep of the disturbing boot. And into old Jolyon's mind came a sudden recollection — a face he had seen at that opera three weeks ago — Irene, the wife of his precious nephew Soames, that man of property! Though he had not met her since the day of the 'At Home' in his old house at Stanhope Gate, which celebrated his granddaughter June's ill-starred engagement to young Bosinney, he had remembered her at once, for he had always admired her — a very pretty creature. After the death of young Bosinney, whose mistress she had so reprehensibly become, he had heard that she had left Soames at once. Goodness only knew what she had been doing since. That sight of her face — a side view — in the row in front, had been literally the only reminder these three years that she was still alive. No one ever spoke of her. And yet Jo had told him something once — something which had upset him completely. The boy had got it from George Forsyte, he believed, who had seen Bosinney in the fog the day he was run over — something which explained the young fellow's distress — an act of Soames towards his wife — a shocking act. Jo had seen her, too, that afternoon, after the news was out, seen her for a moment, and his description had always lingered in old Jolyon's mind —'wild and lost' he had called her. And next day June had gone there — bottled up her feelings and gone there, and the maid had cried and told her how her mistress had slipped out in the night and vanished. A tragic business altogether! One thing was certain — Soames had never been able to lay hands on her again. And he was living at Brighton, and journeying up and down — a fitting fate, the man of property! For when he once took a dislike to anyone — as he had to his nephew — old Jolyon never got over it. He remembered still the sense of relief with which he had heard the news of Irene's disappearance. It had been shocking to think of her a prisoner in that house to which she must have wandered back, when Jo saw her, wandered back for a moment — like a wounded animal to its hole after seeing that news, 'Tragic death of an Architect,' in the street. Her face had struck him very much the other night — more beautiful than he had remembered, but like a mask, with something going on beneath it. A young woman still — twenty-eight perhaps. Ah, well! Very likely she had another lover by now. But at this subversive thought — for married women should never love: once, even, had been too much — his instep rose, and with it the dog Balthasar's head. The sagacious animal stood up and looked into old Jolyon's face. 'Walk?' he seemed to say; and old Jolyon answered: "Come on, old chap!"

Slowly, as was their wont, they crossed among the constellations of buttercups and daisies, and entered the fernery. This feature, where very little grew as yet, had been judiciously dropped below the level of the lawn so that it might come up again on the level of the other lawn and give the impression of irregularity, so important in horticulture. Its rocks and earth were beloved of the dog Balthasar, who sometimes found a mole there. Old Jolyon made a point of passing through it because, though it was not beautiful, he intended that it should be, some day, and he would think: 'I must get Varr to come down and look at it; he's better than Beech.' For plants, like houses and human complaints, required the best expert consideration. It was inhabited by snails, and if accompanied by his grandchildren, he would point to one and tell them the story of the little boy who said: 'Have plummers got leggers, Mother? 'No, sonny.' 'Then darned if I haven't been and swallowed a snileybob.' And when they skipped and clutched his hand, thinking of the snileybob going down the little boy's 'red lane,' his eyes would twinkle. Emerging from the fernery, he opened the wicket gate, which just there led into the first field, a large and park-like area, out of which, within brick walls, the vegetable garden had been carved. Old Jolyon avoided this, which did not suit his mood, and made down the hill towards the pond. Balthasar, who knew a water-rat or two, gambolled in front, at the gait which marks an oldish dog who takes the same walk every day. Arrived at the edge, old Jolyon stood, noting another water-lily opened since yesterday; he would show it to Holly to-morrow, when 'his little sweet' had got over the upset which had followed on her eating a tomato at lunch — her little arrangements were very delicate. Now that Jolly had gone to school — his first term — Holly was with him nearly all day long, and he missed her badly. He felt that pain too, which often bothered him now, a little dragging at his left side. He looked back up the hill. Really, poor young Bosinney had made an uncommonly good job of the house; he would have done very well for himself if he had lived! And where was he now? Perhaps, still haunting this, the site of his last work, of his tragic love affair. Or was Philip Bosinney's spirit diffused in the general? Who could say? That dog was getting his legs muddy! And he moved towards the coppice. There had been the most delightful lot of bluebells, and he knew where some still lingered like little patches of sky fallen in between the trees, away out of the sun. He passed the cow-houses and the hen-houses there installed, and pursued a path into the thick of the saplings, making for one of the bluebell plots. Balthasar, preceding him once more, uttered a low growl. Old Jolyon stirred him with his foot, but the dog remained motionless, just where there was no room to pass, and the hair rose slowly along the centre of his woolly back. Whether from the growl and the look of the dog's stivered hair, or from the sensation which a man feels in a wood, old Jolyon also felt something move along his spine. And then the path turned, and there was an old mossy log, and on it a woman sitting. Her face was turned away, and he had just time to think: 'She's trespassing — I must have a board put up!' before she turned. Powers above! The face he had seen at the opera — the very woman he had just been thinking of! In that confused moment he saw things blurred, as if a spirit — queer effect — the slant of sunlight perhaps on her violet-grey frock! And then she rose and stood smiling, her head a little to one side. Old Jolyon thought: 'How pretty she is!' She did not speak, neither did he; and he realized why with a certain admiration. She was here no doubt because of some memory, and did not mean to try and get out of it by vulgar explanation.

"Don't let that dog touch your frock," he said; "he's got wet feet. Come here, you!"

But the dog Balthasar went on towards the visitor, who put her hand down and stroked his head. Old Jolyon said quickly:

"I saw you at the opera the other night; you didn't notice me."

"Oh, yes! I did."

He felt a subtle flattery in that, as though she had added: 'Do you think one could miss seeing you?'

"They're all in Spain," he remarked abruptly. "I'm alone; I drove up for the opera. The Ravogli's good. Have you seen the cow-houses?"

In a situation so charged with mystery and something very like emotion he moved instinctively towards that bit of property, and she moved beside him. Her figure swayed faintly, like the best kind of French figures; her dress, too, was a sort of French grey. He noticed two or three silver threads in her amber-coloured hair, strange hair with those dark eyes of hers, and that creamy-pale face. A sudden sidelong look from the velvety brown eyes disturbed him. It seemed to come from deep and far, from another world almost, or at all events from some one not living very much in this. And he said mechanically:

"Where are you living now?"

"I have a little flat in Chelsea."

He did not want to hear what she was doing, did not want to hear anything; but the perverse word came out:

"Alone?"

She nodded. It was a relief to know that. And it came into his mind that, but for a twist of fate, she would have been mistress of this coppice, showing these cow-houses to him, a visitor.

"All Alderneys," he muttered; "they give the best milk. This one's a pretty creature. Woa, Myrtle!"

The fawn-coloured cow, with eyes as soft and brown as Irene's own, was standing absolutely still, not having long been milked. She looked round at them out of the corner of those lustrous, mild, cynical eyes, and from her grey lips a little dribble of saliva threaded its way towards the straw. The scent of hay and vanilla and ammonia rose in the dim light of the cool cow-house; and old Jolyon said:

"You must come up and have some dinner with me. I'll send you home in the carriage."

He perceived a struggle going on within her; natural, no doubt, with her memories. But he wanted her company; a pretty face, a charming figure, beauty! He had been alone all the afternoon. Perhaps his eyes were wistful, for she answered: “Thank you, Uncle Jolyon. I should like to.”

He rubbed his hands, and said:

“Capital! Let’s go up, then!” And, preceded by the dog Balthasar, they ascended through the field. The sun was almost level in their faces now, and he could see, not only those silver threads, but little lines, just deep enough to stamp her beauty with a coin-like fineness — the special look of life unshared with others. “I’ll take her in by the terrace,” he thought: “I won’t make a common visitor of her.”

“What do you do all day?” he said.

“Teach music; I have another interest, too.”

“Work!” said old Jolyon, picking up the doll from off the swing, and smoothing its black petticoat. “Nothing like it, is there? I don’t do any now. I’m getting on. What interest is that?”

“Trying to help women who’ve come to grief.” Old Jolyon did not quite understand. “To grief?” he repeated; then realised with a shock that she meant exactly what he would have meant himself if he had used that expression. Assisting the Magdalenes of London! What a weird and terrifying interest! And, curiosity overcoming his natural shrinking, he asked:

“Why? What do you do for them?”

“Not much. I’ve no money to spare. I can only give sympathy and food sometimes.”

Involuntarily old Jolyon’s hand sought his purse. He said hastily: “How d’you get hold of them?”

“I go to a hospital.”

“A hospital! Phew!”

“What hurts me most is that once they nearly all had some sort of beauty.”

Old Jolyon straightened the doll. “Beauty!” he ejaculated: “Ha! Yes! A sad business!” and he moved towards the house. Through a French window, under sun-blinds not yet drawn up, he preceded her into the room where he was wont to study The Times and the sheets of an agricultural magazine, with huge illustrations of mangold wurzels, and the like, which provided Holly with material for her paint brush.

“Dinner’s in half an hour. You’d like to wash your hands! I’ll take you to June’s room.”

He saw her looking round eagerly; what changes since she had last visited this house with her husband, or her lover, or both perhaps — he did not know, could not say! All that was dark, and he wished to leave it so. But what changes! And in the hall he said:

“My boy Jo’s a painter, you know. He’s got a lot of taste. It isn’t mine, of course, but I’ve let him have his way.”

She was standing very still, her eyes roaming through the hall and music room, as it now was — all thrown into one, under the great skylight. Old Jolyon had an odd impression of her. Was she trying to conjure somebody from the shades of that space where the colouring was all pearl-grey and silver? He would have had gold himself; more lively and solid. But Jo had French tastes, and it had come out shadowy like that, with an effect as of the fume of cigarettes the chap was always smoking, broken here and there by a little blaze of blue or crimson colour. It was not his dream! Mentally he had hung this space with those gold-framed masterpieces of still and stiller life which he had bought in days when quantity was precious. And now where were they? Sold for a song! That something which made him, alone among Forsytes, move with the times had warned him against the struggle to retain them. But in his study he still had ‘Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset.’

He began to mount the stairs with her, slowly, for he felt his side.

“These are the bathrooms,” he said, “and other arrangements. I’ve had them tiled. The nurseries are along there. And this is Jo’s and his wife’s. They all communicate. But you remember, I expect.”

Irene nodded. They passed on, up the gallery and entered a large room with a small bed, and several windows.

“This is mine,” he said. The walls were covered with the photographs of children and watercolour sketches, and he added doubtfully:

“These are Jo’s. The view’s first-rate. You can see the Grand Stand at Epsom in clear weather.”

The sun was down now, behind the house, and over the ‘prospect’ a luminous haze had settled, emanation of the long and prosperous day. Few houses showed, but fields and trees faintly glistened, away to a loom of downs.

"The country's changing," he said abruptly, "but there it'll be when we're all gone. Look at those thrushes — the birds are sweet here in the mornings. I'm glad to have washed my hands of London."

Her face was close to the window pane, and he was struck by its mournful look. 'Wish I could make her look happy!' he thought. 'A pretty face, but sad!' And taking up his can of hot water he went out into the gallery.

"This is June's room," he said, opening the next door and putting the can down; "I think you'll find everything." And closing the door behind her he went back to his own room. Brushing his hair with his great ebony brushes, and dabbing his forehead with eau de Cologne, he mused. She had come so strangely — a sort of visitation; mysterious, even romantic, as if his desire for company, for beauty, had been fulfilled by whatever it was which fulfilled that sort of thing. And before the mirror he straightened his still upright figure, passed the brushes over his great white moustache, touched up his eyebrows with eau de Cologne, and rang the bell.

"I forgot to let them know that I have a lady to dinner with me. Let cook do something extra, and tell Beacon to have the landau and pair at half-past ten to drive her back to Town to-night. Is Miss Holly asleep?"

The maid thought not. And old Jolyon, passing down the gallery, stole on tiptoe towards the nursery, and opened the door whose hinges he kept specially oiled that he might slip in and out in the evenings without being heard.

But Holly was asleep, and lay like a miniature Madonna, of that type which the old painters could not tell from Venus, when they had completed her. Her long dark lashes clung to her cheeks; on her face was perfect peace — her little arrangements were evidently all right again. And old Jolyon, in the twilight of the room, stood adoring her! It was so charming, solemn, and loving — that little face. He had more than his share of the blessed capacity of living again in the young. They were to him his future life — all of a future life that his fundamental pagan sanity perhaps admitted. There she was with everything before her, and his blood — some of it — in her tiny veins. There she was, his little companion, to be made as happy as ever he could make her, so that she knew nothing but love. His heart swelled, and he went out, stilling the sound of his patent-leather boots. In the corridor an eccentric notion attacked him: To think that children should come to that which Irene had told him she was helping! Women who were all, once, little things like this one sleeping there! 'I must give her a cheque!' he mused; 'Can't bear to think of them!' They had never borne reflecting on, those poor outcasts; wounding too deeply the core of true refinement hidden under layers of conformity to the sense of property — wounding too grievously the deepest thing in him — a love of beauty which could give him, even now, a flutter of the heart, thinking of his evening in the society of a pretty woman. And he went downstairs, through the swinging doors, to the back regions. There, in the wine-cellar, was a hock worth at least two pounds a bottle, a Steinberg Cabinet, better than any Johannisberg that ever went down throat; a wine of perfect bouquet, sweet as a nectarine — nectar indeed! He got a bottle out, handling it like a baby, and holding it level to the light, to look. Enshrined in its coat of dust, that mellow coloured, slender-necked bottle gave him deep pleasure. Three years to settle down again since the move from Town — ought to be in prime condition! Thirty-five years ago he had bought it — thank God he had kept his palate, and earned the right to drink it. She would appreciate this; not a spice of acidity in a dozen. He wiped the bottle, drew the cork with his own hands, put his nose down, inhaled its perfume, and went back to the music room.

Irene was standing by the piano; she had taken off her hat and a lace scarf she had been wearing, so that her gold-coloured hair was visible, and the pallor of her neck. In her grey frock she made a pretty picture for old Jolyon, against the rosewood of the piano.

He gave her his arm, and solemnly they went. The room, which had been designed to enable twenty-four people to dine in comfort, held now but a little round table. In his present solitude the big dining-table oppressed old Jolyon; he had caused it to be removed till his son came back. Here in the company of two really good copies of Raphael Madonnas he was wont to dine alone. It was the only disconsolate hour of his day, this summer weather. He had never been a large eater, like that great chap Swithin, or Sylvanus Heythorp, or Anthony Thornworthy, those cronies of past times; and to dine alone, overlooked by the Madonnas, was to him but a sorrowful occupation, which he got through quickly, that he might come to the more spiritual enjoyment of his coffee and cigar. But this evening was a different matter! His eyes twinkled at her across the little table and he spoke of Italy and Switzerland, telling her stories of his travels there, and other experiences which he could no longer recount to his son and grand-daughter because they knew them. This fresh audience was precious to him; he had never become one of those old men who ramble round and round the fields of reminiscence.

Himself quickly fatigued by the insensitive, he instinctively avoided fatiguing others, and his natural flirtatiousness towards beauty guarded him specially in his relations with a woman. He would have liked to draw her out, but though she murmured and smiled and seemed to be enjoying what he told her, he remained conscious of that mysterious remoteness which constituted half her fascination. He could not bear women who threw their shoulders and eyes at you, and chattered away; or hard-mouthed women who laid down the law and knew more than you did. There was only one quality in a woman that appealed to him — charm; and the quieter it was, the more he liked it. And this one had charm, shadowy as afternoon sunlight on those Italian hills and valleys he had loved. The feeling, too, that she was, as it were, apart, cloistered, made her seem nearer to himself, a strangely desirable companion. When a man is very old and quite out of the running, he loves to feel secure from the rivalries of youth, for he would still be first in the heart of beauty. And he drank his hock, and watched her lips, and felt nearly young. But the dog Balthasar lay watching her lips too, and despising in his heart the interruptions of their talk, and the tilting of those greenish glasses full of a golden fluid which was distasteful to him.

The light was just failing when they went back into the music-room. And, cigar in mouth, old Jolyon said:

"Play me some Chopin."

By the cigars they smoke, and the composers they love, ye shall know the texture of men's souls. Old Jolyon could not bear a strong cigar or Wagner's music. He loved Beethoven and Mozart, Handel and Gluck, and Schumann, and, for some occult reason, the operas of Meyerbeer; but of late years he had been seduced by Chopin, just as in painting he had succumbed to Botticelli. In yielding to these tastes he had been conscious of divergence from the standard of the Golden Age. Their poetry was not that of Milton and Byron and Tennyson; of Raphael and Titian; Mozart and Beethoven. It was, as it were, behind a veil; their poetry hit no one in the face, but slipped its fingers under the ribs and turned and twisted, and melted up the heart. And, never certain that this was healthy, he did not care a rap so long as he could see the pictures of the one or hear the music of the other.

Irene sat down at the piano under the electric lamp festooned with pearl-grey, and old Jolyon, in an armchair, whence he could see her, crossed his legs and drew slowly at his cigar. She sat a few moments with her hands on the keys, evidently searching her mind for what to give him. Then she began and within old Jolyon there arose a sorrowful pleasure, not quite like anything else in the world. He fell slowly into a trance, interrupted only by the movements of taking the cigar out of his mouth at long intervals, and replacing it. She was there, and the hock within him, and the scent of tobacco; but there, too, was a world of sunshine lingering into moonlight, and pools with storks upon them, and bluish trees above, glowing with blurs of wine-red roses, and fields of lavender where milk-white cows were grazing, and a woman all shadowy, with dark eyes and a white neck, smiled, holding out her arms; and through air which was like music a star dropped and was caught on a cow's horn. He opened his eyes. Beautiful piece; she played well — the touch of an angel! And he closed them again. He felt miraculously sad and happy, as one does, standing under a lime-tree in full honey flower. Not live one's own life again, but just stand there and bask in the smile of a woman's eyes, and enjoy the bouquet! And he jerked his hand; the dog Balthasar had reached up and licked it.

"Beautiful!" He said: "Go on — more Chopin!"

She began to play again. This time the resemblance between her and 'Chopin' struck him. The swaying he had noticed in her walk was in her playing too, and the Nocturne she had chosen and the soft darkness of her eyes, the light on her hair, as of moonlight from a golden moon. Seductive, yes; but nothing of Delilah in her or in that music. A long blue spiral from his cigar ascended and dispersed. 'So we go out!' he thought. 'No more beauty! Nothing?'

Again Irene stopped.

"Would you like some Gluck? He used to write his music in a sunlit garden, with a bottle of Rhine wine beside him."

"Ah! yes. Let's have 'Orfeo.'" Round about him now were fields of gold and silver flowers, white forms swaying in the sunlight, bright birds flying to and fro. All was summer. Lingering waves of sweetness and regret flooded his soul. Some cigar ash dropped, and taking out a silk handkerchief to brush it off, he inhaled a mingled scent as of snuff and eau de Cologne. 'Ah!' he thought, 'Indian summer — that's all!' and he said: "You haven't played me 'Che faro.'"

She did not answer; did not move. He was conscious of something — some strange upset. Suddenly he saw her rise and turn away, and a pang of remorse shot through him. What a clumsy chap! Like Orpheus, she of course — she too was looking for her lost one in the hall of memory! And disturbed to the heart, he got up from his chair. She had gone to the great window at the far end. Gingerly he followed. Her hands were folded over her breast; he could just see her cheek, very white. And, quite emotionalized, he said:

“There, there, my love!” The words had escaped him mechanically, for they were those he used to Holly when she had a pain, but their effect was instantaneously distressing. She raised her arms, covered her face with them, and wept.

Old Jolyon stood gazing at her with eyes very deep from age. The passionate shame she seemed feeling at her abandonment, so unlike the control and quietude of her whole presence was as if she had never before broken down in the presence of another being.

“There, there — there, there!” he murmured, and putting his hand out reverently, touched her. She turned, and leaned the arms which covered her face against him. Old Jolyon stood very still, keeping one thin hand on her shoulder. Let her cry her heart out — it would do her good.

And the dog Balthasar, puzzled, sat down on his stern to examine them.

The window was still open, the curtains had not been drawn, the last of daylight from without mingled with faint intrusion from the lamp within; there was a scent of new-mown grass. With the wisdom of a long life old Jolyon did not speak. Even grief sobbed itself out in time; only Time was good for sorrow — Time who saw the passing of each mood, each emotion in turn; Time the layer-to-rest. There came into his mind the words: ‘As panteth the hart after cooling streams’— but they were of no use to him. Then, conscious of a scent of violets, he knew she was drying her eyes. He put his chin forward, pressed his moustache against her forehead, and felt her shake with a quivering of her whole body, as of a tree which shakes itself free of raindrops. She put his hand to her lips, as if saying: “All over now! Forgive me!”

The kiss filled him with a strange comfort; he led her back to where she had been so upset. And the dog Balthasar, following, laid the bone of one of the cutlets they had eaten at their feet.

Anxious to obliterate the memory of that emotion, he could think of nothing better than china; and moving with her slowly from cabinet to cabinet, he kept taking up bits of Dresden and Lowestoft and Chelsea, turning them round and round with his thin, veined hands, whose skin, faintly freckled, had such an aged look.

“I bought this at Jobson’s,” he would say; “cost me thirty pounds. It’s very old. That dog leaves his bones all over the place. This old ‘ship-bowl’ I picked up at the sale when that precious rip, the Marquis, came to grief. But you don’t remember. Here’s a nice piece of Chelsea. Now, what would you say this was?” And he was comforted, feeling that, with her taste, she was taking a real interest in these things; for, after all, nothing better composes the nerves than a doubtful piece of china.

When the crunch of the carriage wheels was heard at last, he said:

“You must come again; you must come to lunch, then I can show you these by daylight, and my little sweet — she’s a dear little thing. This dog seems to have taken a fancy to you.”

For Balthasar, feeling that she was about to leave, was rubbing his side against her leg. Going out under the porch with her, he said:

“He’ll get you up in an hour and a quarter. Take this for your protegees,” and he slipped a cheque for fifty pounds into her hand. He saw her brightened eyes, and heard her murmur: “Oh! Uncle Jolyon!” and a real throb of pleasure went through him. That meant one or two poor creatures helped a little, and it meant that she would come again. He put his hand in at the window and grasped hers once more. The carriage rolled away. He stood looking at the moon and the shadows of the trees, and thought: ‘A sweet night! She. . . . ..!’

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II

Two days of rain, and summer set in bland and sunny. Old Jolyon walked and talked with Holly. At first he felt taller and full of a new vigour; then he felt restless. Almost every afternoon they would enter the coppice, and walk as far as the log. 'Well, she's not there!' he would think, 'of course not!' And he would feel a little shorter, and drag his feet walking up the hill home, with his hand clapped to his left side. Now and then the thought would move in him: 'Did she come — or did I dream it?' and he would stare at space, while the dog Balthasar stared at him. Of course she would not come again! He opened the letters from Spain with less excitement. They were not returning till July; he felt, oddly, that he could bear it. Every day at dinner he screwed up his eyes and looked at where she had sat. She was not there, so he unscrewed his eyes again.

On the seventh afternoon he thought: 'I must go up and get some boots.' He ordered Beacon, and set out. Passing from Putney towards Hyde Park he reflected: 'I might as well go to Chelsea and see her.' And he called out: "Just drive me to where you took that lady the other night." The coachman turned his broad red face, and his juicy lips answered: "The lady in grey, sir?"

"Yes, the lady in grey." What other ladies were there! Stodgy chap!

The carriage stopped before a small three-storied block of flats, standing a little back from the river. With a practised eye old Jolyon saw that they were cheap. 'I should think about sixty pound a year,' he mused; and entering, he looked at the name-board. The name 'Forsyte' was not on it, but against 'First Floor, Flat C' were the words: 'Mrs. Irene Heron.' Ah! She had taken her maiden name again! And somehow this pleased him. He went upstairs slowly, feeling his side a little. He stood a moment, before ringing, to lose the feeling of drag and fluttering there. She would not be in! And then — Boots! The thought was black. What did he want with boots at his age? He could not wear out all those he had.

"Your mistress at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Say Mr. Jolyon Forsyte."

"Yes, sir, will you come this way?"

Old Jolyon followed a very little maid — not more than sixteen one would say — into a very small drawing-room where the sun-blinds were drawn. It held a cottage piano and little else save a vague fragrance and good taste. He stood in the middle, with his top hat in his hand, and thought: 'I expect she's very badly off!' There was a mirror above the fireplace, and he saw himself reflected. An old-looking chap! He heard a rustle, and turned round. She was so close that his moustache almost brushed her forehead, just under her hair.

"I was driving up," he said. "Thought I'd look in on you, and ask you how you got up the other night."

And, seeing her smile, he felt suddenly relieved. She was really glad to see him, perhaps.

"Would you like to put on your hat and come for a drive in the Park?"

But while she was gone to put her hat on, he frowned. The Park! James and Emily! Mrs. Nicholas, or some other member of his precious family would be there very likely, prancing up and down. And they would go and wag their tongues about having seen him with her, afterwards. Better not! He did not wish to revive the echoes of the past on Forsyte 'Change. He removed a white hair from the lapel of his closely-buttoned-up frock coat, and passed his hand over his cheeks, moustache, and square chin. It felt very hollow there under the cheekbones. He had not been eating much lately — he had better get that little whippersnapper who attended Holly to give him a tonic. But she had come back and when they were in the carriage, he said:

"Suppose we go and sit in Kensington Gardens instead?" and added with a twinkle: "No prancing up and down there," as if she had been in the secret of his thoughts.

Leaving the carriage, they entered those select precincts, and strolled towards the water.

"You've gone back to your maiden name, I see," he said: "I'm not sorry."

She slipped her hand under his arm: "Has June forgiven me, Uncle Jolyon?"

He answered gently: "Yes — yes; of course, why not?"

"And have you?"

"I? I forgave you as soon as I saw how the land really lay." And perhaps he had; his instinct had always been to forgive the beautiful.

She drew a deep breath. "I never regretted — I couldn't. Did you ever love very deeply, Uncle Jolyon?"

At that strange question old Jolyon stared before him. Had he? He did not seem to remember that he ever had. But he did not like to say this to the young woman whose hand was touching his arm, whose life was suspended, as it were, by memory of a tragic love. And he thought: 'If I had met you when I was young I— I might have made a fool of myself, perhaps.' And a longing to escape in generalities beset him.

"Love's a queer thing," he said, "fatal thing often. It was the Greeks — wasn't it? — made love into a goddess; they were right, I dare say, but then they lived in the Golden Age."

"Phil adored them."

Phil! The word jarred him, for suddenly — with his power to see all round a thing, he perceived why she was putting up with him like this. She wanted to talk about her lover! Well! If it was any pleasure to her! And he said: "Ah! There was a bit of the sculptor in him, I fancy."

"Yes. He loved balance and symmetry; he loved the whole-hearted way the Greeks gave themselves to art."

Balance! The chap had no balance at all, if he remembered; as for symmetry — clean-built enough he was, no doubt; but those queer eyes of his, and high cheek-bones — Symmetry?

"You're of the Golden Age, too, Uncle Jolyon."

Old Jolyon looked round at her. Was she chaffing him? No, her eyes were soft as velvet. Was she flattering him? But if so, why? There was nothing to be had out of an old chap like him.

"Phil thought so. He used to say: 'But I can never tell him that I admire him.'"

Ah! There it was again. Her dead lover; her desire to talk of him! And he pressed her arm, half resentful of those memories, half grateful, as if he recognised what a link they were between herself and him.

"He was a very talented young fellow," he murmured. "It's hot; I feel the heat nowadays. Let's sit down."

They took two chairs beneath a chestnut tree whose broad leaves covered them from the peaceful glory of the afternoon. A pleasure to sit there and watch her, and feel that she liked to be with him. And the wish to increase that liking, if he could, made him go on:

"I expect he showed you a side of him I never saw. He'd be at his best with you. His ideas of art were a little new — to me "— he had stiffed the word 'fangled.'

"Yes: but he used to say you had a real sense of beauty." Old Jolyon thought: 'The devil he did!' but answered with a twinkle: "Well, I have, or I shouldn't be sitting here with you." She was fascinating when she smiled with her eyes, like that!

"He thought you had one of those hearts that never grow old. Phil had real insight."

He was not taken in by this flattery spoken out of the past, out of a longing to talk of her dead lover — not a bit; and yet it was precious to hear, because she pleased his eyes and heart which — quite true! — had never grown old. Was that because — unlike her and her dead lover, he had never loved to desperation, had always kept his balance, his sense of symmetry. Well! It had left him power, at eighty-four, to admire beauty. And he thought, 'If I were a painter or a sculptor! But I'm an old chap. Make hay while the sun shines.'

A couple with arms entwined crossed on the grass before them, at the edge of the shadow from their tree. The sunlight fell cruelly on their pale, squashed, unkempt young faces. "We're an ugly lot!" said old Jolyon suddenly. "It amazes me to see how — love triumphs over that."

"Love triumphs over everything!"

"The young think so," he muttered.

"Love has no age, no limit, and no death."

With that glow in her pale face, her breast heaving, her eyes so large and dark and soft, she looked like Venus come to life! But this extravagance brought instant reaction, and, twinkling, he said: "Well, if it had limits, we shouldn't be born; for by George! it's got a lot to put up with."

Then, removing his top hat, he brushed it round with a cuff. The great clumsy thing heated his forehead; in these days he often got a rush of blood to the head — his circulation was not what it had been.

She still sat gazing straight before her, and suddenly she murmured:

“It’s strange enough that I’m alive.”

Those words of Jo’s ‘Wild and lost’ came back to him.

“Ah!” he said: “my son saw you for a moment — that day.”

“Was it your son? I heard a voice in the hall; I thought for a second it was — Phil.”

Old Jolyon saw her lips tremble. She put her hand over them, took it away again, and went on calmly: “That night I went to the Embankment; a woman caught me by the dress. She told me about herself. When one knows that others suffer, one’s ashamed.”

“One of those?”

She nodded, and horror stirred within old Jolyon, the horror of one who has never known a struggle with desperation. Almost against his will he muttered: “Tell me, won’t you?”

“I didn’t care whether I lived or died. When you’re like that, Fate ceases to want to kill you. She took care of me three days — she never left me. I had no money. That’s why I do what I can for them, now.”

But old Jolyon was thinking: ‘No money!’ What fate could compare with that? Every other was involved in it.

“I wish you had come to me,” he said. “Why didn’t you?” But Irene did not answer.

“Because my name was Forsyte, I suppose? Or was it June who kept you away? How are you getting on now?” His eyes involuntarily swept her body. Perhaps even now she was —! And yet she wasn’t thin — not really!

“Oh! with my fifty pounds a year, I make just enough.” The answer did not reassure him; he had lost confidence. And that fellow Soames! But his sense of justice stifled condemnation. No, she would certainly have died rather than take another penny from him. Soft as she looked, there must be strength in her somewhere — strength and fidelity. But what business had young Bosinney to have got run over and left her stranded like this!

“Well, you must come to me now,” he said, “for anything you want, or I shall be quite cut up.” And putting on his hat, he rose. “Let’s go and get some tea. I told that lazy chap to put the horses up for an hour, and come for me at your place. We’ll take a cab presently; I can’t walk as I used to.”

He enjoyed that stroll to the Kensington end of the gardens — the sound of her voice, the glancing of her eyes, the subtle beauty of a charming form moving beside him. He enjoyed their tea at Ruffel’s in the High Street, and came out thence with a great box of chocolates swung on his little finger. He enjoyed the drive back to Chelsea in a hansom, smoking his cigar. She had promised to come down next Sunday and play to him again, and already in thought he was plucking carnations and early roses for her to carry back to town. It was a pleasure to give her a little pleasure, if it WERE pleasure from an old chap like him! The carriage was already there when they arrived. Just like that fellow, who was always late when he was wanted! Old Jolyon went in for a minute to say good-bye. The little dark hall of the flat was impregnated with a disagreeable odour of patchouli, and on a bench against the wall — its only furniture — he saw a figure sitting. He heard Irene say softly: “Just one minute.” In the little drawing-room when the door was shut, he asked gravely: “One of your protegees?”

“Yes. Now thanks to you, I can do something for her.”

He stood, staring, and stroking that chin whose strength had frightened so many in its time. The idea of her thus actually in contact with this outcast grieved and frightened him. What could she do for them? Nothing. Only soil and make trouble for herself, perhaps. And he said: “Take care, my dear! The world puts the worst construction on everything.”

“I know that.”

He was abashed by her quiet smile. “Well then — Sunday,” he murmured: “Good-bye.”

She put her cheek forward for him to kiss.

“Good-bye,” he said again; “take care of yourself.” And he went out, not looking towards the figure on the bench. He drove home by way of Hammersmith; that he might stop at a place he knew of and tell them to send her in two dozen of their best Burgundy. She must want picking-up sometimes! Only in Richmond Park did he remember that he had gone up to order himself some boots, and was surprised that he could have had so paltry an idea.

III

The little spirits of the past which throng an old man's days had never pushed their faces up to his so seldom as in the seventy hours elapsing before Sunday came. The spirit of the future, with the charm of the unknown, put up her lips instead. Old Jolyon was not restless now, and paid no visits to the log, because she was coming to lunch. There is wonderful finality about a meal; it removes a world of doubts, for no one misses meals except for reasons beyond control. He played many games with Holly on the lawn, pitching them up to her who was batting so as to be ready to bowl to Jolly in the holidays. For she was not a Forsyte, but Jolly was — and Forsytes always bat, until they have resigned and reached the age of eighty-five. The dog Balthasar, in attendance, lay on the ball as often as he could, and the page-boy fielded, till his face was like the harvest moon. And because the time was getting shorter, each day was longer and more golden than the last. On Friday night he took a liver pill, his side hurt him rather, and though it was not the liver side, there is no remedy like that. Anyone telling him that he had found a new excitement in life and that excitement was not good for him, would have been met by one of those steady and rather defiant looks of his deep-set iron-grey eyes, which seemed to say: 'I know my own business best.' He always had and always would.

On Sunday morning, when Holly had gone with her governess to church, he visited the strawberry beds. There, accompanied by the dog Balthasar, he examined the plants narrowly and succeeded in finding at least two dozen berries which were really ripe. Stooping was not good for him, and he became very dizzy and red in the forehead. Having placed the strawberries in a dish on the dining-table, he washed his hands and bathed his forehead with eau de Cologne. There, before the mirror, it occurred to him that he was thinner. What a 'threadpaper' he had been when he was young! It was nice to be slim — he could not bear a fat chap; and yet perhaps his cheeks were too thin! She was to arrive by train at half-past twelve and walk up, entering from the road past Drage's farm at the far end of the coppice. And, having looked into June's room to see that there was hot water ready, he set forth to meet her, leisurely, for his heart was beating. The air smelled sweet, larks sang, and the Grand Stand at Epsom was visible. A perfect day! On just such a one, no doubt, six years ago, Soames had brought young Bosinney down with him to look at the site before they began to build. It was Bosinney who had pitched on the exact spot for the house — as June had often told him. In these days he was thinking much about that young fellow, as if his spirit were really haunting the field of his last work, on the chance of seeing — her. Bosinney — the one man who had possessed her heart, to whom she had given her whole self with rapture! At his age one could not, of course, imagine such things, but there stirred in him a queer vague aching — as it were the ghost of an impersonal jealousy; and a feeling, too, more generous, of pity for that love so early lost. All over in a few poor months! Well, well! He looked at his watch before entering the coppice — only a quarter past, twenty-five minutes to wait! And then, turning the corner of the path, he saw her exactly where he had seen her the first time, on the log; and realised that she must have come by the earlier train to sit there alone for a couple of hours at least. Two hours of her society missed! What memory could make that log so dear to her? His face showed what he was thinking, for she said at once:

"Forgive me, Uncle Jolyon; it was here that I first knew."

"Yes, yes; there it is for you whenever you like. You're looking a little Londony; you're giving too many lessons."

That she should have to give lessons worried him. Lessons to a parcel of young girls thumping out scales with their thick fingers.

"Where do you go to give them?" he asked.

"They're mostly Jewish families, luckily."

Old Jolyon stared; to all Forsytes Jews seem strange and doubtful.

"They love music, and they're very kind."

"They had better be, by George!" He took her arm — his side always hurt him a little going uphill — and said:

"Did you ever see anything like those buttercups? They came like that in a night."

Her eyes seemed really to fly over the field, like bees after the flowers and the honey. "I wanted you to see them — wouldn't let them turn the cows in yet." Then, remembering that she had come to talk about Bosinney, he pointed to the clock-tower over the stables:

"I expect he wouldn't have let me put that there — had no notion of time, if I remember."

But, pressing his arm to her, she talked of flowers instead, and he knew it was done that he might not feel she came because of her dead lover.

"The best flower I can show you," he said, with a sort of triumph, "is my little sweet. She'll be back from Church directly. There's something about her which reminds me a little of you," and it did not seem to him peculiar that he had put it thus, instead of saying: "There's something about you which reminds me a little of her." Ah! And here she was!

Holly, followed closely by her elderly French governess, whose digestion had been ruined twenty-two years ago in the siege of Strasbourg, came rushing towards them from under the oak tree. She stopped about a dozen yards away, to pat Balthasar and pretend that this was all she had in her mind. Old Jolyon, who knew better, said:

"Well, my darling, here's the lady in grey I promised you."

Holly raised herself and looked up. He watched the two of them with a twinkle, Irene smiling, Holly beginning with grave inquiry, passing into a shy smile too, and then to something deeper. She had a sense of beauty, that child — knew what was what! He enjoyed the sight of the kiss between them.

"Mrs. Heron, Mam'zelle Beauce. Well, Mam'zelle — good sermon?"

For, now that he had not much more time before him, the only part of the service connected with this world absorbed what interest in church remained to him. Mam'zelle Beauce stretched out a spidery hand clad in a black kid glove — she had been in the best families — and the rather sad eyes of her lean yellowish face seemed to ask: "Are you well-brrred?" Whenever Holly or Jolly did anything unpleasing to her — a not uncommon occurrence — she would say to them: "The little Tayleurs never did that — they were such well-brrred little children." Jolly hated the little Tayleurs; Holly wondered dreadfully how it was she fell so short of them. 'A thin rum little soul,' old Jolyon thought her — Mam'zelle Beauce.

Luncheon was a successful meal, the mushrooms which he himself had picked in the mushroom house, his chosen strawberries, and another bottle of the Steinberg cabinet filled him with a certain aromatic spirituality, and a conviction that he would have a touch of eczema to-morrow.

After lunch they sat under the oak tree drinking Turkish coffee. It was no matter of grief to him when Mademoiselle Beauce withdrew to write her Sunday letter to her sister, whose future had been endangered in the past by swallowing a pin — an event held up daily in warning to the children to eat slowly and digest what they had eaten. At the foot of the bank, on a carriage rug, Holly and the dog Balthasar teased and loved each other, and in the shade old Jolyon with his legs crossed and his cigar luxuriously savoured, gazed at Irene sitting in the swing. A light, vaguely swaying, grey figure with a fleck of sunlight here and there upon it, lips just opened, eyes dark and soft under lids a little drooped. She looked content; surely it did her good to come and see him! The selfishness of age had not set its proper grip on him, for he could still feel pleasure in the pleasure of others, realising that what he wanted, though much, was not quite all that mattered.

"It's quiet here," he said; "you mustn't come down if you find it dull. But it's a pleasure to see you. My little sweet is the only face which gives me any pleasure, except yours."

From her smile he knew that she was not beyond liking to be appreciated, and this reassured him. "That's not humbug," he said. "I never told a woman I admired her when I didn't. In fact I don't know when I've told a woman I admired her, except my wife in the old days; and wives are funny." He was silent, but resumed abruptly:

"She used to expect me to say it more often than I felt it, and there we were." Her face looked mysteriously troubled, and, afraid that he had said something painful, he hurried on: "When my little sweet marries, I hope she'll find someone who knows what women feel. I shan't be here to see it, but there's too much topsy-turvydom in marriage; I don't want her to pitch up against that." And, aware that he had made bad worse, he added: "That dog will scratch."

A silence followed. Of what was she thinking, this pretty creature whose life was spoiled; who had done with love, and yet was made for love? Some day when he was gone, perhaps, she would find another mate — not so disorderly as that young fellow who had got himself run over. Ah! but her husband?

"Does Soames never trouble you?" he asked.

She shook her head. Her face had closed up suddenly. For all her softness there was something irreconcilable about her. And a glimpse of light on the inexorable nature of sex antipathies strayed into a brain which, belonging to early Victorian civilisation — so much older than this of his old age — had never thought about such primitive things.

"That's a comfort," he said. "You can see the Grand Stand to-day. Shall we take a turn round?"

Through the flower and fruit garden, against whose high outer walls peach trees and nectarines were trained to the sun, through the stables, the vinery, the mushroom house, the asparagus beds, the rosery, the summer-house, he conducted her — even into the kitchen garden to see the tiny green peas which Holly loved to scoop out of their pods with her finger, and lick up from the palm of her little brown hand. Many delightful things he showed her, while Holly and the dog Balthasar danced ahead, or came to them at intervals for attention. It was one of the happiest afternoons he had ever spent, but it tired him and he was glad to sit down in the music room and let her give him tea. A special little friend of Holly's had come in — a fair child with short hair like a boy's. And the two sported in the distance, under the stairs, on the stairs, and up in the gallery. Old Jolyon begged for Chopin. She played studies, mazurkas, waltzes, till the two children, creeping near, stood at the foot of the piano their dark and golden heads bent forward, listening. Old Jolyon watched.

"Let's see you dance, you two!"

Shyly, with a false start, they began. Bobbing and circling, earnest, not very adroit, they went past and past his chair to the strains of that waltz. He watched them and the face of her who was playing turned smiling towards those little dancers thinking:

'Sweetest picture I've seen for ages.'

A voice said:

"Hollee! Mais enfin — qu'est-ce que tu fais la — danser, le dimanche! Viens, donc!"

But the children came close to old Jolyon, knowing that he would save them, and gazed into a face which was decidedly 'caught out.'

"Better the day, better the deed, Mam'zelle. It's all my doing. Trot along, chicks, and have your tea."

And, when they were gone, followed by the dog Balthasar, who took every meal, he looked at Irene with a twinkle and said:

"Well, there we are! Aren't they sweet? Have you any little ones among your pupils?"

"Yes, three — two of them darlings."

"Pretty?"

"Lovely!"

Old Jolyon sighed; he had an insatiable appetite for the very young. "My little sweet," he said, "is devoted to music; she'll be a musician some day. You wouldn't give me your opinion of her playing, I suppose?"

"Of course I will."

"You wouldn't like —" but he stifled the words "to give her lessons." The idea that she gave lessons was unpleasant to him; yet it would mean that he would see her regularly. She left the piano and came over to his chair.

"I would like, very much; but there is — June. When are they coming back?"

Old Jolyon frowned. "Not till the middle of next month. What does that matter?"

"You said June had forgiven me; but she could never forget, Uncle Jolyon."

Forget! She must forget, if he wanted her to.

But as if answering, Irene shook her head. "You know she couldn't; one doesn't forget."

Always that wretched past! And he said with a sort of vexed finality:

"Well, we shall see."

He talked to her an hour or more, of the children, and a hundred little things, till the carriage came round to take her home. And when she had gone he went back to his chair, and sat there smoothing his face and chin, dreaming over the day.

That evening after dinner he went to his study and took a sheet of paper. He stayed for some minutes without writing, then rose and stood under the masterpiece 'Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset.' He was not thinking of that picture, but of his life. He was going to leave her something in his Will; nothing could so have stirred the stilly deeps of thought and memory. He was going to leave her a portion of his wealth, of his aspirations, deeds, qualities, work — all that had made that wealth; going to leave her, too, a part of all he had missed in life, by his sane and steady pursuit of wealth. All! What had he missed? 'Dutch Fishing Boats' responded blankly; he crossed to the French window, and drawing the curtain aside, opened it. A wind had got up, and one of last year's oak leaves which had somehow survived the gardener's brooms, was dragging itself with a tiny clicking rustle along the stone terrace in the twilight. Except for that it was very quiet out there, and he could smell the heliotrope watered not long since. A bat went by. A bird uttered its last ‘cheep.’ And right above the oak tree the first star shone. Faust in the opera had bartered his soul for some fresh years of youth. Morbid notion! No such bargain was possible, that was real tragedy! No making oneself new again for love or life or anything. Nothing left to do but enjoy beauty from afar off while you could, and leave it something in your Will. But how much? And, as if he could not make that calculation looking out into the mild freedom of the country night, he turned back and went up to the chimney-piece. There were his pet bronzes — a Cleopatra with the asp at her breast; a Socrates; a greyhound playing with her puppy; a strong man reining in some horses. ‘They last!’ he thought, and a pang went through his heart. They had a thousand years of life before them!

‘How much?’ Well! enough at all events to save her getting old before her time, to keep the lines out of her face as long as possible, and grey from soiling that bright hair. He might live another five years. She would be well over thirty by then. ‘How much?’ She had none of his blood in her! In loyalty to the tenor of his life for forty years and more, ever since he married and founded that mysterious thing, a family, came this warning thought — None of his blood, no right to anything! It was a luxury then, this notion. An extravagance, a petting of an old man’s whim, one of those things done in dotage. His real future was vested in those who had his blood, in whom he would live on when he was gone. He turned away from the bronzes and stood looking at the old leather chair in which he had sat and smoked so many hundreds of cigars. And suddenly he seemed to see her sitting there in her grey dress, fragrant, soft, dark-eyed, graceful, looking up at him. Why! She cared nothing for him, really; all she cared for was that lost lover of hers. But she was there, whether she would or no, giving him pleasure with her beauty and grace. One had no right to inflict an old man’s company, no right to ask her down to play to him and let him look at her — for no reward! Pleasure must be paid for in this world. ‘How much?’ After all, there was plenty; his son and his three grandchildren would never miss that little lump. He had made it himself, nearly every penny; he could leave it where he liked, allow himself this little pleasure. He went back to the bureau. ‘Well, I’m going to,’ he thought, ‘let them think what they like. I’m going to!’ And he sat down.

‘How much?’ Ten thousand, twenty thousand — how much? If only with his money he could buy one year, one month of youth. And startled by that thought, he wrote quickly:

‘DEAR HERRING — Draw me a codicil to this effect: “I leave to my niece Irene Forsyte, born Irene Heron, by which name she now goes, fifteen thousand pounds free of legacy duty.” ‘Yours faithfully, ‘JOLYON FORSYTE.’

When he had sealed and stamped the envelope, he went back to the window and drew in a long breath. It was dark, but many stars shone now.

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IV

He woke at half-past two, an hour which long experience had taught him brings panic intensity to all awkward thoughts. Experience had also taught him that a further waking at the proper hour of eight showed the folly of such panic. On this particular morning the thought which gathered rapid momentum was that if he became ill, at his age not improbable, he would not see her. From this it was but a step to realisation that he would be cut off, too, when his son and June returned from Spain. How could he justify desire for the company of one who had stolen — early morning does not mince words — June's lover? That lover was dead; but June was a stubborn little thing; warm-hearted, but stubborn as wood, and — quite true — not one who forgot! By the middle of next month they would be back. He had barely five weeks left to enjoy the new interest which had come into what remained of his life. Darkness showed up to him absurdly clear the nature of his feeling. Admiration for beauty — a craving to see that which delighted his eyes.

Preposterous, at his age! And yet — what other reason was there for asking June to undergo such painful reminder, and how prevent his son and his son's wife from thinking him very queer? He would be reduced to sneaking up to London, which tired him; and the least indisposition would cut him off even from that. He lay with eyes open, setting his jaw against the prospect, and calling himself an old fool, while his heart beat loudly, and then seemed to stop beating altogether. He had seen the dawn lighting the window chinks, heard the birds chirp and twitter, and the cocks crow, before he fell asleep again, and awoke tired but sane. Five weeks before he need bother, at his age an eternity! But that early morning panic had left its mark, had slightly fevered the will of one who had always had his own way. He would see her as often as he wished! Why not go up to town and make that codicil at his solicitor's instead of writing about it; she might like to go to the opera! But, by train, for he would not have that fat chap Beacon grinning behind his back. Servants were such fools; and, as likely as not, they had known all the past history of Irene and young Bosinney — servants knew everything, and suspected the rest. He wrote to her that morning:

"MY DEAR IRENE — I have to be up in town to-morrow. If you would like to have a look in at the opera, come and dine with me quietly . . . . "

But where? It was decades since he had dined anywhere in London save at his Club or at a private house. Ah! that new-fangled place close to Covent Garden. . . .

"Let me have a line to-morrow morning to the Piedmont Hotel whether to expect you there at 7 o'clock." "Yours affectionately, "JOLYON FORSYTE."

She would understand that he just wanted to give her a little pleasure; for the idea that she should guess he had this itch to see her was instinctively unpleasant to him; it was not seemly that one so old should go out of his way to see beauty, especially in a woman.

The journey next day, short though it was, and the visit to his lawyer's, tired him. It was hot too, and after dressing for dinner he lay down on the sofa in his bedroom to rest a little. He must have had a sort of fainting fit, for he came to himself feeling very queer; and with some difficulty rose and rang the bell. Why! it was past seven! And there he was and she would be waiting. But suddenly the dizziness came on again, and he was obliged to relapse on the sofa. He heard the maid's voice say:

"Did you ring, sir?"

"Yes, come here"; he could not see her clearly, for the cloud in front of his eyes. "I'm not well, I want some sal volatile."

"Yes, sir." Her voice sounded frightened.

Old Jolyon made an effort.

"Don't go. Take this message to my niece — a lady waiting in the hall — a lady in grey. Say Mr. Forsyte is not well — the heat. He is very sorry; if he is not down directly, she is not to wait dinner."

When she was gone, he thought feebly: 'Why did I say a lady in grey — she may be in anything. Sal volatile!' He did not go off again, yet was not conscious of how Irene came to be standing beside him, holding smelling salts to his nose, and pushing a pillow up behind his head. He heard her say anxiously: "Dear Uncle Jolyon, what is it?" was dimly conscious of the soft pressure of her lips on his hand; then drew a long breath of smelling salts, suddenly discovered strength in them, and sneezed.

“Ha!” he said, “it’s nothing. How did you get here? Go down and dine — the tickets are on the dressing-table. I shall be all right in a minute.”

He felt her cool hand on his forehead, smelled violets, and sat divided between a sort of pleasure and a determination to be all right.

“Why! You are in grey!” he said. “Help me up.” Once on his feet he gave himself a shake.

“What business had I to go off like that!” And he moved very slowly to the glass. What a cadaverous chap! Her voice, behind him, murmured:

“You mustn’t come down, Uncle; you must rest.”

“Fiddlesticks! A glass of champagne’ll soon set me to rights. I can’t have you missing the opera.”

But the journey down the corridor was troublesome. What carpets they had in these newfangled places, so thick that you tripped up in them at every step! In the lift he noticed how concerned she looked, and said with the ghost of a twinkle:

“I’m a pretty host.”

When the lift stopped he had to hold firmly to the seat to prevent its slipping under him; but after soup and a glass of champagne he felt much better, and began to enjoy an infirmity which had brought such solicitude into her manner towards him.

“I should have liked you for a daughter,” he said suddenly; and watching the smile in her eyes, went on:

“You mustn’t get wrapped up in the past at your time of life; plenty of that when you get to my age. That’s a nice dress — I like the style.”

“I made it myself.”

Ah! A woman who could make herself a pretty frock had not lost her interest in life.

“Make hay while the sun shines,” he said; “and drink that up. I want to see some colour in your cheeks. We mustn’t waste life; it doesn’t do. There’s a new Marguerite to-night; let’s hope she won’t be fat. And Mephisto — anything more dreadful than a fat chap playing the Devil I can’t imagine.”

But they did not go to the opera after all, for in getting up from dinner the dizziness came over him again, and she insisted on his staying quiet and going to bed early. When he parted from her at the door of the hotel, having paid the cabman to drive her to Chelsea, he sat down again for a moment to enjoy the memory of her words: “You are such a darling to me, Uncle Jolyon!” Why! Who wouldn’t be! He would have liked to stay up another day and take her to the Zoo, but two days running of him would bore her to death. No, he must wait till next Sunday; she had promised to come then. They would settle those lessons for Holly, if only for a month. It would be something. That little Mam’zelle Beauce wouldn’t like it, but she would have to lump it. And crushing his old opera hat against his chest he sought the lift.

He drove to Waterloo next morning, struggling with a desire to say: ‘Drive me to Chelsea.’ But his sense of proportion was too strong. Besides, he still felt shaky, and did not want to risk another aberration like that of last night, away from home. Holly, too, was expecting him, and what he had in his bag for her. Not that there was any cupboard love in his little sweet — she was a bundle of affection. Then, with the rather bitter cynicism of the old, he wondered for a second whether it was not cupboard love which made Irene put up with him. No, she was not that sort either. She had, if anything, too little notion of how to butter her bread, no sense of property, poor thing! Besides, he had not breathed a word about that codicil, nor should he — sufficient unto the day was the good thereof.

In the victoria which met him at the station Holly was restraining the dog Balthasar, and their caresses made ‘jubey’ his drive home. All the rest of that fine hot day and most of the next he was content and peaceful, reposing in the shade, while the long lingering sunshine showered gold on the lawns and the flowers. But on Thursday evening at his lonely dinner he began to count the hours; sixty-five till he would go down to meet her again in the little coppice, and walk up through the fields at her side. He had intended to consult the doctor about his fainting fit, but the fellow would be sure to insist on quiet, no excitement and all that; and he did not mean to be tied by the leg, did not want to be told of an infirmity — if there were one, could not afford to hear of it at his time of life, now that this new interest had come. And he carefully avoided making any mention of it in a letter to his son. It would only bring them back with a run! How far this silence was due to consideration for their pleasure, how far to regard for his own, he did not pause to consider.

That night in his study he had just finished his cigar and was dozing off, when he heard the rustle of a gown, and was conscious of a scent of violets. Opening his eyes he saw her, dressed in grey, standing by the fireplace, holding out her arms. The odd thing was that, though those arms seemed to hold nothing, they were curved as if round someone's neck, and her own neck was bent back, her lips open, her eyes closed. She vanished at once, and there were the mantelpiece and his bronzes. But those bronzes and the mantelpiece had not been there when she was, only the fireplace and the wall! Shaken and troubled, he got up. 'I must take medicine,' he thought; 'I can't be well.' His heart beat too fast, he had an asthmatic feeling in the chest; and going to the window, he opened it to get some air. A dog was barking far away, one of the dogs at Gage's farm no doubt, beyond the coppice. A beautiful still night, but dark. 'I dropped off,' he mused, 'that's it! And yet I'll swear my eyes were open!' A sound like a sigh seemed to answer.

"What's that?" he said sharply, "who's there?"

Putting his hand to his side to still the beating of his heart, he stepped out on the terrace. Something soft scurried by in the dark. "Shoo!" It was that great grey cat. 'Young Bosinney was like a great cat!' he thought. 'It was him in there, that she — that she was — He's got her still!' He walked to the edge of the terrace, and looked down into the darkness; he could just see the powdering of the daisies on the unmown lawn. Here to-day and gone to-morrow! And there came the moon, who saw all, young and old, alive and dead, and didn't care a dump! His own turn soon. For a single day of youth he would give what was left! And he turned again towards the house. He could see the windows of the night nursery up there. His little sweet would be asleep. 'Hope that dog won't wake her!' he thought. 'What is it makes us love, and makes us die! I must go to bed.'

And across the terrace stones, growing grey in the moonlight, he passed back within.

How should an old man live his days if not in dreaming of his well-spent past? In that, at all events, there is no agitating warmth, only pale winter sunshine. The shell can withstand the gentle beating of the dynamos of memory. The present he should distrust; the future shun. From beneath thick shade he should watch the sunlight creeping at his toes. If there be sun of summer, let him not go out into it, mistaking it for the Indian-summer sun! Thus peradventure he shall decline softly, slowly, imperceptibly, until impatient Nature clutches his wind-pipe and he gasps away to death some early morning before the world is aired, and they put on his tombstone: 'In the fulness of years!' yea! If he preserve his principles in perfect order, a Forsyte may live on long after he is dead.

Old Jolyon was conscious of all this, and yet there was in him that which transcended Forsyteism. For it is written that a Forsyte shall not love beauty more than reason; nor his own way more than his own health. And something beat within him in these days that with each throb fretted at the thinning shell. His sagacity knew this, but it knew too that he could not stop that beating, nor would if he could. And yet, if you had told him he was living on his capital, he would have stared you down. No, no; a man did not live on his capital; it was not done! The shibboleths of the past are ever more real than the actualities of the present. And he, to whom living on one's capital had always been anathema, could not have borne to have applied so gross a phrase to his own case. Pleasure is healthful; beauty good to see; to live again in the youth of the young — and what else on earth was he doing!

Methodically, as had been the way of his whole life, he now arranged his time. On Tuesdays he journeyed up to town by train; Irene came and dined with him. And they went to the opera. On Thursdays he drove to town, and, putting that fat chap and his horses up, met her in Kensington Gardens, picking up the carriage after he had left her, and driving home again in time for dinner. He threw out the casual formula that he had business in London on those two days. On Wednesdays and Saturdays she came down to give Holly music lessons. The greater the pleasure he took in her society, the more scrupulously fastidious he became, just a matter-of-fact and friendly uncle. Not even in feeling, really, was he more — for, after all, there was his age. And yet, if she were late he fidgeted himself to death. If she missed coming, which happened twice, his eyes grew sad as an old dog's, and he failed to sleep.

And so a month went by — a month of summer in the fields, and in his heart, with summer's heat and the fatigue thereof. Who could have believed a few weeks back that he would have looked forward to his son's and his grand-daughter's return with something like dread! There was such a delicious freedom, such recovery of that independence a man enjoys before he founds a family, about these weeks of lovely weather, and this new companionship with one who demanded nothing, and remained always a little unknown, retaining the fascination of mystery. It was like a draught of wine to him who has been drinking water for so long that he has almost forgotten the stir wine brings to his blood, the narcotic to his brain. The flowers were coloured brighter, scents and music and the sunlight had a living value — were no longer mere reminders of past enjoyment. There was something now to live for which stirred him continually to anticipation. He lived in that, not in retrospection; the difference is considerable to any so old as he. The pleasures of the table, never of much consequence to one naturally abstemious, had lost all value. He ate little, without knowing what he ate; and every day grew thinner and more worn to look at. He was again a 'threadpaper'; and to this thinned form his massive forehead, with hollows at the temples, gave more dignity than ever. He was very well aware that he ought to see the doctor, but liberty was too sweet. He could not afford to pet his frequent shortness of breath and the pain in his side at the expense of liberty. Return to the vegetable existence he had led among the agricultural journals with the life-size mangold wurzels, before this new attraction came into his life — no! He exceeded his allowance of cigars. Two a day had always been his rule. Now he smoked three and sometimes four — a man will when he is filled with the creative spirit. But very often he thought: 'I must give up smoking, and coffee; I must give up rattling up to town.' But he did not; there was no one in any sort of authority to notice him, and this was a priceless boon.

The servants perhaps wondered, but they were, naturally, dumb. Mam'zelle Beauce was too concerned with her own digestion, and too 'wellbrrred' to make personal allusions. Holly had not as yet an eye for the relative appearance of him who was her plaything and her god. It was left for Irene herself to beg him to eat more, to rest in the hot part of the day, to take a tonic, and so forth. But she did not tell him that she was the a cause of his thinness — for one cannot see the havoc oneself is working. A man of eighty-five has no passions, but the Beauty which produces passion works on in the old way, till death closes the eyes which crave the sight of Her.

On the first day of the second week in July he received a letter from his son in Paris to say that they would all be back on Friday. This had always been more sure than Fate; but, with the pathetic improvidence given to the old, that they may endure to the end, he had never quite admitted it. Now he did, and something would have to be done. He had ceased to be able to imagine life without this new interest, but that which is not imagined sometimes exists, as Forsytes are perpetually finding to their cost. He sat in his old leather chair, doubling up the letter, and mumbling with his lips the end of an unlighted cigar. After to-morrow his Tuesday expeditions to town would have to be abandoned. He could still drive up, perhaps, once a week, on the pretext of seeing his man of business. But even that would be dependent on his health, for now they would begin to fuss about him. The lessons! The lessons must go on! She must swallow down her scruples, and June must put her feelings in her pocket. She had done so once, on the day after the news of Bosinney's death; what she had done then, she could surely do again now. Four years since that injury was inflicted on her — not Christian to keep the memory of old sores alive. June's will was strong, but his was stronger, for his sands were running out. Irene was soft, surely she would do this for him, subdue her natural shrinking, sooner than give him pain! The lessons must continue; for if they did, he was secure. And lighting his cigar at last, he began trying to shape out how to put it to them all, and explain this strange intimacy; how to veil and wrap it away from the naked truth — that he could not bear to be deprived of the sight of beauty. Ah! Holly! Holly was fond of her, Holly liked her lessons. She would save him — his little sweet! And with that happy thought he became serene, and wondered what he had been worrying about so fearfully. He must not worry, it left him always curiously weak, and as if but half present in his own body.

That evening after dinner he had a return of the dizziness, though he did not faint. He would not ring the bell, because he knew it would mean a fuss, and make his going up on the morrow more conspicuous. When one grew old, the whole world was in conspiracy to limit freedom, and for what reason? — just to keep the breath in him a little longer. He did not want it at such cost. Only the dog Balthasar saw his lonely recovery from that weakness; anxiously watched his master go to the sideboard and drink some brandy, instead of giving him a biscuit. When at last old Jolyon felt able to tackle the stairs he went up to bed. And, though still shaky next morning, the thought of the evening sustained and strengthened him. It was always such a pleasure to give her a good dinner — he suspected her of undereating when she was alone; and, at the opera to watch her eyes glow and brighten, the unconscious smiling of her lips. She hadn't much pleasure, and this was the last time he would be able to give her that treat. But when he was packing his bag he caught himself wishing that he had not the fatigue of dressing for dinner before him, and the exertion, too, of telling her about June's return.

The opera that evening was 'Carmen,' and he chose the last entr'acte to break the news, instinctively putting it off till the latest moment.

She took it quietly, queerly; in fact, he did not know how she had taken it before the wayward music lifted up again and silence became necessary. The mask was down over her face, that mask behind which so much went on that he could not see. She wanted time to think it over, no doubt! He would not press her, for she would be coming to give her lesson to-morrow afternoon, and he should see her then when she had got used to the idea. In the cab he talked only of the Carmen;

he had seen better in the old days, but this one was not bad at all. When he took her hand to say good-night, she bent quickly forward and kissed his forehead.

"Good-bye, dear Uncle Jolyon, you have been so sweet to me."

"To-morrow then," he said. "Good-night. Sleep well." She echoed softly: "Sleep well" and from the cab window, already moving away, he saw her face screwed round towards him, and her hand put out in a gesture which seemed to linger.

He sought his room slowly. They never gave him the same, and he could not get used to these 'spick-and-spandy' bedrooms with new furniture and grey-green carpets sprinkled all over with pink roses. He was wakeful and that wretched Habanera kept throbbing in his head.

His French had never been equal to its words, but its sense he knew, if it had any sense, a gipsy thing — wild and unaccountable. Well, there was in life something which upset all your care and plans — something which made men and women dance to its pipes. And he lay staring from deep-sunk eyes into the darkness where the unaccountable held sway. You thought you had hold of life, but it slipped away behind you, took you by the scruff of the neck, forced you here and forced you there, and then, likely as not, squeezed life out of you! It took the very stars like that, he shouldn't wonder, rubbed their noses together and flung them apart; it had never done playing its pranks. Five million people in this great blunderbuss of a town, and all of them at the mercy of that Life-Force, like a lot of little dried peas hopping about on a board when you struck your fist on it. Ah, well! Himself would not hop much longer — a good long sleep would do him good!

How hot it was up here! — how noisy! His forehead burned; she had kissed it just where he always worried; just there — as if she had known the very place and wanted to kiss it all away for him. But, instead, her lips left a patch of grievous uneasiness. She had never spoken in quite that voice, had never before made that lingering gesture or looked back at him as she drove away.

He got out of bed and pulled the curtains aside; his room faced down over the river. There was little air, but the sight of that breadth of water flowing by, calm, eternal, soothed him. 'The great thing,' he thought 'is not to make myself a nuisance. I'll think of my little sweet, and go to sleep.' But it was long before the heat and throbbing of the London night died out into the short slumber of the summer morning. And old Jolyon had but forty winks.

When he reached home next day he went out to the flower garden, and with the help of Holly, who was very delicate with flowers, gathered a great bunch of carnations. They were, he told her, for 'the lady in grey'— a name still bandied between them; and he put them in a bowl in his study where he meant to tackle Irene the moment she came, on the subject of June and future lessons. Their fragrance and colour would help. After lunch he lay down, for he felt very tired, and the carriage would not bring her from the station till four o'clock. But as the hour approached he grew restless, and sought the schoolroom, which overlooked the drive. The sun-blinds were down, and Holly was there with Mademoiselle Beauce, sheltered from the heat of a stifling July day, attending to their silkworms. Old Jolyon had a natural antipathy to these methodical creatures, whose heads and colour reminded him of elephants; who nibbled such quantities of holes in nice green leaves; and smelled, as he thought, horrid. He sat down on a chintz-covered windowseat whence he could see the drive, and get what air there was; and the dog Balthasar who appreciated chintz on hot days, jumped up beside him. Over the cottage piano a violet dust-sheet, faded almost to grey, was spread, and on it the first lavender, whose scent filled the room. In spite of the coolness here, perhaps because of that coolness the beat of life vehemently impressed his ebbed-down senses. Each sunbeam which came through the chinks had annoying brilliance; that dog smelled very strong; the lavender perfume was overpowering; those silkworms heaving up their grey-green backs seemed horribly alive; and Holly's dark head bent over them had a wonderfully silky sheen. A marvellous cruelly strong thing was life when you were old and weak; it seemed to mock you with its multitude of forms and its beating vitality. He had never, till those last few weeks, had this curious feeling of being with one half of him eagerly borne along in the stream of life, and with the other half left on the bank, watching that helpless progress. Only when Irene was with him did he lose this double consciousness.

Holly turned her head, pointed with her little brown fist to the piano — for to point with a finger was not 'well-brrred'— and said slyly:

"Look at the 'lady in grey,' Gran; isn't she pretty to-day?"

Old Jolyon's heart gave a flutter, and for a second the room was clouded; then it cleared, and he said with a twinkle:

"Who's been dressing her up?"

“Mam’zelle.”

“Hollee! Don’t be foolish!”

That prim little Frenchwoman! She hadn’t yet got over the music lessons being taken away from her. That wouldn’t help. His little sweet was the only friend they had. Well, they were her lessons. And he shouldn’t budge shouldn’t budge for anything. He stroked the warm wool on Balthasar’s head, and heard Holly say: “When mother’s home, there won’t be any changes, will there? She doesn’t like strangers, you know.”

The child’s words seemed to bring the chilly atmosphere of opposition about old Jolyon, and disclose all the menace to his new-found freedom. Ah! He would have to resign himself to being an old man at the mercy of care and love, or fight to keep this new and prized companionship; and to fight tired him to death. But his thin, worn face hardened into resolution till it appeared all Jaw. This was his house, and his affair; he should not budge! He looked at his watch, old and thin like himself; he had owned it fifty years. Past four already! And kissing the top of Holly’s head in passing, he went down to the hall. He wanted to get hold of her before she went up to give her lesson. At the first sound of wheels he stepped out into the porch, and saw at once that the victoria was empty.

“The train’s in, sir; but the lady ‘asn’t come.”

Old Jolyon gave him a sharp upward look, his eyes seemed to push away that fat chap’s curiosity, and defy him to see the bitter disappointment he was feeling.

“Very well,” he said, and turned back into the house. He went to his study and sat down, quivering like a leaf. What did this mean? She might have lost her train, but he knew well enough she hadn’t. ‘Good-bye, dear Uncle Jolyon.’ Why ‘Good-bye’ and not ‘Good-night’? And that hand of hers lingering in the air. And her kiss. What did it mean? Vehement alarm and irritation took possession of him. He got up and began to pace the Turkey carpet, between window and wall. She was going to give him up! He felt it for certain — and he defenceless. An old man wanting to look on beauty! It was ridiculous! Age closed his mouth, paralysed his power to fight. He had no right to what was warm and living, no right to anything but memories and sorrow. He could not plead with her; even an old man has his dignity. Defenceless! For an hour, lost to bodily fatigue, he paced up and down, past the bowl of carnations he had plucked, which mocked him with its scent. Of all things hard to bear, the prostration of will-power is hardest, for one who has always had his way. Nature had got him in its net, and like an unhappy fish he turned and swam at the meshes, here and there, found no hole, no breaking point. They brought him tea at five o’clock, and a letter. For a moment hope beat up in him. He cut the envelope with the butter knife, and read:

“DEAREST UNCLE JOLYON — I can’t bear to write anything that may disappoint you, but I was too cowardly to tell you last night. I feel I can’t come down and give Holly any more lessons, now that June is coming back. Some things go too deep to be forgotten. It has been such a joy to see you and Holly. Perhaps I shall still see you sometimes when you come up, though I’m sure it’s not good for you; I can see you are tiring yourself too much. I believe you ought to rest quite quietly all this hot weather, and now you have your son and June coming back you will be so happy. Thank you a million times for all your sweetness to me.

“Lovingly your IRENE.”

So, there it was! Not good for him to have pleasure and what he chiefly cared about; to try and put off feeling the inevitable end of all things, the approach of death with its stealthy, rustling footsteps. Not good for him! Not even she could see how she was his new lease of interest in life, the incarnation of all the beauty he felt slipping from him.

His tea grew cold, his cigar remained unlit; and up and down he paced, torn between his dignity and his hold on life. Intolerable to be squeezed out slowly, without a say of your own, to live on when your will was in the hands of others bent on weighing you to the ground with care and love. Intolerable! He would see what telling her the truth would do — the truth that he wanted the sight of her more than just a lingering on. He sat down at his old bureau and took a pen. But he could not write. There was something revolting in having to plead like this; plead that she should warm his eyes with her beauty. It was tantamount to confessing dotage. He simply could not. And instead, he wrote:

“I had hoped that the memory of old sores would not be allowed to stand in the way of what is a pleasure and a profit to me and my little grand-daughter. But old men learn to forego their whims; they are obliged to, even the whim to live must be foregone sooner or later; and perhaps the sooner the better. “My love to you, “JOLYON FORSYTE.”

‘Bitter,’ he thought, ‘but I can’t help it. I’m tired.’ He sealed and dropped it into the box for the evening post, and hearing it fall to the bottom, thought: 'There goes all I've looked forward to!'

That evening after dinner which he scarcely touched, after his cigar which he left half-smoked for it made him feel faint, he went very slowly upstairs and stole into the night-nursery. He sat down on the window-seat. A night-light was burning, and he could just see Holly's face, with one hand underneath the cheek. An early cockchafer buzzed in the Japanese paper with which they had filled the grate, and one of the horses in the stable stamped restlessly. To sleep like that child! He pressed apart two rungs of the venetian blind and looked out. The moon was rising, blood-red. He had never seen so red a moon. The woods and fields out there were dropping to sleep too, in the last glimmer of the summer light. And beauty, like a spirit, walked. 'I've had a long life,' he thought, 'the best of nearly everything. I'm an ungrateful chap; I've seen a lot of beauty in my time. Poor young Bosinney said I had a sense of beauty. There's a man in the moon to-night!' A moth went by, another, another. 'Ladies in grey!' He closed his eyes. A feeling that he would never open them again beset him; he let it grow, let himself sink; then, with a shiver, dragged the lids up. There was something wrong with him, no doubt, deeply wrong; he would have to have the doctor after all. It didn't much matter now! Into that coppice the moonlight would have crept; there would be shadows, and those shadows would be the only things awake. No birds, beasts, flowers, insects; Just the shadows — moving; 'Ladies in grey!' Over that log they would climb; would whisper together. She and Bosinney! Funny thought! And the frogs and little things would whisper too! How the clock ticked, in here! It was all eerie — out there in the light of that red moon; in here with the little steady night-light and, the ticking clock and the nurse's dressing-gown hanging from the edge of the screen, tall, like a woman's figure. 'Lady in grey!' And a very odd thought beset him: Did she exist? Had she ever come at all? Or was she but the emanation of all the beauty he had loved and must leave so soon? The violet-grey spirit with the dark eyes and the crown of amber hair, who walks the dawn and the moonlight, and at blue-bell time? What was she, who was she, did she exist? He rose and stood a moment clutching the window-sill, to give him a sense of reality again; then began tiptoeing towards the door. He stopped at the foot of the bed; and Holly, as if conscious of his eyes fixed on her, stirred, sighed, and curled up closer in defence. He tiptoed on and passed out into the dark passage; reached his room, undressed at once, and stood before a mirror in his night-shirt. What a scarecrow — with temples fallen in, and thin legs! His eyes resisted his own image, and a look of pride came on his face. All was in league to pull him down, even his reflection in the glass, but he was not down — yet! He got into bed, and lay a long time without sleeping, trying to reach resignation, only too well aware that fretting and disappointment were very bad for him.

He woke in the morning so unrefreshed and strengthless that he sent for the doctor. After sounding him, the fellow pulled a face as long as your arm, and ordered him to stay in bed and give up smoking. That was no hardship; there was nothing to get up for, and when he felt ill, tobacco always lost its savour. He spent the morning languidly with the sun-blinds down, turning and re-turning The Times, not reading much, the dog Balthasar lying beside his bed. With his lunch they brought him a telegram, running thus:

'Your letter received coming down this afternoon will be with you at four-thirty. Irene.'

Coming down! After all! Then she did exist — and he was not deserted. Coming down! A glow ran through his limbs; his cheeks and forehead felt hot. He drank his soup, and pushed the tray-table away, lying very quiet until they had removed lunch and left him alone; but every now and then his eyes twinkled. Coming down! His heart beat fast, and then did not seem to beat at all. At three o'clock he got up and dressed deliberately, noiselessly. Holly and Mam'zelle would be in the schoolroom, and the servants asleep after their dinner, he shouldn't wonder. He opened his door cautiously, and went downstairs. In the hall the dog Balthasar lay solitary, and, followed by him, old Jolyon passed into his study and out into the burning afternoon. He meant to go down and meet her in the coppice, but felt at once he could not manage that in this heat. He sat down instead under the oak tree by the swing, and the dog Balthasar, who also felt the heat, lay down beside him. He sat there smiling. What a revel of bright minutes! What a hum of insects, and cooing of pigeons! It was the quintessence of a summer day. Lovely! And he was happy — happy as a sand-boy, whatever that might be. She was coming; she had not given him up! He had everything in life he wanted — except a little more breath, and less weight — just here! He would see her when she emerged from the fernery, come swaying just a little, a violet-grey figure passing over the daisies and dandelions and 'soldiers' on the lawn — the soldiers with their flowery crowns. He would not move, but she would come up to him and say: 'Dear Uncle Jolyon, I am sorry!' and sit in the swing and let him look at her and tell her that he had not been very well but was all right now; and that dog would lick her hand. That dog knew his master was fond of her; that dog was a good dog.

It was quite shady under the tree; the sun could not get at him, only make the rest of the world bright so that he could see the Grand Stand at Epsom away out there, very far, and the cows cropping the clover in the field and swishing at the flies with their tails. He smelled the scent of limes, and lavender. Ah! that was why there was such a racket of bees. They were excited — busy, as his heart was busy and excited. Drowsy, too, drowsy and drugged on honey and happiness; as his heart was drugged and drowsy. Summer — summer — they seemed saying; great bees and little bees, and the flies too!

The stable clock struck four; in half an hour she would be here. He would have just one tiny nap, because he had had so little sleep of late; and then he would be fresh for her, fresh for youth and beauty, coming towards him across the sunlit lawn — lady in grey! And settling back in his chair he closed his eyes. Some thistle-down came on what little air there was, and pitched on his moustache more white than itself. He did not know; but his breathing stirred it, caught there. A ray of sunlight struck through and lodged on his boot. A bumble-bee alighted and strolled on the crown of his Panama hat. And the delicious surge of slumber reached the brain beneath that hat, and the head swayed forward and rested on his breast. Summer — summer! So went the hum.

The stable clock struck the quarter past. The dog Balthasar stretched and looked up at his master. The thistledown no longer moved. The dog placed his chin over the sunlit foot. It did not stir. The dog withdrew his chin quickly, rose, and leaped on old Jolyon’s lap, looked in his face, whined; then, leaping down, sat on his haunches, gazing up. And suddenly he uttered a long, long howl.

But the thistledown was still as death, and the face of his old master.

Summer — summer — summer! The soundless footsteps on the grass!

1917

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IN CHANCERY

Part 1

Two households both alike in dignity,
From ancient grudge, break into new mutiny.
— Romeo and Juliet

TO JESSIE AND JOSEPH CONRAD

Chapter 1

At Timothy's

The possessive instinct never stands still. Through florescence and feud, frosts and fires, it followed the laws of progression even in the Forsyte family which had believed it fixed for ever. Nor can it be dissociated from environment any more than the quality of potato from the soil.

The historian of the English eighties and nineties will, in his good time, depict the somewhat rapid progression from self-contented and contained provincialism to still more self-contented if less contained imperialism — in other words, the 'possessive' instinct of the nation on the move. And so, as if in conformity, was it with the Forsyte family. They were spreading not merely on the surface, but within.

When, in 1895, Susan Hayman, the married Forsyte sister, followed her husband at the ludicrously low age of seventy-four, and was cremated, it made strangely little stir among the six old Forsytes left. For this apathy there were three causes. First: the almost surreptitious burial of old Jolyon in 1892 down at Robin Hill — first of the Forsytes to desert the family grave at Highgate. That burial, coming a year after Swithin's entirely proper funeral, had occasioned a great deal of talk on Forsyte 'Change, the abode of Timothy Forsyte on the Bayswater Road, London, which still collected and radiated family gossip. Opinions ranged from the lamentation of Aunt Juley to the outspoken assertion of Francie that it was 'a jolly good thing to stop all that stuffy Highgate business.' Uncle Jolyon in his later years — indeed, ever since the strange and lamentable affair between his granddaughter June's lover, young Bosinney, and Irene, his nephew Soames Forsyte's wife — had noticeably rapped the family's knuckles; and that way of his own which he had always taken had begun to seem to them a little wayward. The philosophic vein in him, of course, had always been too liable to crop out of the strata of pure Forsyteism, so they were in a way prepared for his interment in a strange spot. But the whole thing was an odd business, and when the contents of his Will became current coin on Forsyte 'Change, a shiver had gone round the clan. Out of his estate (L145,304 gross, with liabilities L35 7s. 4d.) he had actually left L15,000 to "whomever do you think, my dear? To Irene!" that runaway wife of his nephew Soames; Irene, a woman who had almost disgraced the family, and — still more amazing was to him no blood relation. Not out and out, of course; only a life interest — only the income from it! Still, there it was; and old Jolyon's claim to be the perfect Forsyte was ended once for all. That, then, was the first reason why the burial of Susan Hayman — at Woking — made little stir.

The second reason was altogether more expansive and imperial. Besides the house on Campden Hill, Susan had a place (left her by Hayman when he died) just over the border in Hants, where the Hayman boys had learned to be such good shots and riders, as it was believed, which was of course nice for them, and creditable to everybody; and the fact of owning something really countrified seemed somehow to excuse the dispersion of her remains — though what could have put cremation into her head they could not think! The usual invitations, however, had been issued, and Soames had gone down and young Nicholas, and the Will had been quite satisfactory so far as it went, for she had only had a life interest; and everything had gone quite smoothly to the children in equal shares.

The third reason why Susan's burial made little stir was the most expansive of all. It was summed up daringly by Euphemia, the pale, the thin: "Well, I think people have a right to their own bodies, even when they're dead." Coming from a daughter of Nicholas, a Liberal of the old school and most tyrannical, it was a startling remark — showing in a flash what a lot of water had run under bridges since the death of Aunt Ann in '86, just when the proprietorship of Soames over his wife's body was acquiring the uncertainty which had led to such disaster. Euphemia, of course, spoke like a child, and had no experience; for though well over thirty by now, her name was still Forsyte. But, making all allowances, her remark did undoubtedly show expansion of the principle of liberty, decentralisation and shift in the central point of possession from others to oneself. When Nicholas heard his daughter's remark from Aunt Hester he had rapped out: "Wives and daughters! There's no end to their liberty in these days. I knew that 'Jackson' case would lead to things — lugging in Habeas Corpus like that!" He had, of course, never really forgiven the Married Woman's Property Act, which would so have interfered with him if he had not mercifully married before it was passed. But, in truth, there was no denying the revolt among the younger Forsytes against being owned by others; that, as it were, Colonial disposition to own oneself, which is the paradoxical forerunner of Imperialism, was making progress all the time. They were all now married, except George, confirmed to the Turf and the Iseeum Club; Francie, pursuing her musical career in a studio off the King's Road, Chelsea, and still taking 'lovers' to dances; Euphemia, living at home and complaining of Nicholas; and those two Dromios, Giles and Jesse Hayman. Of the third generation there were not very many — young Jolyon had three, Winifred Dartie four, young Nicholas six already, young Roger had one, Marian Tweetyman one; St. John Hayman two. But the rest of the sixteen married — Soames, Rachel and Cicely of James' family; Eustace and Thomas of Roger's; Ernest, Archibald and Florence of Nicholas'; Augustus and Annabel Spender of the Hayman's — were going down the years unreproduced.

Thus, of the ten old Forsytes twenty-one young Forsytes had been born; but of the twenty-one young Forsytes there were as yet only seventeen descendants; and it already seemed unlikely that there would be more than a further unconsidered trifle or so. A student of statistics must have noticed that the birth rate had varied in accordance with the rate of interest for your money. Grandfather 'Superior Dosset' Forsyte in the early nineteenth century had been getting ten per cent. for his, hence ten children. Those ten, leaving out the four who had not married, and Juley, whose husband Septimus Small had, of course, died almost at once, had averaged from four to five per cent. for theirs, and produced accordingly. The twenty-one whom they produced were now getting barely three per cent. in the Consols to which their father had mostly tied the Settlements they made to avoid death duties, and the six of them who had been reproduced had seventeen children, or just the proper two and five-sixths per stem.

There were other reasons, too, for this mild reproduction. A distrust of their earning powers, natural where a sufficiency is guaranteed, together with the knowledge that their fathers did not die, kept them cautious. If one had children and not much income, the standard of taste and comfort must of necessity go down; what was enough for two was not enough for four, and so on — it would be better to wait and see what Father did. Besides, it was nice to be able to take holidays unhampered. Sooner in fact than own children, they preferred to concentrate on the ownership of themselves, conforming to the growing tendency fin de siecle, as it was called. In this way, little risk was run, and one would be able to have a motor-car. Indeed, Eustace already had one, but it had shaken him horribly, and broken one of his eye teeth; so that it would be better to wait till they were a little safer. In the meantime, no more children! Even young Nicholas was drawing in his horns, and had made no addition to his six for quite three years.

The corporate decay, however, of the Forsytes, their dispersion rather, of which all this was symptomatic, had not advanced so far as to prevent a rally when Roger Forsyte died in 1899. It had been a glorious summer, and after holidays abroad and at the sea they were practically all back in London, when Roger with a touch of his old originality had suddenly breathed his last at his own house in Princes Gardens. At Timothy's it was whispered sadly that poor Roger had always been eccentric about his digestion — had he not, for instance, preferred German mutton to all the other brands?

Be that as it may, his funeral at Highgate had been perfect, and coming away from it Soames Forsyte made almost mechanically for his Uncle Timothy's in the Bayswater Road. The 'Old Things'— Aunt Juley and Aunt Hester — would like to hear about it. His father — James — at eighty-eight had not felt up to the fatigue of the funeral; and Timothy himself, of course, had not gone; so that Nicholas had been the only brother present. Still, there had been a fair gathering; and it would cheer Aunts Juley and Hester up to know. The kindly thought was not unmixed with the inevitable longing to get something out of everything you do, which is the chief characteristic of Forsytes, and indeed of the saner elements in every nation. In this practice of taking family matters to Timothy's in the Bayswater Road, Soames was but following in the footsteps of his father, who had been in the habit of going at least once a week to see his sisters at Timothy's, and had only given it up when he lost his nerve at eighty-six, and could not go out without Emily. To go with Emily was of no use, for who could really talk to anyone in the presence of his own wife? Like James in the old days, Soames found time to go there nearly every Sunday, and sit in the little drawing-room into which, with his undoubted taste, he had introduced a good deal of change and china not quite up to his own fastidious mark, and at least two rather doubtful Barbizon pictures, at Christmastides. He himself, who had done extremely well with the Barbizons, had for some years past moved towards the

Marises, Israels, and Mauve, and was hoping to do better. In the riverside house which he now inhabited near Mapledurham he had a gallery, beautifully hung and lighted, to which few London dealers were strangers. It served, too, as a Sunday afternoon attraction in those week-end parties which his sisters, Winifred or Rachel, occasionally organised for him. For though he was but a taciturn showman, his quiet collected determinism seldom failed to influence his guests, who knew that his reputation was grounded not on mere aesthetic fancy, but on his power of gauging the future of market values. When he went to Timothy's he almost always had some little tale of triumph over a dealer to unfold, and dearly he loved that coo of pride with which his aunts would greet it. This afternoon, however, he was differently animated, coming from Roger's funeral in his neat dark clothes — not quite black, for after all an uncle was but an uncle, and his soul abhorred excessive display of feeling. Leaning back in a marqueterie chair and gazing down his uplifted nose at the sky-blue walls plastered with gold frames, he was noticeably silent. Whether because he had been to a funeral or not, the peculiar Forsyte build of his face was seen to the best advantage this afternoon — a face concave and long, with a jaw which divested of flesh would have seemed extravagant: altogether a chinny face though not at all ill-looking. He was feeling more strongly than ever that Timothy's was hopelessly 'rum-ti-too' and the souls of his aunts dismally mid-Victorian. The subject on which alone he wanted to talk — his own undivorced position — was unspeakable. And yet it occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else. It was only since the Spring that this had been so and a new feeling grown up which was egging him on towards what he knew might well be folly in a Forsyte of forty-five. More and more of late he had been conscious that he was 'getting on.' The fortune already considerable when he conceived the house at Robin Hill which had finally wrecked his marriage with Irene, had mounted with surprising vigour in the twelve lonely years during which he had devoted himself to little else. He was worth to-day well over a hundred thousand pounds, and had no one to leave it to — no real object for going on with what was his religion. Even if he were to relax his efforts, money made money, and he felt that he would have a hundred and fifty thousand before he knew where he was. There had always been a strongly domestic, philoprogenitive side to Soames; baulked and frustrated, it had hidden itself away, but now had crept out again in this his 'prime of life.' Concreted and focussed of late by the attraction of a girl's undoubted beauty, it had become a veritable prepossession.

And this girl was French, not likely to lose her head, or accept any unlegalised position. Moreover, Soames himself disliked the thought of that. He had tasted of the sordid side of sex during those long years of forced celibacy, secretively, and always with disgust, for he was fastidious, and his sense of law and order innate. He wanted no hole and corner liaison. A marriage at the Embassy in Paris, a few months' travel, and he could bring Annette back quite separated from a past which in truth was not too distinguished, for she only kept the accounts in her mother's Soho Restaurant; he could bring her back as something very new and chic with her French taste and self-possession, to reign at 'The Shelter' near Mapledurham. On Forsyte 'Change and among his riverside friends it would be current that he had met a charming French girl on his travels and married her. There would be the flavour of romance, and a certain cachet about a French wife. No! He was not at all afraid of that. It was only this cursed undivorced condition of his, and — and the question whether Annette would take him, which he dared not put to the touch until he had a clear and even dazzling future to offer her.

In his aunts' drawing-room he heard with but muffled ears those usual questions: How was his dear father? Not going out, of course, now that the weather was turning chilly? Would Soames be sure to tell him that Hester had found boiled holly leaves most comforting for that pain in her side; a poultice every three hours, with red flannel afterwards. And could he relish just a little pot of their very best prune preserve — it was so delicious this year, and had such a wonderful effect. Oh! and about the Darties — had Soames heard that dear Winifred was having a most distressing time with Montague? Timothy thought she really ought to have protection It was said — but Soames mustn't take this for certain — that he had given some of Winifred's jewellery to a dreadful dancer. It was such a bad example for dear Val just as he was going to college. Soames had not heard? Oh, but he must go and see his sister and look into it at once! And did he think these Boers were really going to resist? Timothy was in quite a stew about it. The price of Consols was so high, and he had such a lot of money in them. Did Soames think they must go down if there was a war? Soames nodded. But it would be over very quickly. It would be so bad for Timothy if it wasn't. And of course Soames' dear father would feel it very much at his age. Luckily poor dear Roger had been spared this dreadful anxiety. And Aunt Juley with a little handkerchief wiped away the large tear trying to climb the permanent pout on her now quite withered left cheek; she was remembering dear Roger, and all his originality, and how he used to stick pins into her when they were little together. Aunt Hester, with her instinct for avoiding the unpleasant, here chimed in: Did Soames think they would make Mr. Chamberlain Prime Minister at once? He would settle it all so quickly. She would like to see that old Kruger sent to St. Helena. She could remember so well the news of Napoleon's death, and what a, relief it had been to his grandfather. Of course she and Juley —"We were in pantalettes then, my dear"— had not felt it much at the time.

Soames took a cup of tea from her, drank it quickly, and ate three of those macaroons for which Timothy's was famous. His faint, pale, supercilious smile had deepened just a little. Really, his family remained hopelessly provincial, however much of London they might possess between them. In these go-ahead days their provincialism stared out even more than it used to. Why, old Nicholas was still a Free Trader, and a member of that antediluvian home of Liberalism, the Remove Club — though, to be sure, the members were pretty well all Conservatives now, or he himself could not have joined; and Timothy, they said, still wore a nightcap. Aunt Juley spoke again. Dear Soames was looking so well, hardly a day older than he did when dear Ann died, and they were all there together, dear Jolyon, and dear Swithin, and dear Roger. She paused and caught the tear which had climbed the pout on her right cheek. Did he — did he ever hear anything of Irene nowadays? Aunt Hester visibly interposed her shoulder. Really, Juley was always saying something! The smile left Soames' face, and he put his cup down. Here was his subject broached for him, and for all his desire to expand, he could not take advantage.

Aunt Juley went on rather hastily:

"They say dear Jolyon first left her that fifteen thousand out and out; then of course he saw it would not be right, and made it for her life only."

Had Soames heard that?

Soames nodded.

"Your cousin Jolyon is a widower now. He is her trustee; you knew that, of course?"

Soames shook his head. He did know, but wished to show no interest. Young Jolyon and he had not met since the day of Bosinney's death.

"He must be quite middle-aged by now," went on Aunt Juley dreamily. "Let me see, he was born when your dear uncle lived in Mount Street; long before they went to Stanhope Gate in December. Just before that dreadful Commune. Over fifty! Fancy that! Such a pretty baby, and we were all so proud of him; the very first of you all." Aunt Juley sighed, and a lock of not quite her own hair came loose and straggled, so that Aunt Hester gave a little shiver. Soames rose, he was experiencing a curious piece of self-discovery. That old wound to his pride and self-esteem was not yet closed. He had come thinking he could talk of it, even wanting to talk of his fettered condition, and — behold! he was shrinking away from this reminder by Aunt Juley, renowned for her Malapropisms.

Oh, Soames was not going already!

Soames smiled a little vindictively, and said:

"Yes. Good-bye. Remember me to Uncle Timothy!" And, leaving a cold kiss on each forehead, whose wrinkles seemed to try and cling to his lips as if longing to be kissed away, he left them looking brightly after him — dear Soames, it had been so good of him to come to-day, when they were not feeling very. . . .!

With compunction tweaking at his chest Soames descended the stairs, where was always that rather pleasant smell of camphor and port wine, and house where draughts are not permitted. The poor old things — he had not meant to be unkind! And in the street he instantly forgot them, repossessed by the image of Annette and the thought of the cursed coil around him. Why had he not pushed the thing through and obtained divorce when that wretched Bosinney was run over, and there was evidence galore for the asking! And he turned towards his sister Winifred Dartie's residence in Green Street, Mayfair.

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CHAPTER 2

EXIT A MAN OF THE WORLD

That a man of the world so subject to the vicissitudes of fortunes as Montague Dartie should still be living in a house he had inhabited twenty years at least would have been more noticeable if the rent, rates, taxes, and repairs of that house had not been defrayed by his father-in-law. By that simple if wholesale device James Forsyte had secured a certain stability in the lives of his daughter and his grandchildren. After all, there is something invaluable about a safe roof over the head of a sportsman so dashing as Dartie. Until the events of the last few days he had been almost-supernaturally steady all this year. The fact was he had acquired a half share in a filly of George Forsyte's, who had gone irreparably on the turf, to the horror of Roger, now stilled by the grave. Sleeve-links, by Martyr, out of Shirt-on-fire, by Suspender, was a bay filly, three years old, who for a variety of reasons had never shown her true form. With half ownership of this hopeful animal, all the idealism latent somewhere in Dartie, as in every other man, had put up its head, and kept him quietly ardent for months past. When a man has some thing good to live for it is astonishing how sober he becomes; and what Dartie had was really good — a three to one chance for an autumn handicap, publicly assessed at twenty-five to one. The old-fashioned heaven was a poor thing beside it, and his shirt was on the daughter of Shirt-on-fire. But how much more than his shirt depended on this granddaughter of Suspender! At that roving age of forty-five, trying to Forsytes — and, though perhaps less distinguishable from any other age, trying even to Darties — Montague had fixed his current fancy on a dancer. It was no mean passion, but without money, and a good deal of it, likely to remain a love as airy as her skirts; and Dartie never had any money, subsisting miserably on what he could beg or borrow from Winifred — a woman of character, who kept him because he was the father of her children, and from a lingering admiration for those now-dying Wardour Street good looks which in their youth had fascinated her. She, together with anyone else who would lend him anything, and his losses at cards and on the turf (extraordinary how some men make a good thing out of losses!) were his whole means of subsistence; for James was now too old and nervous to approach, and Soames too formidably adamant. It is not too much to say that Dartie had been living on hope for months. He had never been fond of money for itself, had always despised the Forsytes with their investing habits, though careful to make such use of them as he could. What he liked about money was what it bought — personal sensation.

"No real sportsman cares for money," he would say, borrowing a 'pony' if it was no use trying for a 'monkey.' There was something delicious about Montague Dartie. He was, as George Forsyte said, a 'daisy.'

The morning of the Handicap dawned clear and bright, the last day of September, and Dartie who had travelled to Newmarket the night before, arrayed himself in spotless checks and walked to an eminence to see his half of the filly take her final canter: If she won he would be a cool three thou. in pocket — a poor enough recompense for the sobriety and patience of these weeks of hope, while they had been nursing her for this race. But he had not been able to afford more. Should he 'lay it off' at the eight to one to which she had advanced? This was his single thought while the larks sang above him, and the grassy downs smelled sweet, and the pretty filly passed, tossing her head and glowing like satin.

After all, if he lost it would not be he who paid, and to 'lay it off' would reduce his winnings to some fifteen hundred — hardly enough to purchase a dancer out and out. Even more potent was the itch in the blood of all the Darties for a real flutter. And turning to George he said: "She's a clipper. She'll win hands down; I shall go the whole hog." George, who had laid off every penny, and a few besides, and stood to win, however it came out, grinned down on him from his bulky height, with the words: "So ho, my wild one!" for after a chequered apprenticeship weathered with the money of a deeply complaining Roger, his Forsyte blood was beginning to stand him in good stead in the profession of owner.

There are moments of disillusionment in the lives of men from which the sensitive recorder shrinks. Suffice it to say that the good thing fell down. Sleeve-links finished in the ruck. Dartie's shirt was lost.

Between the passing of these things and the day when Soames turned his face towards Green Street, what had not happened!

When a man with the constitution of Montague Dartie has exercised self-control for months from religious motives, and remains unrewarded, he does not curse God and die, he curses God and lives, to the distress of his family.

Winifred — a plucky woman, if a little too fashionable — who had borne the brunt of him for exactly twenty-one years, had never really believed that he would do what he now did. Like so many wives, she thought she knew the worst, but she had not yet known him in his forty-fifth year, when he, like other men, felt that it was now or never. Paying on the 2nd of October a visit of inspection to her jewel case, she was horrified to observe that her woman's crown and glory was gone — the pearls which Montague had given her in '86, when Benedict was born, and which James had been compelled to pay for in the spring of '87, to save scandal. She consulted her husband at once. He 'pooh-poohed' the matter. They would turn up! Nor till she said sharply: "Very well, then, Monty, I shall go down to Scotland Yard myself," did he consent to take the matter in hand. Alas! that the steady and resolved continuity of design necessary to the accomplishment of sweeping operations should be liable to interruption by drink. That night Dartie returned home without a care in the world or a particle of reticence. Under normal conditions Winifred would merely have locked her door and let him sleep it off, but torturing suspense about her pearls had caused her to wait up for him. Taking a small revolver from his pocket and holding on to the dining table, he told her at once that he did not care a cursh whether she lived s'long as she was quiet; but he himself wash tired o' life. Winifred, holding onto the other side of the dining table, answered:

"Don't be a clown, Monty. Have you been to Scotland Yard?"

Placing the revolver against his chest, Dartie had pulled the trigger several times. It was not loaded. Dropping it with an imprecation, he had muttered: "For shake o' the children," and sank into a chair. Winifred, having picked up the revolver, gave him some soda water. The liquor had a magical effect. Life had illused him; Winifred had never 'unshtood'm.' If he hadn't the right to take the pearls he had given her himself, who had? That Spanish filly had got'm. If Winifred had any 'jection he w'd cut — her — throat. What was the matter with that? (Probably the first use of that celebrated phrase — so obscure are the origins of even the most classical language!)

Winifred, who had learned self-containment in a hard school, looked up at him, and said: "Spanish filly! Do you mean that girl we saw dancing in the Pandemonium Ballet? Well, you are a thief and a blackguard." It had been the last straw on a sorely loaded consciousness; reaching up from his chair Dartie seized his wife's arm, and recalling the achievements of his boyhood, twisted it. Winifred endured the agony with tears in her eyes, but no murmur. Watching for a moment of weakness, she wrenched it free; then placing the dining table between them, said between her teeth: "You are the limit, Monty." (Undoubtedly the inception of that phrase — so is English formed under the stress of circumstances.) Leaving Dartie with foam on his dark moustache she went upstairs, and, after locking her door and bathing her arm in hot water, lay awake all night, thinking of her pearls adorning the neck of another, and of the consideration her husband had presumably received therefor.

The man of the world awoke with a sense of being lost to that world, and a dim recollection of having been called a 'limit.' He sat for half an hour in the dawn and the armchair where he had slept — perhaps the unhappiest half-hour he had ever spent, for even to a Dartie there is something tragic about an end. And he knew that he had reached it. Never again would he sleep in his dining-room and wake with the light filtering through those curtains bought by Winifred at Nickens and Jarveys with the money of James. Never again eat a devilled kidney at that rose-wood table, after a roll in the sheets and a hot bath. He took his note case from his dress coat pocket. Four hundred pounds, in fives and tens — the remainder of the proceeds of his half of Sleeve-links, sold last night, cash down, to George Forsyte, who, having won over the race, had not conceived the sudden dislike to the animal which he himself now felt. The ballet was going to Buenos Aires the day after to-morrow, and he was going too. Full value for the pearls had not yet been received; he was only at the soup.

He stole upstairs. Not daring to have a bath, or shave (besides, the water would be cold), he changed his clothes and packed stealthily all he could. It was hard to leave so many shining boots, but one must sacrifice something. Then, carrying a valise in either hand, he stepped out onto the landing. The house was very quiet — that house where he had begotten his four children. It was a curious moment, this, outside the room of his wife, once admired, if not perhaps loved, who had called him 'the limit.' He steeled himself with that phrase, and tiptoed on; but the next door was harder to pass. It was the room his daughters slept in. Maud was at school, but Imogen would be lying there; and moisture came into Dartie's early morning eyes. She was the most like him of the four, with her dark hair, and her luscious brown glance. Just coming out, a pretty thing! He set down the two valises. This almost formal abdication of fatherhood hurt him. The morning light fell on a face which worked with real emotion. Nothing so false as penitence moved him; but genuine paternal feeling, and that melancholy of 'never again.' He moistened his lips; and complete irresolution for a moment paralysed his legs in their check trousers. It was hard — hard to be thus compelled to leave his home! "D—-nit!" he muttered, "I never thought it would come to this.” Noises above warned him that the maids were beginning to get up. And grasping the two valises, he tiptoed on downstairs. His cheeks were wet, and the knowledge of that was comforting, as though it guaranteed the genuineness of his sacrifice. He lingered a little in the rooms below, to pack all the cigars he had, some papers, a crush hat, a silver cigarette box, a Ruff’s Guide. Then, mixing himself a stiff whisky and soda, and lighting a cigarette, he stood hesitating before a photograph of his two girls, in a silver frame. It belonged to Winifred. ‘Never mind,’ he thought; ‘she can get another taken, and I can’t!’ He slipped it into the valise. Then, putting on his hat and overcoat, he took two others, his best malacca cane, an umbrella, and opened the front door. Closing it softly behind him, he walked out, burdened as he had never been in all his life, and made his way round the corner to wait there for an early cab to come by.

Thus had passed Montague Dartie in the forty-fifth year of his age from the house which he had called his own.

When Winifred came down, and realised that he was not in the house, her first feeling was one of dull anger that he should thus elude the reproaches she had carefully prepared in those long wakeful hours. He had gone off to Newmarket or Brighton, with that woman as likely as not. Disgusting! Forced to a complete reticence before Imogen and the servants, and aware that her father’s nerves would never stand the disclosure, she had been unable to refrain from going to Timothy’s that afternoon, and pouring out the story of the pearls to Aunts Juley and Hester in utter confidence. It was only on the following morning that she noticed the disappearance of that photograph. What did it mean? Careful examination of her husband’s relics prompted the thought that he had gone for good. As that conclusion hardened she stood quite still in the middle of his dressing-room, with all the drawers pulled out, to try and realise what she was feeling. By no means easy! Though he was ‘the limit’ he was yet her property, and for the life of her she could not but feel the poorer. To be widowed yet not widowed at forty-two; with four children; made conspicuous, an object of commiseration! Gone to the arms of a Spanish Jade! Memories, feelings, which she had thought quite dead, revived within her, painful, sullen, tenacious. Mechanically she closed drawer after drawer, went to her bed, lay on it, and buried her face in the pillows. She did not cry. What was the use of that? When she got off her bed to go down to lunch she felt as if only one thing could do her good, and that was to have Val home. He — her eldest boy — who was to go to Oxford next month at James’ expense, was at Littlehampton taking his final gallops with his trainer for Smalls, as he would have phrased it following his father’s diction. She caused a telegram to be sent to him.

“I must see about his clothes,” she said to Imogen; “I can’t have him going up to Oxford all anyhow. Those boys are so particular.”

“Val’s got heaps of things,” Imogen answered.

“I know; but they want overhauling. I hope he’ll come.”

“He’ll come like a shot, Mother. But he’ll probably skew his Exam.”

“I can’t help that,” said Winifred. “I want him.”

With an innocent shrewd look at her mother’s face, Imogen kept silence. It was father, of course! Val did come ‘like a shot’ at six o’clock.

Imagine a cross between a pickle and a Forsyte and you have young Publius Valerius Dartie. A youth so named could hardly turn out otherwise. When he was born, Winifred, in the heyday of spirits, and the craving for distinction, had determined that her children should have names such as no others had ever had. (It was a mercy — she felt now — that she had just not named Imogen Thisbe.) But it was to George Forsyte, always a wag, that Val’s christening was due. It so happened that Dartie, dining with him a week after the birth of his son and heir, had mentioned this aspiration of Winifred’s.

“Call him Cato,” said George, “it’ll be damned piquant!” He had just won a tenner on a horse of that name.

“Cato!” Dartie had replied — they were a little ‘on’ as the phrase was even in those days —“it’s not a Christian name.”

“Halo you!” George called to a waiter in knee breeches. “Bring me the Encyc’pedia Brit. from the Library, letter C.”

The waiter brought it.

“Here you are!” said George, pointing with his cigar: “Cato Publius Valerius by Virgil out of Lydia. That’s what you want. Publius Valerius is Christian enough.”

Dartie, on arriving home, had informed Winifred. She had been charmed. It was so ‘chic.’ And Publius Valerius became the baby’s name, though it afterwards transpired that they had got hold of the inferior Cato. In 1890, however, when little Publius was nearly ten, the word ‘chic’ went out of fashion, and sobriety came in; Winifred began to have doubts. They were confirmed by little Publius himself who returned from his first term at school complaining that life was a burden to him — they called him Pubby. Winifred — a woman of real decision — promptly changed his school and his name to Val, the Publius being dropped even as an initial.

At nineteen he was a limber, freckled youth with a wide mouth, light eyes, long dark lashes; a rather charming smile, considerable knowledge of what he should not know, and no experience of what he ought to do. Few boys had more narrowly escaped being expelled — the engaging rascal. After kissing his mother and pinching Imogen, he ran upstairs three at a time, and came down four, dressed for dinner. He was awfully sorry, but his 'trainer,' who had come up too, had asked him to dine at the Oxford and Cambridge; it wouldn't do to miss — the old chap would be hurt. Winifred let him go with an unhappy pride. She had wanted him at home, but it was very nice to know that his tutor was so fond of him. He went out with a wink at Imogen, saying: "I say, Mother, could I have two plover's eggs when I come in? — cook's got some. They top up so jolly well. Oh! and look here — have you any money? — I had to borrow a fiver from old Snobby."

Winifred, looking at him with fond shrewdness, answered:

"My dear, you are naughty about money. But you shouldn't pay him to-night, anyway; you're his guest. How nice and slim he looked in his white waistcoat, and his dark thick lashes!"

"Oh, but we may go to the theatre, you see, Mother; and I think I ought to stand the tickets; he's always hard up, you know."

Winifred produced a five-pound note, saying:

"Well, perhaps you'd better pay him, but you mustn't stand the tickets too."

Val pocketed the fiver.

"If I do, I can't," he said. "Good-night, Mum!"

He went out with his head up and his hat cocked joyously, sniffing the air of Piccadilly like a young hound loosed into covert. Jolly good biz! After that mouldy old slow hole down there!

He found his 'tutor,' not indeed at the Oxford and Cambridge, but at the Goat's Club. This 'tutor' was a year older than himself, a good-looking youth, with fine brown eyes, and smooth dark hair, a small mouth, an oval face, languid, immaculate, cool to a degree, one of those young men who without effort establish moral ascendancy over their companions. He had missed being expelled from school a year before Val, had spent that year at Oxford, and Val could almost see a halo round his head. His name was Crum, and no one could get through money quicker. It seemed to be his only aim in life — dazzling to young Val, in whom, however, the Forsyte would stand apart, now and then, wondering where the value for that money was.

They dined quietly, in style and taste; left the Club smoking cigars, with just two bottles inside them, and dropped into stalls at the Liberty. For Val the sound of comic songs, the sight of lovely legs were fogged and interrupted by haunting fears that he would never equal Crum's quiet dandyism. His idealism was roused; and when that is so, one is never quite at ease. Surely he had too wide a mouth, not the best cut of waistcoat, no braid on his trousers, and his lavender gloves had no thin black stitchings down the back. Besides, he laughed too much — Crum never laughed, he only smiled, with his regular dark brows raised a little so that they formed a gable over his just drooped lids. No! he would never be Crum's equal. All the same it was a jolly good show, and Cynthia Dark simply ripping. Between the acts Crum regaled him with particulars of Cynthia's private life, and the awful knowledge became Val's that, if he liked, Crum could go behind. He simply longed to say: "I say, take me!" but dared not, because of his deficiencies; and this made the last act or two almost miserable. On coming out Crum said: "It's half an hour before they close; let's go on to the Pandemonium." They took a hansom to travel the hundred yards, and seats costing seven-and-six apiece because they were going to stand, and walked into the Promenade. It was in these little things, this utter negligence of money that Crum had such engaging polish. The ballet was on its last legs and night, and the traffic of the Promenade was suffering for the moment. Men and women were crowded in three rows against the barrier. The whirl and dazzle on the stage, the half dark, the mingled tobacco fumes and women's scent, all that curious lure to promiscuity which belongs to Promenades, began to free young Val from his idealism. He looked admiringly in a young woman's face, saw she was not young, and quickly looked away. Shades of Cynthia Dark! The young woman's arm touched his unconsciously; there was a scent of musk and mignonette. Val looked round the corner of his lashes. Perhaps she was young, after all. Her foot trod on his; she begged his pardon. He said:

"Not at all; jolly good ballet, isn't it?"

"Oh, I'm tired of it; aren't you?"

Young Val smiled — his wide, rather charming smile. Beyond that he did not go — not yet convinced. The Forsyte in him stood out for greater certainty. And on the stage the ballet whirled its kaleidoscope of snow-white, salmon-pink, and emerald-green and violet and seemed suddenly to freeze into a stilly spangled pyramid. Applause broke out, and it was over! Maroon curtains had cut it off. The semi-circle of men and women round the barrier broke up, the young woman's arm pressed his. A little way off disturbance seemed centring round a man with a pink carnation; Val stole another glance at the young woman, who was looking towards it. Three men, unsteady, emerged, walking arm in arm. The one in the centre wore the pink carnation, a white waistcoat, a dark moustache; he reeled a little as he walked. Crum's voice said slow and level: "Look at that bounder, he's screwed!" Val turned to look. The 'bounder' had disengaged his arm, and was pointing straight at them. Crum's voice, level as ever, said:

"He seems to know you!" The 'bounder' spoke:

"H'llo!" he said. "You f'llows, look! There's my young rascal of a son!"

Val saw. It was his father! He could have sunk into the crimson carpet. It was not the meeting in this place, not even that his father was 'screwed'; it was Crum's word 'bounder,' which, as by heavenly revelation, he perceived at that moment to be true. Yes, his father looked a bounder with his dark good looks, and his pink carnation, and his square, self-assertive walk. And without a word he ducked behind the young woman and slipped out of the Promenade. He heard the word, "Val!" behind him, and ran down deep-carpeted steps past the 'chuckersout,' into the Square.

To be ashamed of his own father is perhaps the bitterest experience a young man can go through. It seemed to Val, hurrying away, that his career had ended before it had begun. How could he go up to Oxford now amongst all those chaps, those splendid friends of Crum's, who would know that his father was a 'bounder'! And suddenly he hated Crum. Who the devil was Crum, to say that? If Crum had been beside him at that moment, he would certainly have been jostled off the pavement. His own father — his own! A choke came up in his throat, and he dashed his hands down deep into his overcoat pockets. Damn Crum! He conceived the wild idea of running back and fending his father, taking him by the arm and walking about with him in front of Crum; but gave it up at once and pursued his way down Piccadilly. A young woman planted herself before him. "Not so angry, darling!" He shied, dodged her, and suddenly became quite cool. If Crum ever said a word, he would jolly well punch his head, and there would be an end of it. He walked a hundred yards or more, contented with that thought, then lost its comfort utterly. It wasn't simple like that! He remembered how, at school, when some parent came down who did not pass the standard, it just clung to the fellow afterwards. It was one of those things nothing could remove. Why had his mother married his father, if he was a 'bounder'? It was bitterly unfair — jolly low-down on a fellow to give him a 'bounder' for father. The worst of it was that now Crum had spoken the word, he realised that he had long known subconsciously that his father was not 'the clean potato.' It was the beastliest thing that had ever happened to him — beastliest thing that had ever happened to any fellow! And, down-hearted as he had never yet been, he came to Green Street, and let himself in with a smuggled latch-key. In the dining-room his plover's eggs were set invitingly, with some cut bread and butter, and a little whisky at the bottom of a decanter — just enough, as Winifred had thought, for him to feel himself a man. It made him sick to look at them, and he went upstairs.

Winifred heard him pass, and thought: 'The dear boy's in. Thank goodness! If he takes after his father I don't know what I shall do! But he won't he's like me. Dear Val!'

❦

Chapter 3

Soames Prepares to Take Steps

When Soames entered his sister's little Louis Quinze drawing-room, with its small balcony, always flowered with hanging geraniums in the summer, and now with pots of Lilium Auratum, he was struck by the immutability of human affairs. It looked just the same as on his first visit to the newly married Darties twenty-one years ago. He had chosen the furniture himself, and so completely that no subsequent purchase had ever been able to change the room's atmosphere. Yes, he had founded his sister well, and she had wanted it. Indeed, it said a great deal for Winifred that after all this time with Dartie she remained well-founded. From the first Soames had nosed out Dartie's nature from underneath the plausibility, savoir faire, and good looks which had dazzled Winifred, her mother, and even James, to the extent of permitting the fellow to marry his daughter without bringing anything but shares of no value into settlement.

Winifred, whom he noticed next to the furniture, was sitting at her Buhl bureau with a letter in her hand. She rose and came towards him. Tall as himself, strong in the cheekbones, well tailored, something in her face disturbed Soames. She crumpled the letter in her hand, but seemed to change her mind and held it out to him. He was her lawyer as well as her brother.

Soames read, on Iseeum Club paper, these words:

'You will not get chance to insult in my own again. I am leaving country to-morrow. It's played out. I'm tired of being insulted by you. You've brought on yourself. No self-respecting man can stand it. I shall not ask you for anything again. Good-bye. I took the photograph of the two girls. Give them my love. I don't care what your family say. It's all their doing. I'm going to live new life. 'M.D.'

This after-dinner note had a splotch on it not yet quite dry. He looked at Winifred — the splotch had clearly come from her; and he checked the words: 'Good riddance!' Then it occurred to him that with this letter she was entering that very state which he himself so earnestly desired to quit — the state of a Forsyte who was not divorced.

Winifred had turned away, and was taking a long sniff from a little gold-topped bottle. A dull commiseration, together with a vague sense of injury, crept about Soames' heart. He had come to her to talk of his own position, and get sympathy, and here was she in the same position, wanting of course to talk of it, and get sympathy from him. It was always like that! Nobody ever seemed to think that he had troubles and interests of his own. He folded up the letter with the splotch inside, and said:

"What's it all about, now?"

Winifred recited the story of the pearls calmly.

"Do you think he's really gone, Soames? You see the state he was in when he wrote that."

Soames who, when he desired a thing, placated Providence by pretending that he did not think it likely to happen, answered:

"I shouldn't think so. I might find out at his Club."

"If George is there," said Winifred, "he would know."

"George?" said Soames; "I saw him at his father's funeral."

"Then he's sure to be there."

Soames, whose good sense applauded his sister's acumen, said grudgingly: "Well, I'll go round. Have you said anything in Park Lane?"

"I've told Emily," returned Winifred, who retained that 'chic' way of describing her mother. "Father would have a fit."

Indeed, anything untoward was now sedulously kept from James. With another look round at the furniture, as if to gauge his sister's exact position, Soames went out towards Piccadilly. The evening was drawing in — a touch of chill in the October haze. He walked quickly, with his close and concentrated air. He must get through, for he wished to dine in Soho. On hearing from the hall porter at the Iseeum that Mr. Dartie had not been in to-day, he looked at the trusty fellow and decided only to ask if Mr. George Forsyte was in the Club. He was. Soames, who always looked askance at his cousin

George, as one inclined to jest at his expense, followed the pageboy, slightly reassured by the thought that George had just lost his father. He must have come in for about thirty thousand, besides what he had under that settlement of Roger's, which had avoided death duty. He found George in a bow-window, staring out across a half-eaten plate of muffins. His tall, bulky, black-clothed figure loomed almost threatening, though preserving still the supernatural neatness of the racing man. With a faint grin on his fleshy face, he said:

"Hallo, Soames! Have a muffin?"

"No, thanks," murmured Soames; and, nursing his hat, with the desire to say something suitable and sympathetic, added:

"How's your mother?"

"Thanks," said George; "so-so. Haven't seen you for ages. You never go racing. How's the City?"

Soames, scenting the approach of a jest, closed up, and answered:

"I wanted to ask you about Dartie. I hear he's. . . . "

"Flitted, made a bolt to Buenos Aires with the fair Lola. Good for Winifred and the little Darties. He's a treat."

Soames nodded. Naturally inimical as these cousins were, Dartie made them kin.

"Uncle James'll sleep in his bed now," resumed George; "I suppose he's had a lot off you, too."

Soames smiled.

"Ah! You saw him further," said George amicably. "He's a real rouser. Young Val will want a bit of looking after. I was always sorry for Winifred. She's a plucky woman."

Again Soames nodded. "I must be getting back to her," he said; "she just wanted to know for certain. We may have to take steps. I suppose there's no mistake?"

"It's quite O.K.," said George — it was he who invented so many of those quaint sayings which have been assigned to other sources. "He was drunk as a lord last night; but he went off all right this morning. His ship's the Tuscarora;" and, fishing out a card, he read mockingly:

"'Mr. Montague Dartie, Poste Restante, Buenos Aires.' I should hurry up with the steps, if I were you. He fairly fed me up last night."

"Yes," said Soames; "but it's not always easy." Then, conscious from George's eyes that he had roused reminiscence of his own affair, he got up, and held out his hand. George rose too.

"Remember me to Winifred. . . . You'll enter her for the Divorce Stakes straight off if you ask me."

Soames took a sidelong look back at him from the doorway. George had seated himself again and was staring before him; he looked big and lonely in those black clothes. Soames had never known him so subdued. 'I suppose he feels it in a way,' he thought. 'They must have about fifty thousand each, all told. They ought to keep the estate together. If there's a war, house property will go down. Uncle Roger was a good judge, though.' And the face of Annette rose before him in the darkening street; her brown hair and her blue eyes with their dark lashes, her fresh lips and cheeks, dewy and blooming in spite of London, her perfect French figure. 'Take steps!' he thought. Re-entering Winifred's house he encountered Val, and they went in together. An idea had occurred to Soames. His cousin Jolyon was Irene's trustee, the first step would be to go down and see him at Robin Hill. Robin Hill! The odd — the very odd feeling those words brought back! Robin Hill — the house Bosinney had built for him and Irene — the house they had never lived in — the fatal house! And Jolyon lived there now! H'm! And suddenly he thought: 'They say he's got a boy at Oxford! Why not take young Val down and introduce them! It's an excuse! Less bald — very much less bald!' So, as they went upstairs, he said to Val:

"You've got a cousin at Oxford; you've never met him. I should like to take you down with me to-morrow to where he lives and introduce you. You'll find it useful."

Val, receiving the idea with but moderate transports, Soames clinched it.

"I'll call for you after lunch. It's in the country — not far; you'll enjoy it."

On the threshold of the drawing-room he recalled with an effort that the steps he contemplated concerned Winifred at the moment, not himself.

Winifred was still sitting at her Buhl bureau.

"It's quite true," he said; "he's gone to Buenos Aires, started this morning — we'd better have him shadowed when he lands. I’ll cable at once. Otherwise we may have a lot of expense. The sooner these things are done the better. I’m always regretting that I didn’t . . . ” he stopped, and looked sidelong at the silent Winifred. “By the way,” he went on, “can you prove cruelty?”

Winifred said in a dull voice:

“I don’t know. What is cruelty?”

“Well, has he struck you, or anything?”

Winifred shook herself, and her jaw grew square.

“He twisted my arm. Or would pointing a pistol count? Or being too drunk to undress himself, or — No — I can’t bring in the children.”

“No,” said Soames; “no! I wonder! Of course, there’s legal separation — we can get that. But separation! Um!”

“What does it mean?” asked Winifred desolately.

“That he can’t touch you, or you him; you’re both of you married and unmarried.” And again he grunted. What was it, in fact, but his own accursed position, legalised! No, he would not put her into that!

“It must be divorce,” he said decisively; “failing cruelty, there’s desertion. There’s a way of shortening the two years, now. We get the Court to give us restitution of conjugal rights. Then if he doesn’t obey, we can bring a suit for divorce in six months’ time. Of course you don’t want him back. But they won’t know that. Still, there’s the risk that he might come. I’d rather try cruelty.”

Winifred shook her head. “It’s so beastly.”

“Well,” Soames murmured, “perhaps there isn’t much risk so long as he’s infatuated and got money. Don’t say anything to anybody, and don’t pay any of his debts.”

Winifred sighed. In spite of all she had been through, the sense of loss was heavy on her. And this idea of not paying his debts any more brought it home to her as nothing else yet had. Some richness seemed to have gone out of life. Without her husband, without her pearls, without that intimate sense that she made a brave show above the domestic whirlpool, she would now have to face the world. She felt bereaved indeed.

And into the chilly kiss he placed on her forehead, Soames put more than his usual warmth.

“I have to go down to Robin Hill to-morrow,” he said, “to see young Jolyon on business. He’s got a boy at Oxford. I’d like to take Val with me and introduce him. Come down to ‘The Shelter’ for the week-end and bring the children. Oh! by the way, no, that won’t do; I’ve got some other people coming.” So saying, he left her and turned towards Soho.

❦

CHAPTER 4

SOHO

Of all quarters in the queer adventurous amalgam called London, Soho is perhaps least suited to the Forsyte spirit. ‘So-ho, my wild one!’ George would have said if he had seen his cousin going there. Untidy, full of Greeks, Ishmaelites, cats, Italians, tomatoes, restaurants, organs, coloured stuffs, queer names, people looking out of upper windows, it dwells remote from the British Body Politic. Yet has it haphazard proprietary instincts of its own, and a certain possessive prosperity which keeps its rents up when those of other quarters go down. For long years Soames’ acquaintanceship with Soho had been confined to its Western bastion, Wardour Street. Many bargains had he picked up there. Even during those seven years at Brighton after Bosinney’s death and Irene’s flight, he had bought treasures there sometimes, though he had no place to put them; for when the conviction that his wife had gone for good at last became firm within him, he had caused a board to be put up in Montpellier Square:

> FOR SALE
> THE LEASE OF THIS DESIRABLE RESIDENCE
>
> Enquire of Messrs. Lesson and Tukes,
> Court Street, Belgravia.

It had sold within a week — that desirable residence, in the shadow of whose perfection a man and a woman had eaten their hearts out.

Of a misty January evening, just before the board was taken down, Soames had gone there once more, and stood against the Square railings, looking at its unlighted windows, chewing the cud of possessive memories which had turned so bitter in the mouth. Why had she never loved him? Why? She had been given all she had wanted, and in return had given him, for three long years, all he had wanted — except, indeed, her heart. He had uttered a little involuntary groan, and a passing policeman had glanced suspiciously at him who no longer possessed the right to enter that green door with the carved brass knocker beneath the board ‘For Sale!’ A choking sensation had attacked his throat, and he had hurried away into the mist. That evening he had gone to Brighton to live. . . .

Approaching Malta Street, Soho, and the Restaurant Bretagne, where Annette would be drooping her pretty shoulders over her accounts, Soames thought with wonder of those seven years at Brighton. How had he managed to go on so long in that town devoid of the scent of sweetpeas, where he had not even space to put his treasures? True, those had been years with no time at all for looking at them — years of almost passionate money-making, during which Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte had become solicitors to more limited Companies than they could properly attend to. Up to the City of a morning in a Pullman car, down from the City of an evening in a Pullman car. Law papers again after dinner, then the sleep of the tired, and up again next morning. Saturday to Monday was spent at his Club in town — curious reversal of customary procedure, based on the deep and careful instinct that while working so hard he needed sea air to and from the station twice a day, and while resting must indulge his domestic affections. The Sunday visit to his family in Park Lane, to Timothy’s, and to Green Street; the occasional visits elsewhere had seemed to him as necessary to health as sea air on weekdays. Even since his migration to Mapledurham he had maintained those habits until — he had known Annette.

Whether Annette had produced the revolution in his outlook, or that outlook had produced Annette, he knew no more than we know where a circle begins. It was intricate and deeply involved with the growing consciousness that property without anyone to leave it to is the negation of true Forsyteism. To have an heir, some continuance of self, who would begin where he left off — ensure, in fact, that he would not leave off — had quite obsessed him for the last year and more. After buying a bit of Wedgwood one evening in April, he had dropped into Malta Street to look at a house of his father’s which had been turned into a restaurant — a risky proceeding, and one not quite in accordance with the terms of the lease. He had stared for a little at the outside painted a good cream colour, with two peacock-blue tubs containing little bay-trees in a recessed doorway — and at the words ‘Restaurant Bretagne’ above them in gold letters, rather favourably impressed. Entering, he had noticed that several people were already seated at little round green tables with little pots of fresh flowers on them and Brittany-ware plates, and had asked of a trim waitress to see the proprietor. They had shown him into a back room, where a girl was sitting at a simple bureau covered with papers, and a small round, table was laid for two. The impression of cleanliness, order, and good taste was confirmed when the girl got up, saying, “You wish to see Maman, Monsieur?” in a broken accent.

“Yes,” Soames had answered, “I represent your landlord; in fact, I’m his son.”

“Won’t you sit down, sir, please? Tell Maman to come to this gentleman.”

He was pleased that the girl seemed impressed, because it showed business instinct; and suddenly he noticed that she was remarkably pretty — so remarkably pretty that his eyes found a difficulty in leaving her face. When she moved to put a chair for him, she swayed in a curious subtle way, as if she had been put together by someone with a special secret skill; and her face and neck, which was a little bared, looked as fresh as if they had been sprayed with dew. Probably at this moment Soames decided that the lease had not been violated; though to himself and his father he based the decision on the efficiency of those illicit adaptations in the building, on the signs of prosperity, and the obvious business capacity of Madame Lamotte. He did not, however, neglect to leave certain matters to future consideration, which had necessitated further visits, so that the little back room had become quite accustomed to his spare, not unsolid, but unobtrusive figure, and his pale, chinny face with clipped moustache and dark hair not yet grizzling at the sides.

“Un Monsieur tres distingue,” Madame Lamotte found him; and presently, “Tres amical, tres gentil,” watching his eyes upon her daughter.

She was one of those generously built, fine-faced, dark-haired Frenchwomen, whose every action and tone of voice inspire perfect confidence in the thoroughness of their domestic tastes, their knowledge of cooking, and the careful increase of their bank balances.

After those visits to the Restaurant Bretagne began, other visits ceased — without, indeed, any definite decision, for Soames, like all Forsytes, and the great majority of their countrymen, was a born empiricist. But it was this change in his mode of life which had gradually made him so definitely conscious that he desired to alter his condition from that of the unmarried married man to that of the married man remarried.

Turning into Malta Street on this evening of early October, 1899, he bought a paper to see if there were any after-development of the Dreyfus case — a question which he had always found useful in making closer acquaintanceship with Madame Lamotte and her daughter, who were Catholic and anti-Dreyfusard.

Scanning those columns, Soames found nothing French, but noticed a general fall on the Stock Exchange and an ominous leader about the Transvaal. He entered, thinking: ‘War’s a certainty. I shall sell my consols.’ Not that he had many, personally, the rate of interest was too wretched; but he should advise his Companies — consols would assuredly go down. A look, as he passed the doorways of the restaurant, assured him that business was good as ever, and this, which in April would have pleased him, now gave him a certain uneasiness. If the steps which he had to take ended in his marrying Annette, he would rather see her mother safely back in France, a move to which the prosperity of the Restaurant Bretagne might become an obstacle. He would have to buy them out, of course, for French people only came to England to make money; and it would mean a higher price. And then that peculiar sweet sensation at the back of his throat, and a slight thumping about the heart, which he always experienced at the door of the little room, prevented his thinking how much it would cost.

Going in, he was conscious of an abundant black skirt vanishing through the door into the restaurant, and of Annette with her hands up to her hair. It was the attitude in which of all others he admired her — so beautifully straight and rounded and supple. And he said:

“I just came in to talk to your mother about pulling down that partition. No, don’t call her.”

“Monsieur will have supper with us? It will be ready in ten minutes.” Soames, who still held her hand, was overcome by an impulse which surprised him.

“You look so pretty to-night,” he said, “so very pretty. Do you know how pretty you look, Annette?”

Annette withdrew her hand, and blushed. “Monsieur is very good.”

“Not a bit good,” said Soames, and sat down gloomily.

Annette made a little expressive gesture with her hands; a smile was crinkling her red lips untouched by salve.

And, looking at those lips, Soames said:

“Are you happy over here, or do you want to go back to France?”

“Oh, I like London. Paris, of course. But London is better than Orleans, and the English country is so beautiful. I have been to Richmond last Sunday.”

Soames went through a moment of calculating struggle. Mapledurham! Dared he? After all, dared he go so far as that, and show her what there was to look forward to! Still! Down there one could say things. In this room it was impossible.

“I want you and your mother,” he said suddenly, “to come for the afternoon next Sunday. My house is on the river, it’s not too late in this weather; and I can show you some good pictures. What do you say?”

Annette clasped her hands.

“It will be lovelee. The river is so beautiful”

“That’s understood, then. I’ll ask Madame.”

He need say no more to her this evening, and risk giving himself away. But had he not already said too much? Did one ask restaurant proprietors with pretty daughters down to one’s country house without design? Madame Lamotte would see, if Annette didn’t. Well! there was not much that Madame did not see. Besides, this was the second time he had stayed to supper with them; he owed them hospitality.

Walking home towards Park Lane — for he was staying at his father’s — with the impression of Annette’s soft clever hand within his own, his thoughts were pleasant, slightly sensual, rather puzzled. Take steps! What steps? How? Dirty linen washed in public? Pah! With his reputation for sagacity, for far-sightedness and the clever extrication of others, he, who stood for proprietary interests, to become the plaything of that Law of which he was a pillar! There was something revolting in the thought! Winifred’s affair was bad enough! To have a double dose of publicity in the family! Would not a liaison be better than that — a liaison, and a son he could adopt? But dark, solid, watchful, Madame Lamotte blocked the avenue of that vision. No! that would not work. It was not as if Annette could have a real passion for him; one could not expect that at his age. If her mother wished, if the worldly advantage were manifestly great — perhaps! If not, refusal would be certain. Besides, he thought: ‘I’m not a villain. I don’t want to hurt her; and I don’t want anything underhand. But I do want her, and I want a son! There’s nothing for it but divorce — somehow — anyhow — divorce!’ Under the shadow of the plane-trees, in the lamplight, he passed slowly along the railings of the Green Park. Mist clung there among the bluish tree shapes, beyond range of the lamps. How many hundred times he had walked past those trees from his father’s house in Park Lane, when he was quite a young man; or from his own house in Montpellier Square in those four years of married life! And, to-night, making up his mind to free himself if he could of that long useless marriage tie, he took a fancy to walk on, in at Hyde Park Corner, out at Knightsbridge Gate, just as he used to when going home to Irene in the old days. What could she be like now? — how had she passed the years since he last saw her, twelve years in all, seven already since Uncle Jolyon left her that money? Was she still beautiful? Would he know her if he saw her? ‘I’ve not changed much,’ he thought; ‘I expect she has. She made me suffer.’ He remembered suddenly one night, the first on which he went out to dinner alone — an old Malburian dinner — the first year of their marriage. With what eagerness he had hurried back; and, entering softly as a cat, had heard her playing. Opening the drawing-room door noiselessly, he had stood watching the expression on her face, different from any he knew, so much more open, so confiding, as though to her music she was giving a heart he had never seen. And he remembered how she stopped and looked round, how her face changed back to that which he did know, and what an icy shiver had gone through him, for all that the next moment he was fondling her shoulders. Yes, she had made him suffer! Divorce! It seemed ridiculous, after all these years of utter separation! But it would have to be. No other way! ‘The question,’ he thought with sudden realism, ‘is — which of us? She or me? She deserted me. She ought to pay for it. There’ll be someone, I suppose.’ Involuntarily he uttered a little snarling sound, and, turning, made his way back to Park Lane.

⁂

Chapter 5

James Sees Visions

The butler himself opened the door, and closing it softly, detained Soames on the inner mat.

"The master's poorly, sir," he murmured. "He wouldn't go to bed till you came in. He's still in the diningroom."

Soames responded in the hushed tone to which the house was now accustomed.

"What's the matter with him, Warmson?"

"Nervous, sir, I think. Might be the funeral; might be Mrs. Dartie's comin' round this afternoon. I think he overheard something. I've took him in a negus. The mistress has just gone up."

Soames hung his hat on a mahogany stag's-horn.

"All right, Warmson, you can go to bed; I'll take him up myself." And he passed into the dining-room.

James was sitting before the fire, in a big armchair, with a camel-hair shawl, very light and warm, over his frock-coated shoulders, on to which his long white whiskers drooped. His white hair, still fairly thick, glistened in the lamplight; a little moisture from his fixed, light-grey eyes stained the cheeks, still quite well coloured, and the long deep furrows running to the corners of the clean-shaven lips, which moved as if mumbling thoughts. His long legs, thin as a crow's, in shepherd's plaid trousers, were bent at less than a right angle, and on one knee a spindly hand moved continually, with fingers wide apart and glistening tapered nails. Beside him, on a low stool, stood a half-finished glass of negus, bedewed with beads of heat. There he had been sitting, with intervals for meals, all day. At eighty-eight he was still organically sound, but suffering terribly from the thought that no one ever told him anything. It is, indeed, doubtful how he had become aware that Roger was being buried that day, for Emily had kept it from him. She was always keeping things from him. Emily was only seventy! James had a grudge against his wife's youth. He felt sometimes that he would never have married her if he had known that she would have so many years before her, when he had so few. It was not natural. She would live fifteen or twenty years after he was gone, and might spend a lot of money; she had always had extravagant tastes. For all he knew she might want to buy one of these motor-cars. Cicely and Rachel and Imogen and all the young people — they all rode those bicycles now and went off Goodness knew where. And now Roger was gone. He didn't know — couldn't tell! The family was breaking up. Soames would know how much his uncle had left. Curiously he thought of Roger as Soames' uncle not as his own brother. Soames! It was more and more the one solid spot in a vanishing world. Soames was careful; he was a warm man; but he had no one to leave his money to. There it was! He didn't know! And there was that fellow Chamberlain! For James' political principles had been fixed between '70 and '85 when 'that rascally Radical' had been the chief thorn in the side of property and he distrusted him to this day in spite of his conversion; he would get the country into a mess and make money go down before he had done with it. A stormy petrel of a chap! Where was Soames? He had gone to the funeral of course which they had tried to keep from him. He knew that perfectly well; he had seen his son's trousers. Roger! Roger in his coffin! He remembered how, when they came up from school together from the West, on the box seat of the old Slowflyer in 1824, Roger had got into the 'boot' and gone to sleep. James uttered a thin cackle. A funny fellow — Roger — an original! He didn't know! Younger than himself, and in his coffin! The family was breaking up. There was Val going to the university; he never came to see him now. He would cost a pretty penny up there. It was an extravagant age. And all the pretty pennies that his four grandchildren would cost him danced before James' eyes. He did not grudge them the money, but he grudged terribly the risk which the spending of that money might bring on them; he grudged the diminution of security. And now that Cicely had married, she might be having children too. He didn't know — couldn't tell! Nobody thought of anything but spending money in these days, and racing about, and having what they called 'a good time.' A motor-car went past the window. Ugly great lumbering thing, making all that racket! But there it was, the country rattling to the dogs! People in such a hurry that they couldn't even care for style — a neat turnout like his barouche and bays was worth all those new-fangled things. And consols at 116! There must be a lot of money in the country. And now there was this old Kruger! They had tried to keep old Kruger from him. But he knew better; there would be a pretty kettle of fish out there! He had known how it would be when that fellow Gladstone — dead now, thank God! made such a mess of it after that dreadful business at Majuba. He shouldn't wonder if the Empire split up and went to pot.

And this vision of the Empire going to pot filled a full quarter of an hour with qualms of the most serious character. He had eaten a poor lunch because of them. But it was after lunch that the real disaster to his nerves occurred. He had been dozing when he became aware of voices — low voices. Ah! they never told him anything! Winifred's and her mother's. "Monty!" That fellow Dartie — always that fellow Dartie! The voices had receded; and James had been left alone, with his ears standing up like a hare's, and fear creeping about his inwards. Why did they leave him alone? Why didn't they come and tell him? And an awful thought, which through long years had haunted him, concreted again swiftly in his brain. Dartie had gone bankrupt — fraudulently bankrupt, and to save Winifred and the children, he — James — would have to pay! Could he — could Soames turn him into a limited company? No, he couldn't! There it was! With every minute before Emily came back the spectre fiercened. Why, it might be forgery! With eyes fixed on the doubted Turner in the centre of the wall, James suffered tortures. He saw Dartie in the dock, his grandchildren in the gutter, and himself in bed. He saw the doubted Turner being sold at Jobson's, and all the majestic edifice of property in rags. He saw in fancy Winifred unfashionably dressed, and heard in fancy Emily's voice saying: "Now, don't fuss, James!" She was always saying: "Don't fuss!" She had no nerves; he ought never to have married a woman eighteen years younger than himself. Then Emily's real voice said:

"Have you had a nice nap, James?"

Nap! He was in torment, and she asked him that!

"What's this about Dartie?" he said, and his eyes glared at her.

Emily's self-possession never deserted her.

"What have you been hearing?" she asked blandly.

"What's this about Dartie?" repeated James. "He's gone bankrupt."

"Fiddle!"

James made a great effort, and rose to the full height of his stork-like figure.

"You never tell me anything," he said; "he's gone bankrupt."

The destruction of that fixed idea seemed to Emily all that mattered at the moment.

"He has not," she answered firmly. "He's gone to Buenos Aires."

If she had said "He's gone to Mars" she could not have dealt James a more stunning blow; his imagination, invested entirely in British securities, could as little grasp one place as the other.

"What's he gone there for?" he said. "He's got no money. What did he take?"

Agitated within by Winifred's news, and goaded by the constant reiteration of this jeremiad, Emily said calmly:

"He took Winifred's pearls and a dancer."

"What!" said James, and sat down.

His sudden collapse alarmed her, and smoothing his forehead, she said:

"Now, don't fuss, James!"

A dusky red had spread over James' cheeks and forehead.

"I paid for them," he said tremblingly; "he's a thief! I— I knew how it would be. He'll be the death of me; he . . . . " Words failed him and he sat quite still. Emily, who thought she knew him so well, was alarmed, and went towards the sideboard where she kept some sal volatile. She could not see the tenacious Forsyte spirit working in that thin, tremulous shape against the extravagance of the emotion called up by this outrage on Forsyte principles — the Forsyte spirit deep in there, saying: 'You mustn't get into a fantod, it'll never do. You won't digest your lunch. You'll have a fit!' All unseen by her, it was doing better work in James than sal volatile.

"Drink this," she said.

James waved it aside.

"What was Winifred about," he said, "to let him take her pearls?" Emily perceived the crisis past.

"She can have mine," she said comfortably. "I never wear them. She'd better get a divorce."

"There you go!" said James. "Divorce! We've never had a divorce in the family. Where's Soames?"

"He'll be in directly."

“No, he won’t,” said James, almost fiercely; “he’s at the funeral. You think I know nothing.”

“Well,” said Emily with calm, “you shouldn’t get into such fusses when we tell you things.” And plumping up his cushions, and putting the sal volatile beside him, she left the room.

But James sat there seeing visions — of Winifred in the Divorce Court, and the family name in the papers; of the earth falling on Roger’s coffin; of Val taking after his father; of the pearls he had paid for and would never see again; of money back at four per cent., and the country going to the dogs; and, as the afternoon wore into evening, and tea-time passed, and dinnertime, those visions became more and more mixed and menacing — of being told nothing, till he had nothing left of all his wealth, and they told him nothing of it. Where was Soames? Why didn’t he come in? . . . His hand grasped the glass of negus, he raised it to drink, and saw his son standing there looking at him. A little sigh of relief escaped his lips, and putting the glass down, he said:

“There you are! Dartie’s gone to Buenos Aires.”

Soames nodded. “That’s all right,” he said; “good riddance.”

A wave of assuagement passed over James’ brain. Soames knew. Soames was the only one of them all who had sense. Why couldn’t he come and live at home? He had no son of his own. And he said plaintively:

“At my age I get nervous. I wish you were more at home, my boy.”

Again Soames nodded; the mask of his countenance betrayed no understanding, but he went closer, and as if by accident touched his father’s shoulder.

“They sent their love to you at Timothy’s,” he said. “It went off all right. I’ve been to see Winifred. I’m going to take steps.” And he thought: ‘Yes, and you mustn’t hear of them.’

James looked up; his long white whiskers quivered, his thin throat between the points of his collar looked very gristly and naked.

“I’ve been very poorly all day,” he said; “they never tell me anything.”

Soames’ heart twitched.

“Well, it’s all right. There’s nothing to worry about. Will you come up now?” and he put his hand under his father’s arm.

James obediently and tremulously raised himself, and together they went slowly across the room, which had a rich look in the firelight, and out to the stairs. Very slowly they ascended.

“Good-night, my boy,” said James at his bedroom door.

“Good-night, father,” answered Soames. His hand stroked down the sleeve beneath the shawl; it seemed to have almost nothing in it, so thin was the arm. And, turning away from the light in the opening doorway, he went up the extra flight to his own bedroom.

‘I want a son,’ he thought, sitting on the edge of his bed; ‘I want a son.’

❦

CHAPTER 6

NO-LONGER-YOUNG JOLYON AT HOME

Trees take little account of time, and the old oak on the upper lawn at Robin Hill looked no day older than when Bosinney sprawled under it and said to Soames: “Forsyte, I’ve found the very place for your house.” Since then Swithin had dreamed, and old Jolyon died, beneath its branches. And now, close to the swing, no-longer-young Jolyon often painted there. Of all spots in the world it was perhaps the most sacred to him, for he had loved his father.

Contemplating its great girth — crinkled and a little mossed, but not yet hollow — he would speculate on the passage of time. That tree had seen, perhaps, all real English history; it dated, he shouldn’t wonder, from the days of Elizabeth at least. His own fifty years were as nothing to its wood. When the house behind it, which he now owned, was three hundred years of age instead of twelve, that tree might still be standing there, vast and hollow — for who would commit such sacrilege as to cut it down? A Forsyte might perhaps still be living in that house, to guard it jealously. And Jolyon would wonder what the house would look like coated with such age. Wistaria was already about its walls — the new look had gone. Would it hold its own and keep the dignity Bosinney had bestowed on it, or would the giant London have lapped it round and made it into an asylum in the midst of a jerry-built wilderness? Often, within and without of it, he was persuaded that Bosinney had been moved by the spirit when he built. He had put his heart into that house, indeed! It might even become one of the ‘homes of England’— a rare achievement for a house in these degenerate days of building. And the aesthetic spirit, moving hand in hand with his Forsyte sense of possessive continuity, dwelt with pride and pleasure on his ownership thereof. There was the smack of reverence and ancestor-worship (if only for one ancestor) in his desire to hand this house down to his son and his son’s son. His father had loved the house, had loved the view, the grounds, that tree; his last years had been happy there, and no one had lived there before him. These last eleven years at Robin Hill had formed in Jolyon’s life as a painter, the important period of success. He was now in the very van of water-colour art, hanging on the line everywhere. His drawings fetched high prices. Specialising in that one medium with the tenacity of his breed, he had ‘arrived’— rather late, but not too late for a member of the family which made a point of living for ever. His art had really deepened and improved. In conformity with his position he had grown a short fair beard, which was just beginning to grizzle, and hid his Forsyte chin; his brown face had lost the warped expression of his ostracised period — he looked, if anything, younger. The loss of his wife in 1894 had been one of those domestic tragedies which turn out in the end for the good of all. He had, indeed, loved her to the last, for his was an affectionate spirit, but she had become increasingly difficult: jealous of her step-daughter June, jealous even of her own little daughter Holly, and making ceaseless plaint that he could not love her, ill as she was, and ‘useless to everyone, and better dead.’ He had mourned her sincerely, but his face had looked younger since she died. If she could only have believed that she made him happy, how much happier would the twenty years of their companionship have been!

June had never really got on well with her who had reprehensibly taken her own mother’s place; and ever since old Jolyon died she had been established in a sort of studio in London. But she had come back to Robin Hill on her stepmother’s death, and gathered the reins there into her small decided hands. Jolly was then at Harrow; Holly still learning from Mademoiselle Beauce. There had been nothing to keep Jolyon at home, and he had removed his grief and his paint-box abroad. There he had wandered, for the most part in Brittany, and at last had fetched up in Paris. He had stayed there several months, and come back with the younger face and the short fair beard. Essentially a man who merely lodged in any house, it had suited him perfectly that June should reign at Robin Hill, so that he was free to go off with his easel where and when he liked. She was inclined, it is true, to regard the house rather as an asylum for her proteges! but his own outcast days had filled Jolyon for ever with sympathy towards an outcast, and June’s ‘lame ducks’ about the place did not annoy him. By all means let her have them down — and feed them up; and though his slightly cynical humour perceived that they ministered to his daughter’s love of domination as well as moved her warm heart, he never ceased to admire her for having so many ducks. He fell, indeed, year by year into a more and more detached and brotherly attitude towards his own son and daughters, treating them with a sort of whimsical equality. When he went down to Harrow to see Jolly, he never quite knew which of them was the elder, and would sit eating cherries with him out of one paper bag, with an affectionate and ironical smile twisting up an eyebrow and curling his lips a little. And he was always careful to have money in his pocket, and to be modish in his dress, so that his son need not blush for him. They were perfect friends, but never seemed to have occasion for verbal confidences, both having the competitive self-consciousness of Forsytes. They knew they would stand by each other in scrapes, but there was no need to talk about it. Jolyon had a striking horror — partly original sin, but partly the result of his early immorality — of the moral attitude. The most he could ever have said to his son would have been:

“Look here, old man; don’t forget you’re a gentleman,” and then have wondered whimsically whether that was not a snobbish sentiment. The great cricket match was perhaps the most searching and awkward time they annually went through together, for Jolyon had been at Eton. They would be particularly careful during that match, continually saying: “Hooray! Oh! hard luck, old man!” or “Hooray! Oh! bad luck, Dad!” to each other, when some disaster at which their hearts bounded happened to the opposing school. And Jolyon would wear a grey top hat, instead of his usual soft one, to save his son’s feelings, for a black top hat he could not stomach. When Jolly went up to Oxford, Jolyon went up with him, amused, humble, and a little anxious not to discredit his boy amongst all these youths who seemed so much more assured and old than himself. He often thought, ‘Glad I’m a painter’ for he had long dropped under-writing at Lloyds —‘it’s so innocuous. You can’t look down on a painter — you can’t take him seriously enough.’ For Jolly, who had a sort of natural lordliness, had passed at once into a very small set, who secretly amused his father. The boy had fair hair which curled a little, and his grandfather’s deepset iron-grey eyes. He was well-built and very upright, and always pleased Jolyon’s aesthetic sense, so that he was a tiny bit afraid of him, as artists ever are of those of their own sex whom they admire physically. On that occasion, however, he actually did screw up his courage to give his son advice, and this was it:

“Look here, old man, you’re bound to get into debt; mind you come to me at once. Of course, I’ll always pay them. But you might remember that one respects oneself more afterwards if one pays one’s own way. And don’t ever borrow, except from me, will you?”

And Jolly had said:

“All right, Dad, I won’t,” and he never had.

“And there’s just one other thing. I don’t know much about morality and that, but there is this: It’s always worth while before you do anything to consider whether it’s going to hurt another person more than is absolutely necessary.”

Jolly had looked thoughtful, and nodded, and presently had squeezed his father’s hand. And Jolyon had thought: ‘I wonder if I had the right to say that?’ He always had a sort of dread of losing the dumb confidence they had in each other; remembering how for long years he had lost his own father’s, so that there had been nothing between them but love at a great distance. He under-estimated, no doubt, the change in the spirit of the age since he himself went up to Cambridge in ‘65; and perhaps he underestimated, too, his boy’s power of understanding that he was tolerant to the very bone. It was that tolerance of his, and possibly his scepticism, which ever made his relations towards June so queerly defensive. She was such a decided mortal; knew her own mind so terribly well; wanted things so inexorably until she got them — and then, indeed, often dropped them like a hot potato. Her mother had been like that, whence had come all those tears. Not that his incompatibility with his daughter was anything like what it had been with the first Mrs. Young Jolyon. One could be amused where a daughter was concerned; in a wife’s case one could not be amused. To see June set her heart and jaw on a thing until she got it was all right, because it was never anything which interfered fundamentally with Jolyon’s liberty — the one thing on which his jaw was also absolutely rigid, a considerable jaw, under that short grizzling beard. Nor was there ever any necessity for real heart-to-heart encounters. One could break away into irony — as indeed he often had to. But the real trouble with June was that she had never appealed to his aesthetic sense, though she might well have, with her red-gold hair and her viking-coloured eyes, and that touch of the Berserker in her spirit. It was very different with Holly, soft and quiet, shy and affectionate, with a playful imp in her somewhere. He watched this younger daughter of his through the duckling stage with extraordinary interest. Would she come out a swan? With her sallow oval face and her grey wistful eyes and those long dark lashes, she might, or she might not. Only this last year had he been able to guess. Yes, she would be a swan — rather a dark one, always a shy one, but an authentic swan. She was eighteen now, and Mademoiselle Beauce was gone — the excellent lady had removed, after eleven years haunted by her continuous reminiscences of the ‘well-brrred little Tayleurs,’ to another family whose bosom would now be agitated by her reminiscences of the ‘well-brrred little Forsytes.’ She had taught Holly to speak French like herself.

Portraiture was not Jolyon’s forte, but he had already drawn his younger daughter three times, and was drawing her a fourth, on the afternoon of October 4th, 1899, when a card was brought to him which caused his eyebrows to go up:

Mr. SOAMES FORSYTE

THE SHELTER, CONNOISSEURS CLUB, MAPLEDURHAM. ST. JAMES'S.

But here the Forsyte Saga must digress again. . . .

To return from a long travel in Spain to a darkened house, to a little daughter bewildered with tears, to the sight of a loved father lying peaceful in his last sleep, had never been, was never likely to be, forgotten by so impressionable and warm-hearted a man as Jolyon. A sense as of mystery, too, clung to that sad day, and about the end of one whose life had been so well-ordered, balanced, and above-board. It seemed incredible that his father could thus have vanished without, as it were, announcing his intention, without last words to his son, and due farewells. And those incoherent allusions of little Holly to 'the lady in grey,' of Mademoiselle Beauce to a Madame Errant (as it sounded) involved all things in a mist, lifted a little when he read his father's will and the codicil thereto. It had been his duty as executor of that will and codicil to inform Irene, wife of his cousin Soames, of her life interest in fifteen thousand pounds. He had called on her to explain that the existing investment in India Stock, ear-marked to meet the charge, would produce for her the interesting net sum of L430 odd a year, clear of income tax. This was but the third time he had seen his cousin Soames' wife — if indeed she was still his wife, of which he was not quite sure. He remembered having seen her sitting in the Botanical Gardens waiting for Bosinney — a passive, fascinating figure, reminding him of Titian's 'Heavenly Love,' and again, when, charged by his father, he had gone to Montpellier Square on the afternoon when Bosinney's death was known. He still recalled vividly her sudden appearance in the drawing-room doorway on that occasion — her beautiful face, passing from wild eagerness of hope to stony despair; remembered the compassion he had felt, Soames' snarling smile, his words, "We are not at home!" and the slam of the front door.

This third time he saw a face and form more beautiful — freed from that warp of wild hope and despair. Looking at her, he thought: 'Yes, you are just what the Dad would have admired!' And the strange story of his father's Indian summer became slowly clear to him. She spoke of old Jolyon with reverence and tears in her eyes. "He was so wonderfully kind to me; I don't know why. He looked so beautiful and peaceful sitting in that chair under the tree; it was I who first came on him sitting there, you know. Such a lovely day. I don't think an end could have been happier. We should all like to go out like that."

'Quite right!' he had thought. 'We should all a like to go out in full summer with beauty stepping towards us across a lawn.' And looking round the little, almost empty drawing-room, he had asked her what she was going to do now. "I am going to live again a little, Cousin Jolyon. It's wonderful to have money of one's own. I've never had any. I shall keep this flat, I think; I'm used to it; but I shall be able to go to Italy."

"Exactly!" Jolyon had murmured, looking at her faintly smiling lips; and he had gone away thinking: 'A fascinating woman! What a waste! I'm glad the Dad left her that money.' He had not seen her again, but every quarter he had signed her cheque, forwarding it to her bank, with a note to the Chelsea flat to say that he had done so; and always he had received a note in acknowledgment, generally from the flat, but sometimes from Italy; so that her personality had become embodied in slightly scented grey paper, an upright fine handwriting, and the words, 'Dear Cousin Jolyon.' Man of property that he now was, the slender cheque he signed often gave rise to the thought: 'Well, I suppose she just manages'; sliding into a vague wonder how she was faring otherwise in a world of men not wont to let beauty go unpossessed. At first Holly had spoken of her sometimes, but 'ladies in grey' soon fade from children's memories; and the tightening of June's lips in those first weeks after her grandfather's death whenever her former friend's name was mentioned, had discouraged allusion. Only once, indeed, had June spoken definitely: "I've forgiven her. I'm frightfully glad she's independent now. . . . "

On receiving Soames' card, Jolyon said to the maid — for he could not abide butlers —"Show him into the study, please, and say I'll be there in a minute"; and then he looked at Holly and asked:

"Do you remember 'the lady in grey,' who used to give you music-lessons?"

"Oh yes, why? Has she come?"

Jolyon shook his head, and, changing his holland blouse for a coat, was silent, perceiving suddenly that such history was not for those young ears. His face, in fact, became whimsical perplexity incarnate while he journeyed towards the study.

Standing by the french-window, looking out across the terrace at the oak tree, were two figures, middle-aged and young, and he thought: 'Who's that boy? Surely they never had a child.'

The elder figure turned. The meeting of those two Forsytes of the second generation, so much more sophisticated than the first, in the house built for the one and owned and occupied by the other, was marked by subtle defensiveness beneath distinct attempt at cordiality. 'Has he come about his wife?' Jolyon was thinking; and Soames, 'How shall I begin?' while Val, brought to break the ice, stood negligently scrutinising this 'bearded pard' from under his dark, thick eyelashes.

"This is Val Dartie," said Soames, "my sister's son. He's just going up to Oxford. I thought I'd like him to know your boy."

"Ah! I'm sorry Jolly's away. What college?"

"B.N.C.," replied Val.

"Jolly's at the 'House,' but he'll be delighted to look you up."

"Thanks awfully."

"Holly's in — if you could put up with a female relation, she'd show you round. You'll find her in the hall if you go through the curtains. I was just painting her."

With another "Thanks, awfully!" Val vanished, leaving the two cousins with the ice unbroken.

"I see you've some drawings at the 'Water Colours,'" said Soames.

Jolyon winced. He had been out of touch with the Forsyte family at large for twenty-six years, but they were connected in his mind with Frith's 'Derby Day' and Landseer prints. He had heard from June that Soames was a connoisseur, which made it worse. He had become aware, too, of a curious sensation of repugnance.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," he said.

"No," answered Soames between close lips, "not since — as a matter of fact, it's about that I've come. You're her trustee, I'm told."

Jolyon nodded.

"Twelve years is a long time," said Soames rapidly: "I— I'm tired of it."

Jolyon found no more appropriate answer than:

"Won't you smoke?"

"No, thanks."

Jolyon himself lit a cigarette.

"I wish to be free," said Soames abruptly.

"I don't see her," murmured Jolyon through the fume of his cigarette.

"But you know where she lives, I suppose?"

Jolyon nodded. He did not mean to give her address without permission. Soames seemed to divine his thought.

"I don't want her address," he said; "I know it."

"What exactly do you want?"

"She deserted me. I want a divorce."

"Rather late in the day, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Soames. And there was a silence.

"I don't know much about these things — at least, I've forgotten," said Jolyon with a wry smile. He himself had had to wait for death to grant him a divorce from the first Mrs. Jolyon. "Do you wish me to see her about it?"

Soames raised his eyes to his cousin's face. "I suppose there's someone," he said.

A shrug moved Jolyon's shoulders.

"I don't know at all. I imagine you may have both lived as if the other were dead. It's usual in these cases."

Soames turned to the window. A few early fallen oak-leaves strewed the terrace already, and were rolling round in the wind. Jolyon saw the figures of Holly and Val Dartie moving across the lawn towards the stables. 'I'm not going to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds,' he thought. 'I must act for her. The Dad would have wished that.' And for a swift moment he seemed to see his father's figure in the old armchair, just beyond Soames, sitting with knees crossed, The Times in his hand. It vanished.

“My father was fond of her,” he said quietly.

“Why he should have been I don’t know,” Soames answered without looking round. “She brought trouble to your daughter June; she brought trouble to everyone. I gave her all she wanted. I would have given her even — forgiveness — but she chose to leave me.”

In Jolyon compassion was checked by the tone of that close voice. What was there in the fellow that made it so difficult to be sorry for him?

“I can go and see her, if you like,” he said. “I suppose she might be glad of a divorce, but I know nothing.”

Soames nodded.

“Yes, please go. As I say, I know her address; but I’ve no wish to see her.” His tongue was busy with his lips, as if they were very dry.

“You’ll have some tea?” said Jolyon, stifling the words: ‘And see the house.’ And he led the way into the hall. When he had rung the bell and ordered tea, he went to his easel to turn his drawing to the wall. He could not bear, somehow, that his work should be seen by Soames, who was standing there in the middle of the great room which had been designed expressly to afford wall space for his own pictures. In his cousin’s face, with its unseizable family likeness to himself, and its chinny, narrow, concentrated look, Jolyon saw that which moved him to the thought: ‘That chap could never forget anything — nor ever give himself away. He’s pathetic!’

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CHAPTER 7

THE COLT AND THE FILLY

When young Val left the presence of the last generation he was thinking: ‘This is jolly dull! Uncle Soames does take the bun. I wonder what this filly’s like?’ He anticipated no pleasure from her society; and suddenly he saw her standing there looking at him. Why, she was pretty! What luck!

“I’m afraid you don’t know me,” he said. “My name’s Val Dartie — I’m once removed, second cousin, something like that, you know. My mother’s name was Forsyte.”

Holly, whose slim brown hand remained in his because she was too shy to withdraw it, said:

“I don’t know any of my relations. Are there many?”

“Tons. They’re awful — most of them. At least, I don’t know — some of them. One’s relations always are, aren’t they?”

“I expect they think one awful too,” said Holly.

“I don’t know why they should. No one could think you awful, of course.”

Holly looked at him — the wistful candour in those grey eyes gave young Val a sudden feeling that he must protect her.

“I mean there are people and people,” he added astutely. “Your dad looks awfully decent, for instance.”

“Oh yes!” said Holly fervently; “he is.”

A flush mounted in Val’s cheeks — that scene in the Pandemonium promenade — the dark man with the pink carnation developing into his own father! “But you know what the Forsytes are,” he said almost viciously. “Oh! I forgot; you don’t.”

“What are they?”

“Oh! fearfully careful; not sportsmen a bit. Look at Uncle Soames!”

“I’d like to,” said Holly.

Val resisted a desire to run his arm through hers. “Oh! no,” he said, “let’s go out. You’ll see him quite soon enough. What’s your brother like?”

Holly led the way on to the terrace and down to the lawn without answering. How describe Jolly, who, ever since she remembered anything, had been her lord, master, and ideal?

“Does he sit on you?” said Val shrewdly. “I shall be knowing him at Oxford. Have you got any horses?”

Holly nodded. “Would you like to see the stables?”

“Rather!”

They passed under the oak tree, through a thin shrubbery, into the stable-yard. There under a clock-tower lay a fluffy brown-and-white dog, so old that he did not get up, but faintly waved the tail curled over his back.

“That’s Balthasar,” said Holly; “he’s so old — awfully old, nearly as old as I am. Poor old boy! He’s devoted to Dad.”

“Balthasar! That’s a rum name. He isn’t purebred you know.”

“No! but he’s a darling,” and she bent down to stroke the dog. Gentle and supple, with dark covered head and slim browned neck and hands, she seemed to Val strange and sweet, like a thing slipped between him and all previous knowledge.

“When grandfather died,” she said, “he wouldn’t eat for two days. He saw him die, you know.”

“Was that old Uncle Jolyon? Mother always says he was a topper.”

“He was,” said Holly simply, and opened the stable door.

In a loose-box stood a silver roan of about fifteen hands, with a long black tail and mane. “This is mine — Fairy.”

“Ah!” said Val, “she’s a jolly palfrey. But you ought to bang her tail. She’d look much smarter.” Then catching her wondering look, he thought suddenly: ‘I don’t know — anything she likes!’ And he took a long sniff of the stable air. “Horses are ripping, aren’t they? My Dad . . . ” he stopped.

“Yes?” said Holly.

An impulse to unbosom himself almost overcame him — but not quite. “Oh! I don’t know he’s often gone a mucker over them. I’m jolly keen on them too — riding and hunting. I like racing awfully, as well; I should like to be a gentleman rider.” And oblivious of the fact that he had but one more day in town, with two engagements, he plumped out:

“I say, if I hire a gee to-morrow, will you come a ride in Richmond Park?”

Holly clasped her hands.

“Oh yes! I simply love riding. But there’s Jolly’s horse; why don’t you ride him? Here he is. We could go after tea.”

Val looked doubtfully at his trousered legs.

He had imagined them immaculate before her eyes in high brown boots and Bedford cords.

“I don’t much like riding his horse,” he said. “He mightn’t like it. Besides, Uncle Soames wants to get back, I expect. Not that I believe in buckling under to him, you know. You haven’t got an uncle, have you? This is rather a good beast,” he added, scrutinising Jolly’s horse, a dark brown, which was showing the whites of its eyes. “You haven’t got any hunting here, I suppose?”

“No; I don’t know that I want to hunt. It must be awfully exciting, of course; but it’s cruel, isn’t it? June says so.”

“Cruel?” ejaculated Val. “Oh! that’s all rot. Who’s June?”

“My sister — my half-sister, you know — much older than me.” She had put her hands up to both cheeks of Jolly’s horse, and was rubbing her nose against its nose with a gentle snuffling noise which seemed to have an hypnotic effect on the animal. Val contemplated her cheek resting against the horse’s nose, and her eyes gleaming round at him. ‘She’s really a duck,’ he thought.

They returned to the house less talkative, followed this time by the dog Balthasar, walking more slowly than anything on earth, and clearly expecting them not to exceed his speed limit.

“This is a ripping place,” said Val from under the oak tree, where they had paused to allow the dog Balthasar to come up.

“Yes,” said Holly, and sighed. “Of course I want to go everywhere. I wish I were a gipsy.”

“Yes, gipsies are jolly,” replied Val, with a conviction which had just come to him; “you’re rather like one, you know.”

Holly’s face shone suddenly and deeply, like dark leaves gilded by the sun.

“To go mad-rabbiting everywhere and see everything, and live in the open — oh! wouldn’t it be fun?”

“Let’s do it!” said Val.

“Oh yes, let’s!”

“It’d be grand sport, just you and I.”

Then Holly perceived the quaintness and gushed.

“Well, we’ve got to do it,” said Val obstinately, but reddening too.

“I believe in doing things you want to do. What’s down there?”

“The kitchen-garden, and the pond and the coppice, and the farm.”

“Let’s go down!”

Holly glanced back at the house.

“It’s tea-time, I expect; there’s Dad beckoning.”

Val, uttering a growly sound, followed her towards the house.

When they re-entered the hall gallery the sight of two middle-aged Forsytes drinking tea together had its magical effect, and they became quite silent. It was, indeed, an impressive spectacle. The two were seated side by side on an arrangement in marqueterie which looked like three silvery pink chairs made one, with a low tea-table in front of them. They seemed to have taken up that position, as far apart as the seat would permit, so that they need not look at each other too much; and they were eating and drinking rather than talking — Soames with his air of despising the tea-cake as it disappeared, Jolyon of finding himself slightly amusing. To the casual eye neither would have seemed greedy, but both were getting through a good deal of sustenance. The two young ones having been supplied with food, the process went on silent and absorbative, till, with the advent of cigarettes, Jolyon said to Soames:

“And how’s Uncle James?”

“Thanks, very shaky.”

“We’re a wonderful family, aren’t we? The other day I was calculating the average age of the ten old Forsytes from my father’s family Bible. I make it eighty-four already, and five still living. They ought to beat the record;” and looking whimsically at Soames, he added:

“We aren’t the men they were, you know.”

Soames smiled. ‘Do you really think I shall admit that I’m not their equal’; he seemed to be saying, ‘or that I’ve got to give up anything, especially life?’

“We may live to their age, perhaps,” pursued Jolyon, “but self-consciousness is a handicap, you know, and that’s the difference between us. We’ve lost conviction. How and when self-consciousness was born I never can make out. My father had a little, but I don’t believe any other of the old Forsytes ever had a scrap. Never to see yourself as others see you, it’s a wonderful preservative. The whole history of the last century is in the difference between us. And between us and you,” he added, gazing through a ring of smoke at Val and Holly, uncomfortable under his quizzical regard, “there’ll be — another difference. I wonder what.”

Soames took out his watch.

“We must go,” he said, “if we’re to catch our train.”

“Uncle Soames never misses a train,” muttered Val, with his mouth full.

“Why should I?” Soames answered simply.

“Oh! I don’t know,” grumbled Val, “other people do.”

At the front door he gave Holly’s slim brown hand a long and surreptitious squeeze.

“Look out for me to-morrow,” he whispered; “three o’clock. I’ll wait for you in the road; it’ll save time. We’ll have a ripping ride.” He gazed back at her from the lodge gate, and, but for the principles of a man about town, would have waved his hand. He felt in no mood to tolerate his uncle’s conversation. But he was not in danger. Soames preserved a perfect muteness, busy with far-away thoughts.

The yellow leaves came down about those two walking the mile and a half which Soames had traversed so often in those long-ago days when he came down to watch with secret pride the building of the house — that house which was to have been the home of him and her from whom he was now going to seek release. He looked back once, up that endless vista of autumn lane between the yellowing hedges. What an age ago! “I don’t want to see her,” he had said to Jolyon. Was that true? ‘I may have to,’ he thought; and he shivered, seized by one of those queer shudderings that they say mean footsteps on one’s grave. A chilly world! A queer world! And glancing sidelong at his nephew, he thought: ‘Wish I were his age! I wonder what she’s like now!’

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CHAPTER 8

JOLYON PROSECUTES TRUSTEESHIP

When those two were gone Jolyon did not return to his painting, for daylight was failing, but went to the study, craving unconsciously a revival of that momentary vision of his father sitting in the old leather chair with his knees crossed and his straight eyes gazing up from under the dome of his massive brow. Often in this little room, cosiest in the house, Jolyon would catch a moment of communion with his father. Not, indeed, that he had definitely any faith in the persistence of the human spirit — the feeling was not so logical — it was, rather, an atmospheric impact, like a scent, or one of those strong animistic impressions from forms, or effects of light, to which those with the artist's eye are especially prone. Here only — in this little unchanged room where his father had spent the most of his waking hours — could be retrieved the feeling that he was not quite gone, that the steady counsel of that old spirit and the warmth of his masterful lovability endured.

What would his father be advising now, in this sudden recrudescence of an old tragedy — what would he say to this menace against her to whom he had taken such a fancy in the last weeks of his life? 'I must do my best for her,' thought Jolyon; 'he left her to me in his will. But what is the best?'

And as if seeking to regain the sapience, the balance and shrewd common sense of that old Forsyte, he sat down in the ancient chair and crossed his knees. But he felt a mere shadow sitting there; nor did any inspiration come, while the fingers of the wind tapped on the darkening panes of the french-window.

'Go and see her?' he thought, 'or ask her to come down here? What's her life been? What is it now, I wonder? Beastly to rake up things at this time of day.' Again the figure of his cousin standing with a hand on a front door of a fine olive-green leaped out, vivid, like one of those figures from old-fashioned clocks when the hour strikes; and his words sounded in Jolyon's ears clearer than any chime: "I manage my own affairs. I've told you once, I tell you again: We are not at home." The repugnance he had then felt for Soames — for his flat-cheeked, shaven face full of spiritual bull-doggedness; for his spare, square, sleek figure slightly crouched as it were over the bone he could not digest — came now again, fresh as ever, nay, with an odd increase. 'I dislike him,' he thought, 'I dislike him to the very roots of me. And that's lucky; it'll make it easier for me to back his wife.' Half-artist, and half-Forsyte, Jolyon was constitutionally averse from what he termed 'ructions'; unless angered, he conformed deeply to that classic description of the she-dog, 'Er'd ruther run than fight.' A little smile became settled in his beard. Ironical that Soames should come down here — to this house, built for himself! How he had gazed and gaped at this ruin of his past intention; furtively nosing at the walls and stairway, appraising everything! And intuitively Jolyon thought: 'I believe the fellow even now would like to be living here. He could never leave off longing for what he once owned! Well, I must act, somehow or other; but it's a bore — a great bore.'

Late that evening he wrote to the Chelsea flat, asking if Irene would see him.

The old century which had seen the plant of individualism flower so wonderfully was setting in a sky orange with coming storms. Rumours of war added to the briskness of a London turbulent at the close of the summer holidays. And the streets to Jolyon, who was not often up in town, had a feverish look, due to these new motorcars and cabs, of which he disapproved aesthetically. He counted these vehicles from his hansom, and made the proportion of them one in twenty. 'They were one in thirty about a year ago,' he thought; 'they've come to stay. Just so much more rattling round of wheels and general stink'— for he was one of those rather rare Liberals who object to anything new when it takes a material form; and he instructed his driver to get down to the river quickly, out of the traffic, desiring to look at the water through the mellowing screen of plane-trees. At the little block of flats which stood back some fifty yards from the Embankment, he told the cabman to wait, and went up to the first floor.

Yes, Mrs. Heron was at home!

The effect of a settled if very modest income was at once apparent to him remembering the threadbare refinement in that tiny flat eight years ago when he announced her good fortune. Everything was now fresh, dainty, and smelled of flowers. The general effect was silvery with touches of black, hydrangea colour, and gold. 'A woman of great taste,' he thought. Time had dealt gently with Jolyon, for he was a Forsyte. But with Irene Time hardly seemed to deal at all, or such was his impression. She appeared to him not a day older, standing there in mole-coloured velvet corduroy, with soft dark eyes and dark gold hair, with outstretched hand and a little smile.

“Won’t you sit down?”

He had probably never occupied a chair with a fuller sense of embarrassment.

“You look absolutely unchanged,” he said.

“And you look younger, Cousin Jolyon.”

Jolyon ran his hands through his hair, whose thickness was still a comfort to him.

“I’m ancient, but I don’t feel it. That’s one thing about painting, it keeps you young. Titian lived to ninety-nine, and had to have plague to kill him off. Do you know, the first time I ever saw you I thought of a picture by him?”

“When did you see me for the first time?”

“In the Botanical Gardens.”

“How did you know me, if you’d never seen me before?”

“By someone who came up to you.” He was looking at her hardily, but her face did not change; and she said quietly:

“Yes; many lives ago.”

“What is your recipe for youth, Irene?”

“People who don’t live are wonderfully preserved.”

H’m! a bitter little saying! People who don’t live! But an opening, and he took it. “You remember my Cousin Soames?”

He saw her smile faintly at that whimsicality, and at once went on:

“He came to see me the day before yesterday! He wants a divorce. Do you?”

“I?” The word seemed startled out of her. “After twelve years? It’s rather late. Won’t it be difficult?”

Jolyon looked hard into her face. “Unless. . . . ” he said.

“Unless I have a lover now. But I have never had one since.”

What did he feel at the simplicity and candour of those words? Relief, surprise, pity! Venus for twelve years without a lover!

“And yet,” he said, “I suppose you would give a good deal to be free, too?”

“I don’t know. What does it matter, now?”

“But if you were to love again?”

“I should love.” In that simple answer she seemed to sum up the whole philosophy of one on whom the world had turned its back.

“Well! Is there anything you would like me to say to him?”

“Only that I’m sorry he’s not free. He had his chance once. I don’t know why he didn’t take it.”

“Because he was a Forsyte; we never part with things, you know, unless we want something in their place; and not always then.”

Irene smiled. “Don’t you, Cousin Jolyon? — I think you do.”

“Of course, I’m a bit of a mongrel — not quite a pure Forsyte. I never take the halfpennies off my cheques, I put them on,” said Jolyon uneasily.

“Well, what does Soames want in place of me now?”

“I don’t know; perhaps children.”

She was silent for a little, looking down.

“Yes,” she murmured; “it’s hard. I would help him to be free if I could.”

Jolyon gazed into his hat, his embarrassment was increasing fast; so was his admiration, his wonder, and his pity. She was so lovely, and so lonely; and altogether it was such a coil!

“Well,” he said, “I shall have to see Soames. If there’s anything I can do for you I’m always at your service. You must think of me as a wretched substitute for my father. At all events I’ll let you know what happens when I speak to Soames. He may supply the material himself.”

She shook her head.

“You see, he has a lot to lose; and I have nothing. I should like him to be free; but I don’t see what I can do.”

“Nor I at the moment,” said Jolyon, and soon after took his leave. He went down to his hansom. Half-past three! Soames would be at his office still.

“To the Poultry,” he called through the trap. In front of the Houses of Parliament and in Whitehall, newsvendors were calling, “Grave situation in the Transvaal!” but the cries hardly roused him, absorbed in recollection of that very beautiful figure, of her soft dark glance, and the words: “I have never had one since.” What on earth did such a woman do with her life, back-watered like this? Solitary, unprotected, with every man’s hand against her or rather — reaching out to grasp her at the least sign. And year after year she went on like that!

The word ‘Poultry’ above the passing citizens brought him back to reality.

‘Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte,’ in black letters on a ground the colour of peasoup, spurred him to a sort of vigour, and he went up the stone stairs muttering: “Fusty musty ownerships! Well, we couldn’t do without them!”

“I want Mr. Soames Forsyte,” he said to the boy who opened the door.

“What name?”

“Mr. Jolyon Forsyte.”

The youth looked at him curiously, never having seen a Forsyte with a beard, and vanished.

The offices of ‘Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte’ had slowly absorbed the offices of ‘Tooting and Bowles,’ and occupied the whole of the first floor.

The firm consisted now of nothing but Soames and a number of managing and articled clerks. The complete retirement of James some six years ago had accelerated business, to which the final touch of speed had been imparted when Bustard dropped off, worn out, as many believed, by the suit of ‘Fryer versus Forsyte,’ more in Chancery than ever and less likely to benefit its beneficiaries. Soames, with his saner grasp of actualities, had never permitted it to worry him; on the contrary, he had long perceived that Providence had presented him therein with L200 a year net in perpetuity, and — why not?

When Jolyon entered, his cousin was drawing out a list of holdings in Consols, which in view of the rumours of war he was going to advise his companies to put on the market at once, before other companies did the same. He looked round, sidelong, and said:

“How are you? Just one minute. Sit down, won’t you?” And having entered three amounts, and set a ruler to keep his place, he turned towards Jolyon, biting the side of his flat forefinger. . . .

“Yes?” he said.

“I have seen her.”

Soames frowned.

“Well?”

“She has remained faithful to memory.”

Having said that, Jolyon was ashamed. His cousin had flushed a dusky yellowish red. What had made him tease the poor brute!

“I was to tell you she is sorry you are not free. Twelve years is a long time. You know your law, and what chance it gives you.” Soames uttered a curious little grunt, and the two remained a full minute without speaking. ‘Like wax!’ thought Jolyon, watching that close face, where the flush was fast subsiding. ‘He’ll never give me a sign of what he’s thinking, or going to do. Like wax!’ And he transferred his gaze to a plan of that flourishing town, ‘By-Street on Sea,’ the future existence of which lay exposed on the wall to the possessive instincts of the firm’s clients. The whimsical thought flashed through him: ‘I wonder if I shall get a bill of costs for this —“To attending Mr. Jolyon Forsyte in the matter of my divorce, to receiving his account of his visit to my wife, and to advising him to go and see her again, sixteen and eightpence.”’

Suddenly Soames said: “I can’t go on like this. I tell you, I can’t go on like this.” His eyes were shifting from side to side, like an animal’s when it looks for way of escape. ‘He really suffers,’ thought Jolyon; ‘I’ve no business to forget that, just because I don’t like him.’

“Surely,” he said gently, “it lies with yourself. A man can always put these things through if he’ll take it on himself.”

Soames turned square to him, with a sound which seemed to come from somewhere very deep.

“Why should I suffer more than I’ve suffered already? Why should I?”

Jolyon could only shrug his shoulders. His reason agreed, his instinct rebelled; he could not have said why.

“Your father,” went on Soames, “took an interest in her — why, goodness knows! And I suppose you do too?” he gave Jolyon a sharp look. “It seems to me that one only has to do another person a wrong to get all the sympathy. I don’t know in what way I was to blame — I’ve never known. I always treated her well. I gave her everything she could wish for. I wanted her.”

Again Jolyon’s reason nodded; again his instinct shook its head. ‘What is it?’ he thought; ‘there must be something wrong in me. Yet if there is, I’d rather be wrong than right.’

“After all,” said Soames with a sort of glum fierceness, “she was my wife.”

In a flash the thought went through his listener: ‘There it is! Ownerships! Well, we all own things. But — human beings! Pah!’

“You have to look at facts,” he said drily, “or rather the want of them.”

Soames gave him another quick suspicious look.

“The want of them?” he said. “Yes, but I am not so sure.”

“I beg your pardon,” replied Jolyon; “I’ve told you what she said. It was explicit.”

“My experience has not been one to promote blind confidence in her word. We shall see.”

Jolyon got up.

“Good-bye,” he said curtly.

“Good-bye,” returned Soames; and Jolyon went out trying to understand the look, half-startled, half-menacing, on his cousin’s face. He sought Waterloo Station in a disturbed frame of mind, as though the skin of his moral being had been scraped; and all the way down in the train he thought of Irene in her lonely flat, and of Soames in his lonely office, and of the strange paralysis of life that lay on them both. ‘In chancery!’ he thought. ‘Both their necks in chancery — and her’s so pretty!’

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Chapter 9

Val Hears the News

The keeping of engagements had not as yet been a conspicuous feature in the life of young Val Dartie, so that when he broke two and kept one, it was the latter event which caused him, if anything, the greater surprise, while jogging back to town from Robin Hill after his ride with Holly. She had been even prettier than he had thought her yesterday, on her silver-roan, long-tailed ‘palfrey’; and it seemed to him, self-critical in the brumous October gloaming and the outskirts of London, that only his boots had shone throughout their two-hour companionship. He took out his new gold ‘hunter’— present from James — and looked not at the time, but at sections of his face in the glittering back of its opened case. He had a temporary spot over one eyebrow, and it displeased him, for it must have displeased her. Crum never had any spots. Together with Crum rose the scene in the promenade of the Pandemonium. To-day he had not had the faintest desire to unbosom himself to Holly about his father. His father lacked poetry, the stirrings of which he was feeling for the first time in his nineteen years. The Liberty, with Cynthia Dark, that almost mythical embodiment of rapture; the Pandemonium, with the woman of uncertain age — both seemed to Val completely ‘off,’ fresh from communion with this new, shy, dark-haired young cousin of his. She rode ‘Jolly well,’ too, so that it had been all the more flattering that she had let him lead her where he would in the long gallops of Richmond Park, though she knew them so much better than he did. Looking back on it all, he was mystified by the barrenness of his speech; he felt that he could say ‘an awful lot of fetching things’ if he had but the chance again, and the thought that he must go back to Littlehampton on the morrow, and to Oxford on the twelfth —‘to that beastly exam,’ too — without the faintest chance of first seeing her again, caused darkness to settle on his spirit even more quickly than on the evening. He should write to her, however, and she had promised to answer. Perhaps, too, she would come up to Oxford to see her brother. That thought was like the first star, which came out as he rode into Padwick’s livery stables in the purlieus of Sloane Square. He got off and stretched himself luxuriously, for he had ridden some twenty-five good miles. The Dartie within him made him chaffer for five minutes with young Padwick concerning the favourite for the Cambridgeshire; then with the words, “Put the gee down to my account,” he walked away, a little wide at the knees, and flipping his boots with his knotty little cane. ‘I don’t feel a bit inclined to go out,’ he thought. ‘I wonder if mother will stand fizz for my last night!’ With ‘fizz’ and recollection, he could well pass a domestic evening.

When he came down, speckless after his bath, he found his mother scrupulous in a low evening dress, and, to his annoyance, his Uncle Soames. They stopped talking when he came in; then his uncle said:

“He’d better be told.”

At those words, which meant something about his father, of course, Val’s first thought was of Holly. Was it anything beastly? His mother began speaking.

“Your father,” she said in her fashionably appointed voice, while her fingers plucked rather pitifully at sea-green brocade, “your father, my dear boy, has — is not at Newmarket; he’s on his way to South America. He — he’s left us.”

Val looked from her to Soames. Left them! Was he sorry? Was he fond of his father? It seemed to him that he did not know. Then, suddenly — as at a whiff of gardenias and cigars — his heart twitched within him, and he was sorry. One’s father belonged to one, could not go off in this fashion — it was not done! Nor had he always been the ‘bounder’ of the Pandemonium promenade. There were precious memories of tailors’ shops and horses, tips at school, and general lavish kindness, when in luck.

“But why?” he said. Then, as a sportsman himself, was sorry he had asked. The mask of his mother’s face was all disturbed; and he burst out:

“All right, Mother, don’t tell me! Only, what does it mean?”

“A divorce, Val, I’m afraid.”

Val uttered a queer little grunt, and looked quickly at his uncle — that uncle whom he had been taught to look on as a guarantee against the consequences of having a father, even against the Dartie blood in his own veins. The flat-checked visage seemed to wince, and this upset him.

“It won’t be public, will it?”

So vividly before him had come recollection of his own eyes glued to the unsavoury details of many a divorce suit in the Public Press.

“Can’t it be done quietly somehow? It’s so disgusting for — for mother, and — and everybody.”

“Everything will be done as quietly as it can, you may be sure.”

“Yes — but, why is it necessary at all? Mother doesn’t want to marry again.”

Himself, the girls, their name tarnished in the sight of his schoolfellows and of Crum, of the men at Oxford, of — Holly! Unbearable! What was to be gained by it?

“Do you, Mother?” he said sharply.

Thus brought face to face with so much of her own feeling by the one she loved best in the world, Winifred rose from the Empire chair in which she had been sitting. She saw that her son would be against her unless he was told everything; and, yet, how could she tell him? Thus, still plucking at the green brocade, she stared at Soames. Val, too, stared at Soames. Surely this embodiment of respectability and the sense of property could not wish to bring such a slur on his own sister!

Soames slowly passed a little inlaid paperknife over the smooth surface of a marqueterie table; then, without looking at his nephew, he began:

“You don’t understand what your mother has had to put up with these twenty years. This is only the last straw, Val.” And glancing up sideways at Winifred, he added:

“Shall I tell him?”

Winifred was silent. If he were not told, he would be against her! Yet, how dreadful to be told such things of his own father! Clenching her lips, she nodded.

Soames spoke in a rapid, even voice:

“He has always been a burden round your mother’s neck. She has paid his debts over and over again; he has often been drunk, abused and threatened her; and now he is gone to Buenos Aires with a dancer.” And, as if distrusting the efficacy of those words on the boy, he went on quickly:

“He took your mother’s pearls to give to her.”

Val jerked up his hand, then. At that signal of distress Winifred cried out:

“That’ll do, Soames — stop!”

In the boy, the Dartie and the Forsyte were struggling. For debts, drink, dancers, he had a certain sympathy; but the pearls — no! That was too much! And suddenly he found his mother’s hand squeezing his.

“You see,” he heard Soames say, “we can’t have it all begin over again. There’s a limit; we must strike while the iron’s hot.”

Val freed his hand.

“But — you’re — never going to bring out that about the pearls! I couldn’t stand that — I simply couldn’t!”

Winifred cried out:

“No, no, Val — oh no! That’s only to show you how impossible your father is!” And his uncle nodded. Somewhat assuaged, Val took out a cigarette. His father had bought him that thin curved case. Oh! it was unbearable — just as he was going up to Oxford!

“Can’t mother be protected without?” he said. “I could look after her. It could always be done later if it was really necessary.”

A smile played for a moment round Soames’ lips, and became bitter.

“You don’t know what you’re talking of; nothing’s so fatal as delay in such matters.”

“Why?”

“I tell you, boy, nothing’s so fatal. I know from experience.”

His voice had the ring of exasperation. Val regarded him round-eyed, never having known his uncle express any sort of feeling. Oh! Yes — he remembered now — there had been an Aunt Irene, and something had happened — something which people kept dark; he had heard his father once use an unmentionable word of her.

“I don’t want to speak ill of your father,” Soames went on doggedly, “but I know him well enough to be sure that he’ll be back on your mother’s hands before a year’s over. You can imagine what that will mean to her and to all of you after this. The only thing is to cut the knot for good.”

In spite of himself, Val was impressed; and, happening to look at his mother’s face, he got what was perhaps his first real insight into the fact that his own feelings were not always what mattered most.

“All right, mother,” he said; “we’ll back you up. Only I’d like to know when it’ll be. It’s my first term, you know. I don’t want to be up there when it comes off.”

“Oh! my dear boy,” murmured Winifred, “it is a bore for you.” So, by habit, she phrased what, from the expression of her face, was the most poignant regret. “When will it be, Soames?”

“Can’t tell — not for months. We must get restitution first.”

‘What the deuce is that?’ thought Val. ‘What silly brutes lawyers are! Not for months! I know one thing: I’m not going to dine in!’ And he said:

“Awfully sorry, mother, I’ve got to go out to dinner now.”

Though it was his last night, Winifred nodded almost gratefully; they both felt that they had gone quite far enough in the expression of feeling.

Val sought the misty freedom of Green Street, reckless and depressed. And not till he reached Piccadilly did he discover that he had only eighteen-pence. One couldn’t dine off eighteen-pence, and he was very hungry. He looked longingly at the windows of the Iseeum Club, where he had often eaten of the best with his father! Those pearls! There was no getting over them! But the more he brooded and the further he walked the hungrier he naturally became. Short of trailing home, there were only two places where he could go — his grandfather’s in Park Lane, and Timothy’s in the Bayswater Road. Which was the less deplorable? At his grandfather’s he would probably get a better dinner on the spur of the moment. At Timothy’s they gave you a jolly good feed when they expected you, not otherwise. He decided on Park Lane, not unmoved by the thought that to go up to Oxford without affording his grandfather a chance to tip him was hardly fair to either of them. His mother would hear he had been there, of course, and might think it funny; but he couldn’t help that. He rang the bell.

“Hullo, Warmson, any dinner for me, d’you think?”

“They’re just going in, Master Val. Mr. Forsyte will be very glad to see you. He was saying at lunch that he never saw you nowadays.”

Val grinned.

“Well, here I am. Kill the fatted calf, Warmson, let’s have fizz.”

Warmson smiled faintly — in his opinion Val was a young limb.

“I will ask Mrs. Forsyte, Master Val.”

“I say,” Val grumbled, taking off his overcoat, “I’m not at school any more, you know.”

Warmson, not without a sense of humour, opened the door beyond the stag’s-horn coat stand, with the words:

“Mr. Valerus, ma’am.”

“Confound him!” thought Val, entering.

A warm embrace, a “Well, Val!” from Emily, and a rather quavery “So there you are at last!” from James, restored his sense of dignity.

“Why didn’t you let us know? There’s only saddle of mutton. Champagne, Warmson,” said Emily. And they went in.

At the great dining-table, shortened to its utmost, under which so many fashionable legs had rested, James sat at one end, Emily at the other, Val half-way between them; and something of the loneliness of his grandparents, now that all their four children were flown, reached the boy’s spirit. ‘I hope I shall kick the bucket long before I’m as old as grandfather,’ he thought. ‘Poor old chap, he’s as thin as a rail!’ And lowering his voice while his grandfather and Warmson were in discussion about sugar in the soup, he said to Emily:

“It’s pretty brutal at home, Granny. I suppose you know.”

“Yes, dear boy.”

"Uncle Soames was there when I left. I say, isn't there anything to be done to prevent a divorce? Why is he so beastly keen on it?"

"Hush, my dear!" murmured Emily; "we're keeping it from your grandfather."

James' voice sounded from the other end.

"What's that? What are you talking about?"

"About Val's college," returned Emily. "Young Pariser was there, James; you remember — he nearly broke the Bank at Monte Carlo afterwards."

James muttered that he did not know — Val must look after himself up there, or he'd get into bad ways. And he looked at his grandson with gloom, out of which affection distrustfully glimmered.

"What I'm afraid of," said Val to his plate, "is of being hard up, you know."

By instinct he knew that the weak spot in that old man was fear of insecurity for his grandchildren.

"Well," said James, and the soup in his spoon dribbled over, "you'll have a good allowance; but you must keep within it."

"Of course," murmured Val; "if it is good. How much will it be, Grandfather?"

"Three hundred and fifty; it's too much. I had next to nothing at your age."

Val sighed. He had hoped for four, and been afraid of three. "I don't know what your young cousin has," said James; "he's up there. His father's a rich man."

"Aren't you?" asked Val hardily.

"I?" replied James, flustered. "I've got so many expenses. Your father. . . . " and he was silent.

"Cousin Jolyon's got an awfully jolly place. I went down there with Uncle Soames — ripping stables."

"Ah!" murmured James profoundly. "That house — I knew how it would be!" And he lapsed into gloomy meditation over his fish-bones. His son's tragedy, and the deep cleavage it had caused in the Forsyte family, had still the power to draw him down into a whirlpool of doubts and misgivings. Val, who hankered to talk of Robin Hill, because Robin Hill meant Holly, turned to Emily and said:

"Was that the house built for Uncle Soames?" And, receiving her nod, went on: "I wish you'd tell me about him, Granny. What became of Aunt Irene? Is she still going? He seems awfully worked-up about something to-night."

Emily laid her finger on her lips, but the word Irene had caught James' ear.

"What's that?" he said, staying a piece of mutton close to his lips. "Who's been seeing her? I knew we hadn't heard the last of that."

"Now, James," said Emily, "eat your dinner. Nobody's been seeing anybody."

James put down his fork.

"There you go," he said. "I might die before you'd tell me of it. Is Soames getting a divorce?"

"Nonsense," said Emily with incomparable aplomb; "Soames is much too sensible."

James had sought his own throat, gathering the long white whiskers together on the skin and bone of it.

"She — she was always. . . . " he said, and with that enigmatic remark the conversation lapsed, for Warmson had returned. But later, when the saddle of mutton had been succeeded by sweet, savoury, and dessert, and Val had received a cheque for twenty pounds and his grandfather's kiss — like no other kiss in the world, from lips pushed out with a sort of fearful suddenness, as if yielding to weakness — he returned to the charge in the hall.

"Tell us about Uncle Soames, Granny. Why is he so keen on mother's getting a divorce?"

"Your Uncle Soames," said Emily, and her voice had in it an exaggerated assurance, "is a lawyer, my dear boy. He's sure to know best."

"Is he?" muttered Val. "But what did become of Aunt Irene? I remember she was jolly good-looking."

"She — er. . . . " said Emily, "behaved very badly. We don't talk about it."

"Well, I don't want everybody at Oxford to know about our affairs," ejaculated Val; "it's a brutal idea. Why couldn't father be prevented without its being made public?"

Emily sighed. She had always lived rather in an atmosphere of divorce, owing to her fashionable proclivities — so many of those whose legs had been under her table having gained a certain notoriety. When, however, it touched her own family, she liked it no better than other people. But she was eminently practical, and a woman of courage, who never pursued a shadow in preference to its substance.

“Your mother,” she said, “will be happier if she’s quite free, Val. Good-night, my dear boy; and don’t wear loud waistcoats up at Oxford, they’re not the thing just now. Here’s a little present.”

With another five pounds in his hand, and a little warmth in his heart, for he was fond of his grandmother, he went out into Park Lane. A wind had cleared the mist, the autumn leaves were rustling, and the stars were shining. With all that money in his pocket an impulse to ‘see life’ beset him; but he had not gone forty yards in the direction of Piccadilly when Holly’s shy face, and her eyes with an imp dancing in their gravity, came up before him, and his hand seemed to be tingling again from the pressure of her warm gloved hand. ‘No, dash it!’ he thought, ‘I’m going home!’

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Chapter 10

Soames Entertains the Future

It was full late for the river, but the weather was lovely, and summer lingered below the yellowing leaves. Soames took many looks at the day from his riverside garden near Mapledurham that Sunday morning.

With his own hands he put flowers about his little house-boat, and equipped the punt, in which, after lunch, he proposed to take them on the river. Placing those Chinese-looking cushions, he could not tell whether or no he wished to take Annette alone. She was so very pretty — could he trust himself not to say irrevocable words, passing beyond the limits of discretion? Roses on the veranda were still in bloom, and the hedges ever-green, so that there was almost nothing of middle-aged autumn to chill the mood; yet was he nervous, fidgety, strangely distrustful of his powers to steer just the right course. This visit had been planned to produce in Annette and her mother a due sense of his possessions, so that they should be ready to receive with respect any overture he might later be disposed to make. He dressed with great care, making himself neither too young nor too old, very thankful that his hair was still thick and smooth and had no grey in it. Three times he went up to his picture-gallery. If they had any knowledge at all, they must see at once that his collection alone was worth at least thirty thousand pounds. He minutely inspected, too, the pretty bedroom overlooking the river where they would take off their hats. It would be her bedroom if — if the matter went through, and she became his wife. Going up to the dressing-table he passed his hand over the lilac-coloured pincushion, into which were stuck all kinds of pins; a bowl of pot-pourri exhaled a scent that made his head turn just a little. His wife! If only the whole thing could be settled out of hand, and there was not the nightmare of this divorce to be gone through first; and with gloom puckered on his forehead, he looked out at the river shining beyond the roses and the lawn. Madame Lamotte would never resist this prospect for her child; Annette would never resist her mother. If only he were free! He drove to the station to meet them. What taste Frenchwomen had! Madame Lamotte was in black with touches of lilac colour, Annette in greyish lilac linen, with cream coloured gloves and hat. Rather pale she looked and Londony; and her blue eyes were demure. Waiting for them to come down to lunch, Soames stood in the open french-window of the diningroom moved by that sensuous delight in sunshine and flowers and trees which only came to the full when youth and beauty were there to share it with one. He had ordered the lunch with intense consideration; the wine was a very special Sauterne, the whole appointments of the meal perfect, the coffee served on the veranda super-excellent. Madame Lamotte accepted creme de menthe; Annette refused. Her manners were charming, with just a suspicion of 'the conscious beauty' creeping into them. 'Yes,' thought Soames, 'another year of London and that sort of life, and she'll be spoiled.'

Madame was in sedate French raptures. "Adorable! Le soleil est si bon! How everything is chic, is it not, Annette? Monsieur is a real Monte Cristo." Annette murmured assent, with a look up at Soames which he could not read. He proposed a turn on the river. But to punt two persons when one of them looked so ravishing on those Chinese cushions was merely to suffer from a sense of lost opportunity; so they went but a short way towards Pangbourne, drifting slowly back, with every now and then an autumn leaf dropping on Annette or on her mother's black amplitude. And Soames was not happy, worried by the thought: 'How — when — where — can I say — what?' They did not yet even know that he was married. To tell them he was married might jeopardise his every chance; yet, if he did not definitely make them understand that he wished for Annette's hand, it would be dropping into some other clutch before he was free to claim it.

At tea, which they both took with lemon, Soames spoke of the Transvaal.

"There'll be war," he said.

Madame Lamotte lamented.

"Ces pauvres gens bergers!" Could they not be left to themselves?

Soames smiled — the question seemed to him absurd.

Surely as a woman of business she understood that the British could not abandon their legitimate commercial interests.

"Ah! that!" But Madame Lamotte found that the English were a little hypocrite. They were talking of justice and the Uitlanders, not of business. Monsieur was the first who had spoken to her of that.

"The Boers are only half-civilised," remarked Soames; "they stand in the way of progress. It will never do to let our suzerainty go."

"What does that mean to say? Suzerainty!"

"What a strange word!" Soames became eloquent, roused by these threats to the principle of possession, and stimulated by Annette's eyes fixed on him. He was delighted when presently she said:

"I think Monsieur is right. They should be taught a lesson." She was sensible!

"Of course," he said, "we must act with moderation. I'm no jingo. We must be firm without bullying. Will you come up and see my pictures?" Moving from one to another of these treasures, he soon perceived that they knew nothing. They passed his last Mauve, that remarkable study of a 'Hay-cart going Home,' as if it were a lithograph. He waited almost with awe to see how they would view the jewel of his collection — an Israels whose price he had watched ascending till he was now almost certain it had reached top value, and would be better on the market again. They did not view it at all. This was a shock; and yet to have in Annette a virgin taste to form would be better than to have the silly, half-baked predilections of the English middle-class to deal with. At the end of the gallery was a Meissonier of which he was rather ashamed — Meissonier was so steadily going down. Madame Lamotte stopped before it.

"Meissonier! Ah! What a jewel!" Soames took advantage of that moment. Very gently touching Annette's arm, he said:

"How do you like my place, Annette?"

She did not shrink, did not respond; she looked at him full, looked down, and murmured:

"Who would not like it? It is so beautiful!"

"Perhaps some day —" Soames said, and stopped.

So pretty she was, so self-possessed — she frightened him. Those cornflower-blue eyes, the turn of that creamy neck, her delicate curves — she was a standing temptation to indiscretion! No! No! One must be sure of one's ground — much surer! 'If I hold off,' he thought, 'it will tantalise her.' And he crossed over to Madame Lamotte, who was still in front of the Meissonier.

"Yes, that's quite a good example of his later work. You must come again, Madame, and see them lighted up. You must both come and spend a night."

Enchanted, would it not be beautiful to see them lighted? By moonlight too, the river must be ravishing!

Annette murmured:

"Thou art sentimental, Maman!"

Sentimental! That black-robed, comely, substantial Frenchwoman of the world! And suddenly he was certain as he could be that there was no sentiment in either of them. All the better. Of what use sentiment? And yet. . . .!

He drove to the station with them, and saw them into the train. To the tightened pressure of his hand it seemed that Annette's fingers responded just a little; her face smiled at him through the dark.

He went back to the carriage, brooding. "Go on home, Jordan," he said to the coachman; "I'll walk." And he strode out into the darkening lanes, caution and the desire of possession playing see-saw within him. 'Bon soir, monsieur!' How softly she had said it. To know what was in her mind! The French — they were like cats — one could tell nothing! But — how pretty! What a perfect young thing to hold in one's arms! What a mother for his heir! And he thought, with a smile, of his family and their surprise at a French wife, and their curiosity, and of the way he would play with it and buffet it confound them!

The, poplars sighed in the darkness; an owl hooted. Shadows deepened in the water. 'I will and must be free,' he thought. 'I won't hang about any longer. I'll go and see Irene. If you want things done, do them yourself. I must live again — live and move and have my being.' And in echo to that queer biblicality church-bells chimed the call to evening prayer.

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Chapter 11

And Visits the Past

On a Tuesday evening after dining at his club Soames set out to do what required more courage and perhaps less delicacy than anything he had yet undertaken in his life — save perhaps his birth, and one other action. He chose the evening, indeed, partly because Irene was more likely to be in, but mainly because he had failed to find sufficient resolution by daylight, had needed wine to give him extra daring.

He left his hansom on the Embankment, and walked up to the Old Church, uncertain of the block of flats where he knew she lived. He found it hiding behind a much larger mansion; and having read the name, 'Mrs. Irene Heron'— Heron, forsooth! Her maiden name: so she used that again, did she? — he stepped back into the road to look up at the windows of the first floor. Light was coming through in the corner fiat, and he could hear a piano being played. He had never had a love of music, had secretly borne it a grudge in the old days when so often she had turned to her piano, making of it a refuge place into which she knew he could not enter. Repulse! The long repulse, at first restrained and secret, at last open! Bitter memory came with that sound. It must be she playing, and thus almost assured of seeing her, he stood more undecided than ever. Shivers of anticipation ran through him; his tongue felt dry, his heart beat fast. 'I have no cause to be afraid,' he thought. And then the lawyer stirred within him. Was he doing a foolish thing? Ought he not to have arranged a formal meeting in the presence of her trustee? No! Not before that fellow Jolyon, who sympathised with her! Never! He crossed back into the doorway, and, slowly, to keep down the beating of his heart, mounted the single flight of stairs and rang the bell. When the door was opened to him his sensations were regulated by the scent which came — that perfume — from away back in the past, bringing muffled remembrance: fragrance of a drawing-room he used to enter, of a house he used to own — perfume of dried rose-leaves and honey!

"Say, Mr. Forsyte," he said, "your mistress will see me, I know." He had thought this out; she would think it was Jolyon!

When the maid was gone and he was alone in the tiny hall, where the light was dim from one pearly-shaded sconce, and walls, carpet, everything was silvery, making the walled-in space all ghostly, he could only think ridiculously: 'Shall I go in with my overcoat on, or take it off?' The music ceased; the maid said from the doorway:

"Will you walk in, sir?"

Soames walked in. He noted mechanically that all was still silvery, and that the upright piano was of satinwood. She had risen and stood recoiled against it; her hand, placed on the keys as if groping for support, had struck a sudden discord, held for a moment, and released. The light from the shaded piano-candle fell on her neck, leaving her face rather in shadow. She was in a black evening dress, with a sort of mantilla over her shoulders — he did not remember ever having seen her in black, and the thought passed through him: 'She dresses even when she's alone.'

"You!" he heard her whisper.

Many times Soames had rehearsed this scene in fancy. Rehearsal served him not at all. He simply could not speak. He had never thought that the sight of this woman whom he had once so passionately desired, so completely owned, and whom he had not seen for twelve years, could affect him in this way. He had imagined himself speaking and acting, half as man of business, half as judge. And now it was as if he were in the presence not of a mere woman and erring wife, but of some force, subtle and elusive as atmosphere itself within him and outside. A kind of defensive irony welled up in him.

"Yes, it's a queer visit! I hope you're well."

"Thank you. Will you sit down?"

She had moved away from the piano, and gone over to a window-seat, sinking on to it, with her hands clasped in her lap. Light fell on her there, so that Soames could see her face, eyes, hair, strangely as he remembered them, strangely beautiful.

He sat down on the edge of a satinwood chair, upholstered with silver-coloured stuff, close to where he was standing.

"You have not changed," he said.

"No? What have you come for?"

“To discuss things.”

“I have heard what you want from your cousin.”

“Well?”

“I am willing. I have always been.”

The sound of her voice, reserved and close, the sight of her figure watchfully poised, defensive, was helping him now. A thousand memories of her, ever on the watch against him, stirred, and. . . .

“Perhaps you will be good enough, then, to give me information on which I can act. The law must be complied with.”

“I have none to give you that you don’t know of.”

“Twelve years! Do you suppose I can believe that?”

“I don’t suppose you will believe anything I say; but it’s the truth.”

Soames looked at her hard. He had said that she had not changed; now he perceived that she had. Not in face, except that it was more beautiful; not in form, except that it was a little fuller — no! She had changed spiritually. There was more of her, as it were, something of activity and daring, where there had been sheer passive resistance. ‘Ah!’ he thought, ‘that’s her independent income! Confound Uncle Jolyon!’

“I suppose you’re comfortably off now?” he said.

“Thank you, yes.”

“Why didn’t you let me provide for you? I would have, in spite of everything.”

A faint smile came on her lips; but she did not answer.

“You are still my wife,” said Soames. Why he said that, what he meant by it, he knew neither when he spoke nor after. It was a truism almost preposterous, but its effect was startling. She rose from the window-seat, and stood for a moment perfectly still, looking at him. He could see her bosom heaving. Then she turned to the window and threw it open.

“Why do that?” he said sharply. “You’ll catch cold in that dress. I’m not dangerous.” And he uttered a little sad laugh.

She echoed it — faintly, bitterly.

“It was — habit.”

“Rather odd habit,” said Soames as bitterly. “Shut the window!”

She shut it and sat down again. She had developed power, this woman — this — wife of his! He felt it issuing from her as she sat there, in a sort of armour. And almost unconsciously he rose and moved nearer; he wanted to see the expression on her face. Her eyes met his unflinching. Heavens! how clear they were, and what a dark brown against that white skin, and that burnt-amber hair! And how white her shoulders.

Funny sensation this! He ought to hate her.

“You had better tell me,” he said; “it’s to your advantage to be free as well as to mine. That old matter is too old.”

“I have told you.”

“Do you mean to tell me there has been nothing — nobody?”

“Nobody. You must go to your own life.”

Stung by that retort, Soames moved towards the piano and back to the hearth, to and fro, as he had been wont in the old days in their drawing-room when his feelings were too much for him.

“That won’t do,” he said. “You deserted me. In common justice it’s for you. . . . ”

He saw her shrug those white shoulders, heard her murmur:

“Yes. Why didn’t you divorce me then? Should I have cared?”

He stopped, and looked at her intently with a sort of curiosity. What on earth did she do with herself, if she really lived quite alone? And why had he not divorced her? The old feeling that she had never understood him, never done him justice, bit him while he stared at her.

“Why couldn’t you have made me a good wife?” he said.

“Yes; it was a crime to marry you. I have paid for it. You will find some way perhaps. You needn’t mind my name, I have none to lose. Now I think you had better go.”

A sense of defeat — of being defrauded of his self-justification, and of something else beyond power of explanation to himself, beset Soames like the breath of a cold fog. Mechanically he reached up, took from the mantel-shelf a little china bowl, reversed it, and said:

“Lowestoft. Where did you get this? I bought its fellow at Jobson’s.” And, visited by the sudden memory of how, those many years ago, he and she had bought china together, he remained staring at the little bowl, as if it contained all the past. Her voice roused him.

“Take it. I don’t want it.”

Soames put it back on the shelf.

“Will you shake hands?” he said.

A faint smile curved her lips. She held out her hand. It was cold to his rather feverish touch. ‘She’s made of ice,’ he thought —‘she was always made of ice!’ But even as that thought darted through him, his senses were assailed by the perfume of her dress and body, as though the warmth within her, which had never been for him, were struggling to show its presence. And he turned on his heel. He walked out and away, as if someone with a whip were after him, not even looking for a cab, glad of the empty Embankment and the cold river, and the thick-strewn shadows of the plane-tree leaves — confused, flurried, sore at heart, and vaguely disturbed, as though he had made some deep mistake whose consequences he could not foresee. And the fantastic thought suddenly assailed him if instead of, ‘I think you had better go,’ she had said, ‘I think you had better stay!’ What should he have felt, what would he have done? That cursed attraction of her was there for him even now, after all these years of estrangement and bitter thoughts. It was there, ready to mount to his head at a sign, a touch. ‘I was a fool to go!’ he muttered. ‘I’ve advanced nothing. Who could imagine? I never thought!’ Memory, flown back to the first years of his marriage, played him torturing tricks. She had not deserved to keep her beauty — the beauty he had owned and known so well. And a kind of bitterness at the tenacity of his own admiration welled up in him. Most men would have hated the sight of her, as she had deserved. She had spoiled his life, wounded his pride to death, defrauded him of a son. And yet the mere sight of her, cold and resisting as ever, had this power to upset him utterly! It was some damned magnetism she had! And no wonder if, as she asserted; she had lived untouched these last twelve years. So Bosinney — cursed be his memory! — had lived on all this time with her! Soames could not tell whether he was glad of that knowledge or no.

Nearing his Club at last he stopped to buy a paper. A headline ran: ‘Boers reported to repudiate suzerainty!’ Suzerainty! ‘Just like her!’ he thought: ‘she always did. Suzerainty! I still have it by rights. She must be awfully lonely in that wretched little flat!’

❦

CHAPTER 12

ON FORSYTE ‘CHANGE

Soames belonged to two clubs, ‘The Connoisseurs,’ which he put on his cards and seldom visited, and ‘The Remove,’ which he did not put on his cards and frequented. He had joined this Liberal institution five years ago, having made sure that its members were now nearly all sound Conservatives in heart and pocket, if not in principle. Uncle Nicholas had put him up. The fine reading-room was decorated in the Adam style.

On entering that evening he glanced at the tape for any news about the Transvaal, and noted that Consols were down seven-sixteenths since the morning. He was turning away to seek the reading-room when a voice behind him said:

“Well, Soames, that went off all right.”

It was Uncle Nicholas, in a frock-coat and his special cut-away collar, with a black tie passed through a ring. Heavens! How young and dapper he looked at eighty-two!

“I think Roger’d have been pleased,” his uncle went on. “The thing was very well done. Blackley’s? I’ll make a note of them. Buxton’s done me no good. These Boers are upsetting me — that fellow Chamberlain’s driving the country into war. What do you think?”

“Bound to come,” murmured Soames.

Nicholas passed his hand over his thin, clean-shaven cheeks, very rosy after his summer cure; a slight pout had gathered on his lips. This business had revived all his Liberal principles.

“I mistrust that chap; he’s a stormy petrel. House-property will go down if there’s war. You’ll have trouble with Roger’s estate. I often told him he ought to get out of some of his houses. He was an opinionated beggar.”

‘There was a pair of you!’ thought Soames. But he never argued with an uncle, in that way preserving their opinion of him as ‘a long-headed chap,’ and the legal care of their property.

“They tell me at Timothy’s,” said Nicholas, lowering his voice, “that Dartie has gone off at last. That’ll be a relief to your father. He was a rotten egg.”

Again Soames nodded. If there was a subject on which the Forsytes really agreed, it was the character of Montague Dartie.

“You take care,” said Nicholas, “or he’ll turn up again. Winifred had better have the tooth out, I should say. No use preserving what’s gone bad.”

Soames looked at him sideways. His nerves, exacerbated by the interview he had just come through, disposed him to see a personal allusion in those words.

“I’m advising her,” he said shortly.

“Well,” said Nicholas, “the brougham’s waiting; I must get home. I’m very poorly. Remember me to your father.”

And having thus reconsecrated the ties of blood, he passed down the steps at his youthful gait and was wrapped into his fur coat by the junior porter.

‘I’ve never known Uncle Nicholas other than “very poorly,”’ mused Soames, ‘or seen him look other than everlasting. What a family! Judging by him, I’ve got thirty-eight years of health before me. Well, I’m not going to waste them.’ And going over to a mirror he stood looking at his face. Except for a line or two, and three or four grey hairs in his little dark moustache, had he aged any more than Irene? The prime of life — he and she in the very prime of life! And a fantastic thought shot into his mind. Absurd! Idiotic! But again it came. And genuinely alarmed by the recurrence, as one is by the second fit of shivering which presages a feverish cold, he sat down on the weighing machine. Eleven stone! He had not varied two pounds in twenty years. What age was she? Nearly thirty-seven — not too old to have a child — not at all! Thirty-seven on the ninth of next month. He remembered her birthday well — he had always observed it religiously, even that last birthday so soon before she left him, when he was almost certain she was faithless. Four birthdays in his house. He had looked forward to them, because his gifts had meant a semblance of gratitude, a certain attempt at warmth. Except, indeed, that last birthday — which had tempted him to be too religious! And he shied away in thought. Memory heaps dead leaves on corpse-like deeds, from under which they do but vaguely offend the sense. And then he thought suddenly: ‘I could send her a present for her birthday. After all, we’re Christians! Couldn’t! — couldn’t we join up again!’ And he uttered a deep sigh sitting there. Annette! Ah! but between him and Annette was the need for that wretched divorce suit! And how?

“A man can always work these things, if he’ll take it on himself,” Jolyon had said.

But why should he take the scandal on himself with his whole career as a pillar of the law at stake? It was not fair! It was quixotic! Twelve years’ separation in which he had taken no steps to free himself put out of court the possibility of using her conduct with Bosinney as a ground for divorcing her. By doing nothing to secure relief he had acquiesced, even if the evidence could now be gathered, which was more than doubtful. Besides, his own pride would never let him use that old incident, he had suffered from it too much. No! Nothing but fresh misconduct on her part — but she had denied it; and — almost — he had believed her. Hung up! Utterly hung up!

He rose from the scooped-out red velvet seat with a feeling of constriction about his vitals. He would never sleep with this going on in him! And, taking coat and hat again, he went out, moving eastward. In Trafalgar Square he became aware of some special commotion travelling towards him out of the mouth of the Strand. It materialised in newspaper men calling out so loudly that no words whatever could be heard. He stopped to listen, and one came by.

“Payper! Special! Ultimatium by Krooger! Declaration of war!” Soames bought the paper. There it was in the stop press. . . .! His first thought was: ‘The Boers are committing suicide.’ His second: ‘Is there anything still I ought to sell?’ If so he had missed the chance — there would certainly be a slump in the city to-morrow. He swallowed this thought with a nod of defiance. That ultimatum was insolent — sooner than let it pass he was prepared to lose money. They wanted a lesson, and they would get it; but it would take three months at least to bring them to heel. There weren’t the troops out there; always behind time, the Government! Confound those newspaper rats! What was the use of waking everybody up? Breakfast to-morrow was quite soon enough. And he thought with alarm of his father. They would cry it down Park Lane. Hailing a hansom, he got in and told the man to drive there.

James and Emily had just gone up to bed, and after communicating the news to Warmson, Soames prepared to follow. He paused by after-thought to say:

“What do you think of it, Warmson?”

The butler ceased passing a hat brush over the silk hat Soames had taken off, and, inclining his face a little forward, said in a low voice: “Well, sir, they ‘aven’t a chance, of course; but I’m told they’re very good shots. I’ve got a son in the Inniskillings.”

“You, Warmson? Why, I didn’t know you were married.”

“No, sir. I don’t talk of it. I expect he’ll be going out.”

The slighter shock Soames had felt on discovering that he knew so little of one whom he thought he knew so well was lost in the slight shock of discovering that the war might touch one personally. Born in the year of the Crimean War, he had only come to consciousness by the time the Indian Mutiny was over; since then the many little wars of the British Empire had been entirely professional, quite unconnected with the Forsytes and all they stood for in the body politic. This war would surely be no exception. But his mind ran hastily over his family. Two of the Haymans, he had heard, were in some Yeomanry or other — it had always been a pleasant thought, there was a certain distinction about the Yeomanry; they wore, or used to wear, a blue uniform with silver about it, and rode horses. And Archibald, he remembered, had once on a time joined the Militia, but had given it up because his father, Nicholas, had made such a fuss about his ‘wasting his time peacocking about in a uniform.’ Recently he had heard somewhere that young Nicholas’ eldest, very young Nicholas, had become a Volunteer. ‘No,’ thought Soames, mounting the stairs slowly, ‘there’s nothing in that!’

He stood on the landing outside his parents’ bed and dressing rooms, debating whether or not to put his nose in and say a reassuring word. Opening the landing window, he listened. The rumble from Piccadilly was all the sound he heard, and with the thought, ‘If these motor-cars increase, it’ll affect house property,’ he was about to pass on up to the room always kept ready for him when he heard, distant as yet, the hoarse rushing call of a newsvendor. There it was, and coming past the house! He knocked on his mother’s door and went in.

His father was sitting up in bed, with his ears pricked under the white hair which Emily kept so beautifully cut. He looked pink, and extraordinarily clean, in his setting of white sheet and pillow, out of which the points of his high, thin, nightgowned shoulders emerged in small peaks. His eyes alone, grey and distrustful under their withered lids, were moving from the window to Emily, who in a wrapper was walking up and down, squeezing a rubber ball attached to a scent bottle. The room reeked faintly of the eau-de-Cologne she was spraying.

"All right!" said Soames, "it's not a fire. The Boers have declared war — that's all."

Emily stopped her spraying.

"Oh!" was all she said, and looked at James.

Soames, too, looked at his father. He was taking it differently from their expectation, as if some thought, strange to them, were working in him.

"H'm!" he muttered suddenly, "I shan't live to see the end of this."

"Nonsense, James! It'll be over by Christmas."

"What do you know about it?" James answered her with asperity. "It's a pretty mess at this time of night, too!" He lapsed into silence, and his wife and son, as if hypnotised, waited for him to say: 'I can't tell — I don't know; I knew how it would be!' But he did not. The grey eyes shifted, evidently seeing nothing in the room; then movement occurred under the bedclothes, and the knees were drawn up suddenly to a great height.

"They ought to send out Roberts. It all comes from that fellow Gladstone and his Majuba."

The two listeners noted something beyond the usual in his voice, something of real anxiety. It was as if he had said: 'I shall never see the old country peaceful and safe again. I shall have to die before I know she's won.' And in spite of the feeling that James must not be encouraged to be fussy, they were touched. Soames went up to the bedside and stroked his father's hand which had emerged from under the bedclothes, long and wrinkled with veins.

"Mark my words!" said James, "consols will go to par. For all I know, Val may go and enlist."

"Oh, come, James!" cried Emily, "you talk as if there were danger."

Her comfortable voice seemed to soothe James for once.

"Well," he muttered, "I told you how it would be. I don't know, I'm sure — nobody tells me anything. Are you sleeping here, my boy?"

The crisis was past, he would now compose himself to his normal degree of anxiety; and, assuring his father that he was sleeping in the house, Soames pressed his hand, and went up to his room.

The following afternoon witnessed the greatest crowd Timothy's had known for many a year. On national occasions, such as this, it was, indeed, almost impossible to avoid going there. Not that there was any danger or rather only just enough to make it necessary to assure each other that there was none.

Nicholas was there early. He had seen Soames the night before — Soames had said it was bound to come. This old Kruger was in his dotage — why, he must be seventy-five if he was a day!

(Nicholas was eighty-two.) What had Timothy said? He had had a fit after Majuba. These Boers were a grasping lot! The dark-haired Francie, who had arrived on his heels, with the contradictious touch which became the free spirit of a daughter of Roger, chimed in:

"Kettle and pot, Uncle Nicholas. What price the Uitlanders?" What price, indeed! A new expression, and believed to be due to her brother George.

Aunt Juley thought Francie ought not to say such a thing. Dear Mrs. MacAnder's boy, Charlie MacAnder, was one, and no one could call him grasping. At this Francie uttered one of her mots, scandalising, and so frequently repeated:

"Well, his father's a Scotchman, and his mother's a cat."

Aunt Juley covered her ears, too late, but Aunt Hester smiled; as for Nicholas, he pouted — witticism of which he was not the author was hardly to his taste. Just then Marian Tweetyman arrived, followed almost immediately by young Nicholas. On seeing his son, Nicholas rose.

"Well, I must be going," he said, "Nick here will tell you what'll win the race." And with this hit at his eldest, who, as a pillar of accountancy, and director of an insurance company, was no more addicted to sport than his father had ever been, he departed. Dear Nicholas! What race was that? Or was it only one of his jokes? He was a wonderful man for his age! How many lumps would dear Marian take? And how were Giles and Jesse? Aunt Juley supposed their Yeomanry would be very busy now, guarding the coast, though of course the Boers had no ships. But one never knew what the French might do if they had the chance, especially since that dreadful Fashoda scare, which had upset Timothy so terribly that he had made no investments for months afterwards. It was the ingratitude of the Boers that was so dreadful, after everything had been done for them — Dr. Jameson imprisoned, and he was so nice, Mrs. MacAnder had always said. And Sir Alfred Milner sent out to talk to them — such a clever man! She didn't know what they wanted.

But at this moment occurred one of those sensations — so precious at Timothy's — which great occasions sometimes bring forth:

"Miss June Forsyte."

Aunts Juley and Hester were on their feet at once, trembling from smothered resentment, and old affection bubbling up, and pride at the return of a prodigal June! Well, this was a surprise! Dear June — after all these years! And how well she was looking! Not changed at all! It was almost on their lips to add, 'And how is your dear grandfather?' forgetting in that giddy moment that poor dear Jolyon had been in his grave for seven years now.

Ever the most courageous and downright of all the Forsytes, June, with her decided chin and her spirited eyes and her hair like flame, sat down, slight and short, on a gilt chair with a bead-worked seat, for all the world as if ten years had not elapsed since she had been to see them — ten years of travel and independence and devotion to lame ducks. Those ducks of late had been all definitely painters, etchers, or sculptors, so that her impatience with the Forsytes and their hopelessly inartistic outlook had become intense. Indeed, she had almost ceased to believe that her family existed, and looked round her now with a sort of challenging directness which brought exquisite discomfort to the roomful. She had not expected to meet any of them but 'the poor old things'; and why she had come to see them she hardly knew, except that, while on her way from Oxford Street to a studio in Latimer Road, she had suddenly remembered them with compunction as two long-neglected old lame ducks.

Aunt Juley broke the hush again. "We've just been saying, dear, how dreadful it is about these Boers! And what an impudent thing of that old Kruger!"

"Impudent!" said June. "I think he's quite right. What business have we to meddle with them? If he turned out all those wretched Uitlanders it would serve them right. They're only after money."

The silence of sensation was broken by Francie saying:

"What? Are you a pro-Boer?" (undoubtedly the first use of that expression).

"Well! Why can't we leave them alone?" said June, just as, in the open doorway, the maid said "Mr. Soames Forsyte." Sensation on sensation! Greeting was almost held up by curiosity to see how June and he would take this encounter, for it was shrewdly suspected, if not quite known, that they had not met since that old and lamentable affair of her fiance Bosinney with Soames' wife. They were seen to just touch each other's hands, and look each at the other's left eye only. Aunt Juley came at once to the rescue:

"Dear June is so original. Fancy, Soames, she thinks the Boers are not to blame."

"They only want their independence," said June; "and why shouldn't they have it?"

"Because," answered Soames, with his smile a little on one side, "they happen to have agreed to our suzerainty."

"Suzerainty!" repeated June scornfully; "we shouldn't like anyone's suzerainty over us."

"They got advantages in payment," replied Soames; "a contract is a contract."

"Contracts are not always just," fumed out June, "and when they're not, they ought to be broken. The Boers are much the weaker. We could afford to be generous."

Soames sniffed. "That's mere sentiment," he said.

Aunt Hester, to whom nothing was more awful than any kind of disagreement, here leaned forward and remarked decisively:

"What lovely weather it has been for the time of year?"

But June was not to be diverted.

"I don't know why sentiment should be sneered at. It's the best thing in the world." She looked defiantly round, and Aunt Juley had to intervene again:

"Have you bought any pictures lately, Soames?"

Her incomparable instinct for the wrong subject had not failed her. Soames flushed. To disclose the name of his latest purchases would be like walking into the jaws of disdain. For somehow they all knew of June's predilection for 'genius' not yet on its legs, and her contempt for 'success' unless she had had a finger in securing it.

"One or two," he muttered.

But June's face had changed; the Forsyte within her was seeing its chance. Why should not Soames buy some of the pictures of Eric Cobbley — her last lame duck? And she promptly opened her attack: Did Soames know his work? It was so wonderful. He was the coming man.

Oh, yes, Soames knew his work. It was in his view 'splashy,' and would never get hold of the public.

June blazed up.

"Of course it won't; that's the last thing one would wish for. I thought you were a connoisseur, not a picture-dealer."

"Of course Soames is a connoisseur," Aunt Juley said hastily; "he has wonderful taste — he can always tell beforehand what's going to be successful."

"Oh!" gasped June, and sprang up from the bead-covered chair, "I hate that standard of success. Why can't people buy things because they like them?"

"You mean," said Francie, "because you like them."

And in the slight pause young Nicholas was heard saying gently that Violet (his fourth) was taking lessons in pastel, he didn't know if they were any use.

"Well, good-bye, Auntie," said June; "I must get on," and kissing her aunts, she looked defiantly round the room, said "Good-bye" again, and went. A breeze seemed to pass out with her, as if everyone had sighed.

The third sensation came before anyone had time to speak:

"Mr. James Forsyte."

James came in using a stick slightly and wrapped in a fur coat which gave him a fictitious bulk.

Everyone stood up. James was so old; and he had not been at Timothy's for nearly two years.

"It's hot in here," he said.

Soames divested him of his coat, and as he did so could not help admiring the glossy way his father was turned out. James sat down, all knees, elbows, frock-coat, and long white whiskers.

"What's the meaning of that?" he said.

Though there was no apparent sense in his words, they all knew that he was referring to June. His eyes searched his son's face.

"I thought I'd come and see for myself. What have they answered Kruger?"

Soames took out an evening paper, and read the headline.

"'Instant action by our Government — state of war existing!'"

"Ah!" said James, and sighed. "I was afraid they'd cut and run like old Gladstone. We shall finish with them this time."

All stared at him. James! Always fussy, nervous, anxious! James with his continual, 'I told you how it would be!' and his pessimism, and his cautious investments. There was something uncanny about such resolution in this the oldest living Forsyte.

"Where's Timothy?" said James. "He ought to pay attention to this."

Aunt Juley said she didn't know; Timothy had not said much at lunch to-day. Aunt Hester rose and threaded her way out of the room, and Francie said rather maliciously:

"The Boers are a hard nut to crack, Uncle James."

"H'm!" muttered James. "Where do you get your information? Nobody tells me."

Young Nicholas remarked in his mild voice that Nick (his eldest) was now going to drill regularly.

"Ah!" muttered James, and stared before him — his thoughts were on Val. "He's got to look after his mother," he said, "he's got no time for drilling and that, with that father of his." This cryptic saying produced silence, until he spoke again.

"What did June want here?" And his eyes rested with suspicion on all of them in turn. "Her father's a rich man now." The conversation turned on Jolyon, and when he had been seen last. It was supposed that he went abroad and saw all sorts of people now that his wife was dead; his water-colours were on the line, and he was a successful man. Francie went so far as to say:

“I should like to see him again; he was rather a dear.”

Aunt Juley recalled how he had gone to sleep on the sofa one day, where James was sitting. He had always been very amiable; what did Soames think?

Knowing that Jolyon was Irene’s trustee, all felt the delicacy of this question, and looked at Soames with interest. A faint pink had come up in his cheeks.

“He’s going grey,” he said.

Indeed! Had Soames seen him? Soames nodded, and the pink vanished.

James said suddenly: “Well — I don’t know, I can’t tell.”

It so exactly expressed the sentiment of everybody present that there was something behind everything, that nobody responded. But at this moment Aunt Hester returned.

“Timothy,” she said in a low voice, “Timothy has bought a map, and he’s put in — he’s put in three flags.”

Timothy had . . . .! A sigh went round the company.

If Timothy had indeed put in three flags already, well! — it showed what the nation could do when it was roused. The war was as good as over.

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CHAPTER 13

JOLYON FINDS OUT WHERE HE IS

Jolyon stood at the window in Holly's old night nursery, converted into a studio, not because it had a north light, but for its view over the prospect away to the Grand Stand at Epsom. He shifted to the side window which overlooked the stableyard, and whistled down to the dog Balthasar who lay for ever under the clock tower. The old dog looked up and wagged his tail. 'Poor old boy!' thought Jolyon, shifting back to the other window.

He had been restless all this week, since his attempt to prosecute trusteeship, uneasy in his conscience which was ever acute, disturbed in his sense of compassion which was easily excited, and with a queer sensation as if his feeling for beauty had received some definite embodiment. Autumn was getting hold of the old oak-tree, its leaves were browning. Sunshine had been plentiful and hot this summer. As with trees, so with men's lives! 'I ought to live long,' thought Jolyon; 'I'm getting mildewed for want of heat. If I can't work, I shall be off to Paris.' But memory of Paris gave him no pleasure. Besides, how could he go? He must stay and see what Soames was going to do. 'I'm her trustee. I can't leave her unprotected,' he thought. It had been striking him as curious how very clearly he could still see Irene in her little drawing-room which he had only twice entered. Her beauty must have a sort of poignant harmony! No literal portrait would ever do her justice; the essence of her was — ah I what? . . . The noise of hoofs called him back to the other window. Holly was riding into the yard on her long-tailed 'palfrey.' She looked up and he waved to her. She had been rather silent lately; getting old, he supposed, beginning to want her future, as they all did — youngsters!

Time was certainly the devil! And with the feeling that to waste this swift-travelling commodity was unforgivable folly, he took up his brush. But it was no use; he could not concentrate his eye — besides, the light was going. 'I'll go up to town,' he thought. In the hall a servant met him.

"A lady to see you, sir; Mrs. Heron."

Extraordinary coincidence! Passing into the picture-gallery, as it was still called, he saw Irene standing over by the window.

She came towards him saying:

"I've been trespassing; I came up through the coppice and garden. I always used to come that way to see Uncle Jolyon."

"You couldn't trespass here," replied Jolyon; "history makes that impossible. I was just thinking of you."

Irene smiled. And it was as if something shone through; not mere spirituality — serener, completer, more alluring.

"History!" she answered; "I once told Uncle Jolyon that love was for ever. Well, it isn't. Only aversion lasts."

Jolyon stared at her. Had she got over Bosinney at last?

"Yes!" he said, "aversion's deeper than love or hate because it's a natural product of the nerves, and we don't change them."

"I came to tell you that Soames has been to see me. He said a thing that frightened me. He said: 'You are still my wife!'"

"What!" ejaculated Jolyon. "You ought not to live alone." And he continued to stare at her, afflicted by the thought that where Beauty was, nothing ever ran quite straight, which, no doubt, was why so many people looked on it as immoral.

"What more?"

"He asked me to shake hands.

"Did you?"

"Yes. When he came in I'm sure he didn't want to; he changed while he was there."

"Ah! you certainly ought not to go on living there alone."

"I know no woman I could ask; and I can't take a lover to order, Cousin Jolyon."

"Heaven forbid!" said Jolyon. "What a damnable position! Will you stay to dinner? No? Well, let me see you back to town; I wanted to go up this evening."

"Truly?"

"Truly. I'll be ready in five minutes."

On that walk to the station they talked of pictures and music, contrasting the English and French characters and the difference in their attitude to Art. But to Jolyon the colours in the hedges of the long straight lane, the twittering of chaffinches who kept pace with them, the perfume of weeds being already burned, the turn of her neck, the fascination of those dark eyes bent on him now and then, the lure of her whole figure, made a deeper impression than the remarks they exchanged. Unconsciously he held himself straighter, walked with a more elastic step.

In the train he put her through a sort of catechism as to what she did with her days.

Made her dresses, shopped, visited a hospital, played her piano, translated from the French.

She had regular work from a publisher, it seemed, which supplemented her income a little. She seldom went out in the evening. "I've been living alone so long, you see, that I don't mind it a bit. I believe I'm naturally solitary."

"I don't believe that," said Jolyon. "Do you know many people?"

"Very few."

At Waterloo they took a hansom, and he drove with her to the door of her mansions. Squeezing her hand at parting, he said:

"You know, you could always come to us at Robin Hill; you must let me know everything that happens. Good-bye, Irene."

"Good-bye," she answered softly.

Jolyon climbed back into his cab, wondering why he had not asked her to dine and go to the theatre with him. Solitary, starved, hung-up life that she had! "Hotch Potch Club," he said through the trap-door. As his hansom debouched on to the Embankment, a man in top-hat and overcoat passed, walking quickly, so close to the wall that he seemed to be scraping it.

'By Jove!' thought Jolyon; 'Soames himself! What's he up to now?' And, stopping the cab round the corner, he got out and retraced his steps to where he could see the entrance to the mansions. Soames had halted in front of them, and was looking up at the light in her windows. 'If he goes in,' thought Jolyon, 'what shall I do? What have I the right to do?' What the fellow had said was true. She was still his wife, absolutely without protection from annoyance! 'Well, if he goes in,' he thought, 'I follow.' And he began moving towards the mansions. Again Soames advanced; he was in the very entrance now. But suddenly he stopped, spun round on his heel, and came back towards the river. 'What now?' thought Jolyon. 'In a dozen steps he'll recognise me.' And he turned tail. His cousin's footsteps kept pace with his own. But he reached his cab, and got in before Soames had turned the corner. "Go on!" he said through the trap. Soames' figure ranged up alongside.

"Hansom!" he said. "Engaged? Hallo!"

"Hallo!" answered Jolyon. "You?"

The quick suspicion on his cousin's face, white in the lamplight, decided him.

"I can give you a lift," he said, "if you're going West."

"Thanks," answered Soames, and got in.

"I've been seeing Irene," said Jolyon when the cab had started.

"Indeed!"

"You went to see her yesterday yourself, I understand."

"I did," said Soames; "she's my wife, you know."

The tone, the half-lifted sneering lip, roused sudden anger in Jolyon; but he subdued it.

"You ought to know best," he said, "but if you want a divorce it's not very wise to go seeing her, is it? One can't run with the hare and hunt with the hounds?"

"You're very good to warn me," said Soames, "but I have not made up my mind."

"She has," said Jolyon, looking straight before him; "you can't take things up, you know, as they were twelve years ago."

"That remains to be seen."

"Look here!" said Jolyon, "she's in a damnable position, and I am the only person with any legal say in her affairs."

“Except myself,” retorted Soames, “who am also in a damnable position. Hers is what she made for herself; mine what she made for me. I am not at all sure that in her own interests I shan’t require her to return to me.”

“What!” exclaimed Jolyon; and a shiver went through his whole body.

“I don’t know what you may mean by ‘what,’” answered Soames coldly; “your say in her affairs is confined to paying out her income; please bear that in mind. In choosing not to disgrace her by a divorce, I retained my rights, and, as I say, I am not at all sure that I shan’t require to exercise them.”

“My God!” ejaculated Jolyon, and he uttered a short laugh.

“Yes,” said Soames, and there was a deadly quality in his voice. “I’ve not forgotten the nickname your father gave me, ‘The man of property’! I’m not called names for nothing.”

“This is fantastic,” murmured Jolyon. Well, the fellow couldn’t force his wife to live with him. Those days were past, anyway! And he looked around at Soames with the thought: ‘Is he real, this man?’ But Soames looked very real, sitting square yet almost elegant with the clipped moustache on his pale face, and a tooth showing where a lip was lifted in a fixed smile. There was a long silence, while Jolyon thought: ‘Instead of helping her, I’ve made things worse.’ Suddenly Soames said:

“It would be the best thing that could happen to her in many ways.”

At those words such a turmoil began taking place in Jolyon that he could barely sit still in the cab. It was as if he were boxed up with hundreds of thousands of his countrymen, boxed up with that something in the national character which had always been to him revolting, something which he knew to be extremely natural and yet which seemed to him inexplicable — their intense belief in contracts and vested rights, their complacent sense of virtue in the exaction of those rights. Here beside him in the cab was the very embodiment, the corporeal sum as it were, of the possessive instinct — his own kinsman, too! It was uncanny and intolerable! ‘But there’s something more in it than that!’ he thought with a sick feeling. ‘The dog, they say, returns to his vomit! The sight of her has reawakened something. Beauty! The devil’s in it!’

“As I say,” said Soames, “I have not made up my mind. I shall be obliged if you will kindly leave her quite alone.”

Jolyon bit his lips; he who had always hated rows almost welcomed the thought of one now.

“I can give you no such promise,” he said shortly.

“Very well,” said Soames, “then we know where we are. I’ll get down here.” And stopping the cab he got out without word or sign of farewell. Jolyon travelled on to his Club.

The first news of the war was being called in the streets, but he paid no attention. What could he do to help her? If only his father were alive! He could have done so much! But why could he not do all that his father could have done? Was he not old enough? — turned fifty and twice married, with grown-up daughters and a son. ‘Queer,’ he thought. ‘If she were plain I shouldn’t be thinking twice about it. Beauty is the devil, when you’re sensitive to it!’ And into the Club reading-room he went with a disturbed heart. In that very room he and Bosinney had talked one summer afternoon; he well remembered even now the disguised and secret lecture he had given that young man in the interests of June, the diagnosis of the Forsytes he had hazarded; and how he had wondered what sort of woman it was he was warning him against. And now! He was almost in want of a warning himself. ‘It’s deuced funny!’ he thought, ‘really deuced funny!’

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CHAPTER 14

SOAMES DISCOVERS WHAT HE WANTS

It is so much easier to say, “Then we know where we are,” than to mean anything particular by the words. And in saying them Soames did but vent the jealous rankling of his instincts. He got out of the cab in a state of wary anger — with himself for not having seen Irene, with Jolyon for having seen her; and now with his inability to tell exactly what he wanted.

He had abandoned the cab because he could not bear to remain seated beside his cousin, and walking briskly eastwards he thought: ‘I wouldn’t trust that fellow Jolyon a yard. Once outcast, always outcast!’ The chap had a natural sympathy with — with — laxity (he had shied at the word sin, because it was too melodramatic for use by a Forsyte).

Indecision in desire was to him a new feeling. He was like a child between a promised toy and an old one which had been taken away from him; and he was astonished at himself. Only last Sunday desire had seemed simple — just his freedom and Annette. ‘I’ll go and dine there,’ he thought. To see her might bring back his singleness of intention, calm his exasperation, clear his mind.

The restaurant was fairly full — a good many foreigners and folk whom, from their appearance, he took to be literary or artistic. Scraps of conversation came his way through the clatter of plates and glasses. He distinctly heard the Boers sympathised with, the British Government blamed. ‘Don’t think much of their clientele,’ he thought. He went stolidly through his dinner and special coffee without making his presence known, and when at last he had finished, was careful not to be seen going towards the sanctum of Madame Lamotte. They were, as he entered, having supper — such a much nicer-looking supper than the dinner he had eaten that he felt a kind of grief — and they greeted him with a surprise so seemingly genuine that he thought with sudden suspicion: ‘I believe they knew I was here all the time.’ He gave Annette a look furtive and searching. So pretty, seemingly so candid; could she be angling for him? He turned to Madame Lamotte and said:

“I’ve been dining here.”

Really! If she had only known! There were dishes she could have recommended; what a pity! Soames was confirmed in his suspicion. ‘I must look out what I’m doing!’ he thought sharply.

“Another little cup of very special coffee, monsieur; a liqueur, Grand Marnier?” and Madame Lamotte rose to order these delicacies.

Alone with Annette Soames said, “Well, Annette?” with a defensive little smile about his lips.

The girl blushed. This, which last Sunday would have set his nerves tingling, now gave him much the same feeling a man has when a dog that he owns wriggles and looks at him. He had a curious sense of power, as if he could have said to her, ‘Come and kiss me,’ and she would have come. And yet — it was strange — but there seemed another face and form in the room too; and the itch in his nerves, was it for that — or for this? He jerked his head towards the restaurant and said: “You have some queer customers. Do you like this life?”

Annette looked up at him for a moment, looked down, and played with her fork.

“No,” she said, “I do not like it.”

‘I’ve got her,’ thought Soames, ‘if I want her. But do I want her?’ She was graceful, she was pretty — very pretty; she was fresh, she had taste of a kind. His eyes travelled round the little room; but the eyes of his mind went another journey — a half-light, and silvery walls, a satinwood piano, a woman standing against it, reined back as it were from him — a woman with white shoulders that he knew, and dark eyes that he had sought to know, and hair like dull dark amber. And as in an artist who strives for the unrealisable and is ever thirsty, so there rose in him at that moment the thirst of the old passion he had never satisfied.

“Well,” he said calmly, “you’re young. There’s everything before you.”

Annette shook her head.

“I think sometimes there is nothing before me but hard work. I am not so in love with work as mother.”

“Your mother is a wonder,” said Soames, faintly mocking; “she will never let failure lodge in her house.”

Annette sighed. “It must be wonderful to be rich.”

“Oh! You’ll be rich some day,” answered Soames, still with that faint mockery; “don’t be afraid.”

Annette shrugged her shoulders. “Monsieur is very kind.” And between her pouting lips she put a chocolate.

‘Yes, my dear,’ thought Soames, ‘they’re very pretty.’

Madame Lamotte, with coffee and liqueur, put an end to that colloquy. Soames did not stay long.

Outside in the streets of Soho, which always gave him such a feeling of property improperly owned, he mused. If only Irene had given him a son, he wouldn’t now be squirming after women! The thought had jumped out of its little dark sentry-box in his inner consciousness. A son — something to look forward to, something to make the rest of life worth while, something to leave himself to, some perpetuity of self. ‘If I had a son,’ he thought bitterly, ‘a proper legal son, I could make shift to go on as I used. One woman’s much the same as another, after all.’ But as he walked he shook his head. No! One woman was not the same as another. Many a time had he tried to think that in the old days of his thwarted married life; and he had always failed. He was failing now. He was trying to think Annette the same as that other. But she was not, she had not the lure of that old passion. ‘And Irene’s my wife,’ he thought, ‘my legal wife. I have done nothing to put her away from me. Why shouldn’t she come back to me? It’s the right thing, the lawful thing. It makes no scandal, no disturbance. If it’s disagreeable to her — but why should it be? I’m not a leper, and she — she’s no longer in love!’ Why should he be put to the shifts and the sordid disgraces and the lurking defeats of the Divorce Court, when there she was like an empty house only waiting to be retaken into use and possession by him who legally owned her? To one so secretive as Soames the thought of reentry into quiet possession of his own property with nothing given away to the world was intensely alluring. ‘No,’ he mused, ‘I’m glad I went to see that girl. I know now what I want most. If only Irene will come back I’ll be as considerate as she wishes; she could live her own life; but perhaps — perhaps she would come round to me.’ There was a lump in his throat. And doggedly along by the railings of the Green Park, towards his father’s house, he went, trying to tread on his shadow walking before him in the brilliant moonlight.

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PART II

CHAPTER 1

THE THIRD GENERATION

Jolly Forsyte was strolling down High Street, Oxford, on a November afternoon; Val Dartie was strolling up. Jolly had just changed out of boating flannels and was on his way to the 'Frying-pan,' to which he had recently been elected. Val had just changed out of riding clothes and was on his way to the fire — a bookmaker's in Cornmarket.

"Hallo!" said Jolly.

"Hallo!" replied Val.

The cousins had met but twice, Jolly, the second-year man, having invited the freshman to breakfast; and last evening they had seen each other again under somewhat exotic circumstances.

Over a tailor's in the Cornmarket resided one of those privileged young beings called minors, whose inheritances are large, whose parents are dead, whose guardians are remote, and whose instincts are vicious. At nineteen he had commenced one of those careers attractive and inexplicable to ordinary mortals for whom a single bankruptcy is good as a feast. Already famous for having the only roulette table then to be found in Oxford, he was anticipating his expectations at a dazzling rate. He out-crummed Crum, though of a sanguine and rather beefy type which lacked the latter's fascinating languor. For Val it had been in the nature of baptism to be taken there to play roulette; in the nature of confirmation to get back into college, after hours, through a window whose bars were deceptive. Once, during that evening of delight, glancing up from the seductive green before him, he had caught sight, through a cloud of smoke, of his cousin standing opposite. 'Rouge gagne, impair, et manque!' He had not seen him again.

"Come in to the Frying-pan and have tea," said Jolly, and they went in.

A stranger, seeing them together, would have noticed an unseizable resemblance between these second cousins of the third generations of Forsytes; the same bone formation in face, though Jolly's eyes were darker grey, his hair lighter and more wavy.

"Tea and buttered buns, waiter, please," said Jolly.

"Have one of my cigarettes?" said Val. "I saw you last night. How did you do?"

"I didn't play."

"I won fifteen quid."

Though desirous of repeating a whimsical comment on gambling he had once heard his father make —'When you're fleeced you're sick, and when you fleece you're sorry — Jolly contented himself with:

"Rotten game, I think; I was at school with that chap. He's an awful fool."

"Oh! I don't know," said Val, as one might speak in defence of a disparaged god; "he's a pretty good sport."

They exchanged whiffs in silence.

"You met my people, didn't you?" said Jolly. "They're coming up to-morrow."

Val grew a little red.

"Really! I can give you a rare good tip for the Manchester November handicap."

"Thanks, I only take interest in the classic races."

"You can't make any money over them," said Val.

"I hate the ring," said Jolly; "there's such a row and stink. I like the paddock."

"I like to back my judgment,"' answered Val.

Jolly smiled; his smile was like his father's.

"I haven't got any. I always lose money if I bet."

"You have to buy experience, of course."

"Yes, but it's all messed-up with doing people in the eye."

"Of course, or they'll do you — that's the excitement."

Jolly looked a little scornful.

"What do you do with yourself? Row?"

"No — ride, and drive about. I'm going to play polo next term, if I can get my granddad to stump up."

"That's old Uncle James, isn't it? What's he like?"

"Older than forty hills," said Val, "and always thinking he's going to be ruined."

"I suppose my granddad and he were brothers."

"I don't believe any of that old lot were sportsmen," said Val; "they must have worshipped money."

"Mine didn't!" said Jolly warmly.

Val flipped the ash off his cigarette.

"Money's only fit to spend," he said; "I wish the deuce I had more."

Jolly gave him that direct upward look of judgment which he had inherited from old Jolyon: One didn't talk about money! And again there was silence, while they drank tea and ate the buttered buns.

"Where are your people going to stay?" asked Val, elaborately casual.

"'Rainbow.' What do you think of the war?"

"Rotten, so far. The Boers aren't sports a bit. Why don't they come out into the open?"

"Why should they? They've got everything against them except their way of fighting. I rather admire them."

"They can ride and shoot," admitted Val, "but they're a lousy lot. Do you know Crum?"

"Of Merton? Only by sight. He's in that fast set too, isn't he? Rather La-di-da and Brummagem."

Val said fixedly: "He's a friend of mine."

"Oh! Sorry!" And they sat awkwardly staring past each other, having pitched on their pet points of snobbery. For Jolly was forming himself unconsciously on a set whose motto was:

'We defy you to bore us. Life isn't half long enough, and we're going to talk faster and more crisply, do more and know more, and dwell less on any subject than you can possibly imagine. We are "the best"— made of wire and whipcord.' And Val was unconsciously forming himself on a set whose motto was: 'We defy you to interest or excite us. We have had every sensation, or if we haven't, we pretend we have. We are so exhausted with living that no hours are too small for us. We will lose our shirts with equanimity. We have flown fast and are past everything. All is cigarette smoke. Bismillah!' Competitive spirit, bone-deep in the English, was obliging those two young Forsytes to have ideals; and at the close of a century ideals are mixed. The aristocracy had already in the main adopted the 'jumping-Jesus' principle; though here and there one like Crum — who was an 'honourable'— stood starkly languid for that gambler's Nirvana which had been the summum bonum of the old 'dandies' and of 'the mashers' in the eighties. And round Crum were still gathered a forlorn hope of blue-bloods with a plutocratic following.

But there was between the cousins another far less obvious antipathy — coming from the unseizable family resemblance, which each perhaps resented; or from some half-consciousness of that old feud persisting still between their branches of the clan, formed within them by odd words or half-hints dropped by their elders. And Jolly, tinkling his teaspoon, was musing: 'His tie-pin and his waistcoat and his drawl and his betting — good Lord!'

And Val, finishing his bun, was thinking: 'He's rather a young beast!'

"I suppose you'll be meeting your people?" he said, getting up. "I wish you'd tell them I should like to show them over B.N.C. — not that there's anything much there — if they'd care to come."

"Thanks, I'll ask them."

"Would they lunch? I've got rather a decent scout."

Jolly doubted if they would have time.

"You'll ask them, though?"

"Very good of you," said Jolly, fully meaning that they should not go; but, instinctively polite, he added: "You'd better come and have dinner with us to-morrow."

“Rather. What time?”

“Seven-thirty.”

“Dress?”

“No.” And they parted, a subtle antagonism alive within them.

Holly and her father arrived by a midday train. It was her first visit to the city of spires and dreams, and she was very silent, looking almost shyly at the brother who was part of this wonderful place. After lunch she wandered, examining his household gods with intense curiosity. Jolly’s sitting-room was panelled, and Art represented by a set of Bartolozzi prints which had belonged to old Jolyon, and by college photographs — of young men, live young men, a little heroic, and to be compared with her memories of Val. Jolyon also scrutinised with care that evidence of his boy’s character and tastes.

Jolly was anxious that they should see him rowing, so they set forth to the river. Holly, between her brother and her father, felt elated when heads were turned and eyes rested on her. That they might see him to the best advantage they left him at the Barge and crossed the river to the towing-path. Slight in build — for of all the Forsytes only old Swithin and George were beefy — Jolly was rowing ‘Two’ in a trial eight. He looked very earnest and strenuous. With pride Jolyon thought him the best-looking boy of the lot; Holly, as became a sister, was more struck by one or two of the others, but would not have said so for the world. The river was bright that afternoon, the meadows lush, the trees still beautiful with colour. Distinguished peace clung around the old city; Jolyon promised himself a day’s sketching if the weather held. The Eight passed a second time, spurting home along the Barges — Jolly’s face was very set, so as not to show that he was blown. They returned across the river and waited for him.

“Oh!” said Jolly in the Christ Church meadows, “I had to ask that chap Val Dartie to dine with us to-night. He wanted to give you lunch and show you B.N.C., so I thought I’d better; then you needn’t go. I don’t like him much.”

Holly’s rather sallow face had become suffused with pink.

“Why not?”

“Oh! I don’t know. He seems to me rather showy and bad form. What are his people like, Dad? He’s only a second cousin, isn’t he?”

Jolyon took refuge in a smile.

“Ask Holly,” he said; “she saw his uncle.”

“I liked Val,” Holly answered, staring at the ground before her; “his uncle looked — awfully different.” She stole a glance at Jolly from under her lashes.

“Did you ever,” said Jolyon with whimsical intention, “hear our family history, my dears? It’s quite a fairy tale. The first Jolyon Forsyte — at all events the first we know anything of, and that would be your great-great-grandfather — dwelt in the land of Dorset on the edge of the sea, being by profession an ‘agriculturalist,’ as your great-aunt put it, and the son of an agriculturist — farmers, in fact; your grandfather used to call them, ‘Very small beer.’” He looked at Jolly to see how his lordliness was standing it, and with the other eye noted Holly’s malicious pleasure in the slight drop of her brother’s face.

“We may suppose him thick and sturdy, standing for England as it was before the Industrial Era began. The second Jolyon Forsyte — your great-grandfather, Jolly; better known as Superior Dosset Forsyte — built houses, so the chronicle runs, begat ten children, and migrated to London town. It is known that he drank sherry. We may suppose him representing the England of Napoleon’s wars, and general unrest. The eldest of his six sons was the third Jolyon, your grandfather, my dears — tea merchant and chairman of companies, one of the soundest Englishmen who ever lived — and to me the dearest.” Jolyon’s voice had lost its irony, and his son and daughter gazed at him solemnly, “He was just and tenacious, tender and young at heart. You remember him, and I remember him. Pass to the others! Your great-uncle James, that’s young Val’s grandfather, had a son called Soames — whereby hangs a tale of no love lost, and I don’t think I’ll tell it you. James and the other eight children of ‘Superior Dosset,’ of whom there are still five alive, may be said to have represented Victorian England, with its principles of trade and individualism at five per cent. and your money back — if you know what that means. At all events they’ve turned thirty thousand pounds into a cool million between them in the course of their long lives. They never did a wild thing — unless it was your great-uncle Swithin, who I believe was once swindled at thimble-rig, and was called ‘Four-in-hand Forsyte’ because he drove a pair. Their day is passing, and their type, not altogether for the advantage of the country. They were pedestrian, but they too were sound. I am the fourth Jolyon Forsyte — a poor holder of the name —”

"No, Dad," said Jolly, and Holly squeezed his hand.

"Yes," repeated Jolyon, "a poor specimen, representing, I'm afraid, nothing but the end of the century, unearned income, amateurism, and individual liberty — a different thing from individualism, Jolly. You are the fifth Jolyon Forsyte, old man, and you open the ball of the new century."

As he spoke they turned in through the college gates, and Holly said: "It's fascinating, Dad."

None of them quite knew what she meant. Jolly was grave.

The Rainbow, distinguished, as only an Oxford hostel can be, for lack of modernity, provided one small oak-panelled private sitting-room, in which Holly sat to receive, white-frocked, shy, and alone, when the only guest arrived. Rather as one would touch a moth, Val took her hand. And wouldn't she wear this 'measly flower'? It would look ripping in her hair. He removed a gardenia from his coat.

"Oh! No, thank you — I couldn't!" But she took it and pinned it at her neck, having suddenly remembered that word 'showy'! Val's buttonhole would give offence; and she so much wanted Jolly to like him. Did she realise that Val was at his best and quietest in her presence, and was that, perhaps, half the secret of his attraction for her?

"I never said anything about our ride, Val."

"Rather not! It's just between us."

By the uneasiness of his hands and the fidgeting of his feet he was giving her a sense of power very delicious; a soft feeling too — the wish to make him happy.

"Do tell me about Oxford. It must be ever so lovely."

Val admitted that it was frightfully decent to do what you liked; the lectures were nothing; and there were some very good chaps. "Only," he added, "of course I wish I was in town, and could come down and see you."

Holly moved one hand shyly on her knee, and her glance dropped.

"You haven't forgotten," he said, suddenly gathering courage, "that we're going mad-rabbiting together?"

Holly smiled.

"Oh! That was only make-believe. One can't do that sort of thing after one's grown up, you know."

"Dash it! cousins can," said Val. "Next Long Vac. — it begins in June, you know, and goes on for ever — we'll watch our chance."

But, though the thrill of conspiracy ran through her veins, Holly shook her head. "It won't come off," she murmured.

"Won't it!" said Val fervently; "who's going to stop it? Not your father or your brother."

At this moment Jolyon and Jolly came in; and romance fled into Val's patent leather and Holly's white satin toes, where it itched and tingled during an evening not conspicuous for open-heartedness.

Sensitive to atmosphere, Jolyon soon felt the latent antagonism between the boys, and was puzzled by Holly; so he became unconsciously ironical, which is fatal to the expansiveness of youth. A letter, handed to him after dinner, reduced him to a silence hardly broken till Jolly and Val rose to go. He went out with them, smoking his cigar, and walked with his son to the gates of Christ Church. Turning back, he took out the letter and read it again beneath a lamp.

"DEAR JOLYON,

"Soames came again to-night — my thirty-seventh birthday. You were right, I mustn't stay here. I'm going to-morrow to the Piedmont Hotel, but I won't go abroad without seeing you. I feel lonely and down-hearted.

"Yours affectionately, "IRENE."

He folded the letter back into his pocket and walked on, astonished at the violence of his feelings. What had the fellow said or done?

He turned into High Street, down the Turf, and on among a maze of spires and domes and long college fronts and walls, bright or dark-shadowed in the strong moonlight. In this very heart of England's gentility it was difficult to realise that a lonely woman could be importuned or hunted, but what else could her letter mean? Soames must have been pressing her to go back to him again, with public opinion and the Law on his side, too! 'Eighteen-ninety-nine!,' he thought, gazing at the broken glass shining on the top of a villa garden wall; 'but when it comes to property we're still a heathen people! I'll go up to-morrow morning. I dare say it'll be best for her to go abroad.' Yet the thought displeased him. Why should Soames hunt her out of England! Besides, he might follow, and out there she would be still more helpless against the attentions of her own husband! ‘I must tread warily,’ he thought; ‘that fellow could make himself very nasty. I didn’t like his manner in the cab the other night.’ His thoughts turned to his daughter June. Could she help? Once on a time Irene had been her greatest friend, and now she was a ‘lame duck,’ such as must appeal to June’s nature! He determined to wire to his daughter to meet him at Paddington Station. Retracing his steps towards the Rainbow he questioned his own sensations. Would he be upsetting himself over every woman in like case? No! he would not. The candour of this conclusion discomfited him; and, finding that Holly had gone up to bed, he sought his own room. But he could not sleep, and sat for a long time at his window, huddled in an overcoat, watching the moonlight on the roofs.

Next door Holly too was awake, thinking of the lashes above and below Val’s eyes, especially below; and of what she could do to make Jolly like him better. The scent of the gardenia was strong in her little bedroom, and pleasant to her.

And Val, leaning out of his first-floor window in B.N.C., was gazing at a moonlit quadrangle without seeing it at all, seeing instead Holly, slim and white-frocked, as she sat beside the fire when he first went in.

But Jolly, in his bedroom narrow as a ghost, lay with a hand beneath his cheek and dreamed he was with Val in one boat, rowing a race against him, while his father was calling from the towpath: ‘Two! Get your hands away there, bless you!’

❦

CHAPTER 2

SOAMES PUTS IT TO THE TOUCH

Of all those radiant firms which emblazon with their windows the West End of London, Gaves and Cortegal were considered by Soames the most ‘attractive’ word just coming into fashion. He had never had his Uncle Swithin’s taste in precious stones, and the abandonment by Irene when she left his house in 1887 of all the glittering things he had given her had disgusted him with this form of investment. But he still knew a diamond when he saw one, and during the week before her birthday he had taken occasion, on his way into the Poultry or his way out therefrom, to dally a little before the greater jewellers where one got, if not one’s money’s worth, at least a certain cachet with the goods.

Constant cogitation since his drive with Jolyon had convinced him more and more of the supreme importance of this moment in his life, the supreme need for taking steps and those not wrong. And, alongside the dry and reasoned sense that it was now or never with his self-preservation, now or never if he were to range himself and found a family, went the secret urge of his senses roused by the sight of her who had once been a passionately desired wife, and the conviction that it was a sin against common sense and the decent secrecy of Forsytes to waste the wife he had.

In an opinion on Winifred’s case, Dreamer, Q.C. — he would much have preferred Waterbuck, but they had made him a judge (so late in the day as to rouse the usual suspicion of a political job)— had advised that they should go forward and obtain restitution of conjugal rights, a point which to Soames had never been in doubt. When they had obtained a decree to that effect they must wait to see if it was obeyed. If not, it would constitute legal desertion, and they should obtain evidence of misconduct and file their petition for divorce. All of which Soames knew perfectly well. They had marked him ten and one. This simplicity in his sister’s case only made him the more desperate about the difficulty in his own. Everything, in fact, was driving him towards the simple solution of Irene’s return. If it were still against the grain with her, had he not feelings to subdue, injury to forgive, pain to forget? He at least had never injured her, and this was a world of compromise! He could offer her so much more than she had now. He would be prepared to make a liberal settlement on her which could not be upset. He often scrutinised his image in these days. He had never been a peacock like that fellow Dartie, or fancied himself a woman’s man, but he had a certain belief in his own appearance — not unjustly, for it was well-coupled and preserved, neat, healthy, pale, unblemished by drink or excess of any kind. The Forsyte jaw and the concentration of his face were, in his eyes, virtues. So far as he could tell there was no feature of him which need inspire dislike.

Thoughts and yearnings, with which one lives daily, become natural, even if far-fetched in their inception. If he could only give tangible proof enough of his determination to let bygones be bygones, and to do all in his power to please her, why should she not come back to him?

He entered Gaves and Cortegal’s therefore, on the morning of November the 9th, to buy a certain diamond brooch. “Four twenty-five and dirt cheap, sir, at the money. It’s a lady’s brooch.” There was that in his mood which made him accept without demur. And he went on into the Poultry with the flat green morocco case in his breast pocket. Several times that day he opened it to look at the seven soft shining stones in their velvet oval nest.

“If the lady doesn’t like it, sir, happy to exchange it any time. But there’s no fear of that.” If only there were not! He got through a vast amount of work, only soother of the nerves he knew. A cablegram came while he was in the office with details from the agent in Buenos Aires, and the name and address of a stewardess who would be prepared to swear to what was necessary. It was a timely spur to Soames, with his rooted distaste for the washing of dirty linen in public. And when he set forth by Underground to Victoria Station he received a fresh impetus towards the renewal of his married life from the account in his evening paper of a fashionable divorce suit. The homing instinct of all true Forsytes in anxiety and trouble, the corporate tendency which kept them strong and solid, made him choose to dine at Park Lane. He neither could nor would breath a word to his people of his intention — too reticent and proud — but the thought that at least they would be glad if they knew, and wish him luck, was heartening.

James was in lugubrious mood, for the fire which the impudence of Kruger’s ultimatum had lit in him had been cold-watered by the poor success of the last month, and the exhortations to effort in The Times. He didn’t know where it would end. Soames sought to cheer him by the continual use of the word Buller. But James couldn’t tell! There was Colley — and he got stuck on that hill, and this Ladysmith was down in a hollow, and altogether it looked to him a ‘pretty kettle of fish’; he thought they ought to be sending the sailors — they were the chaps, they did a lot of good in the Crimea. Soames shifted the ground of consolation. Winifred had heard from Val that there had been a ‘rag’ and a bonfire on Guy Fawkes Day at Oxford, and that he had escaped detection by blacking his face.

“Ah!” James muttered, “he’s a clever little chap.” But he shook his head shortly afterwards and remarked that he didn’t know what would become of him, and looking wistfully at his son, murmured on that Soames had never had a boy. He would have liked a grandson of his own name. And now — well, there it was!

Soames flinched. He had not expected such a challenge to disclose the secret in his heart. And Emily, who saw him wince, said:

“Nonsense, James; don’t talk like that!”

But James, not looking anyone in the face, muttered on. There were Roger and Nicholas and Jolyon; they all had grandsons. And Swithin and Timothy had never married. He had done his best; but he would soon be gone now. And, as though he had uttered words of profound consolation, he was silent, eating brains with a fork and a piece of bread, and swallowing the bread.

Soames excused himself directly after dinner. It was not really cold, but he put on his fur coat, which served to fortify him against the fits of nervous shivering to which he had been subject all day. Subconsciously, he knew that he looked better thus than in an ordinary black overcoat. Then, feeling the morocco case flat against his heart, he sallied forth. He was no smoker, but he lit a cigarette, and smoked it gingerly as he walked along. He moved slowly down the Row towards Knightsbridge, timing himself to get to Chelsea at nine-fifteen. What did she do with herself evening after evening in that little hole? How mysterious women were! One lived alongside and knew nothing of them. What could she have seen in that fellow Bosinney to send her mad? For there was madness after all in what she had done — crazy moonstruck madness, in which all sense of values had been lost, and her life and his life ruined! And for a moment he was filled with a sort of exaltation, as though he were a man read of in a story who, possessed by the Christian spirit, would restore to her all the prizes of existence, forgiving and forgetting, and becoming the godfather of her future. Under a tree opposite Knightsbridge Barracks, where the moon-light struck down clear and white, he took out once more the morocco case, and let the beams draw colour from those stones. Yes, they were of the first water! But, at the hard closing snap of the case, another cold shiver ran through his nerves; and he walked on faster, clenching his gloved hands in the pockets of his coat, almost hoping she would not be in. The thought of how mysterious she was again beset him. Dining alone there night after night — in an evening dress, too, as if she were making believe to be in society! Playing the piano — to herself! Not even a dog or cat, so far as he had seen. And that reminded him suddenly of the mare he kept for station work at Mapledurham. If ever he went to the stable, there she was quite alone, half asleep, and yet, on her home journeys going more freely than on her way out, as if longing to be back and lonely in her stable! ‘I would treat her well,’ he thought incoherently. ‘I would be very careful.’ And all that capacity for home life of which a mocking Fate seemed for ever to have deprived him swelled suddenly in Soames, so that he dreamed dreams opposite South Kensington Station. In the King’s Road a man came slithering out of a public house playing a concertina. Soames watched him for a moment dance crazily on the pavement to his own drawling jagged sounds, then crossed over to avoid contact with this piece of drunken foolery. A night in the lock-up! What asses people were! But the man had noticed his movement of avoidance, and streams of genial blasphemy followed him across the street. ‘I hope they’ll run him in,’ thought Soames viciously. ‘To have ruffians like that about, with women out alone!’ A woman’s figure in front had induced this thought. Her walk seemed oddly familiar, and when she turned the corner for which he was bound, his heart began to beat. He hastened on to the corner to make certain. Yes! It was Irene; he could not mistake her walk in that little drab street. She threaded two more turnings, and from the last corner he saw her enter her block of flats. To make sure of her now, he ran those few paces, hurried up the stairs, and caught her standing at her door. He heard the latchkey in the lock, and reached her side just as she turned round, startled, in the open doorway.

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said, breathless. “I happened to see you. Let me come in a minute.”

She had put her hand up to her breast, her face was colourless, her eyes widened by alarm. Then seeming to master herself, she inclined her head, and said: “Very well.”

Soames closed the door. He, too, had need to recover, and when she had passed into the sitting-room, waited a full minute, taking deep breaths to still the beating of his heart. At this moment, so fraught with the future, to take out that morocco case seemed crude. Yet, not to take it out left him there before her with no preliminary excuse for coming. And in this dilemma he was seized with impatience at all this paraphernalia of excuse and justification. This was a scene — it could be nothing else, and he must face it. He heard her voice, uncomfortably, pathetically soft:

"Why have you come again? Didn't you understand that I would rather you did not?"

He noticed her clothes — a dark brown velvet corduroy, a sable boa, a small round toque of the same. They suited her admirably. She had money to spare for dress, evidently! He said abruptly:

"It's your birthday. I brought you this," and he held out to her the green morocco case.

"Oh! No-no!"

Soames pressed the clasp; the seven stones gleamed out on the pale grey velvet.

"Why not?" he said. "Just as a sign that you don't bear me ill-feeling any longer."

"I couldn't."

Soames took it out of the case.

"Let me just see how it looks."

She shrank back.

He followed, thrusting his hand with the brooch in it against the front of her dress. She shrank again.

Soames dropped his hand.

"Irene," he said, "let bygones be bygones. If I can, surely you might. Let's begin again, as if nothing had been. Won't you?" His voice was wistful, and his eyes, resting on her face, had in them a sort of supplication.

She, who was standing literally with her back against the wall, gave a little gulp, and that was all her answer. Soames went on:

"Can you really want to live all your days half-dead in this little hole? Come back to me, and I'll give you all you want. You shall live your own life; I swear it."

He saw her face quiver ironically.

"Yes," he repeated, "but I mean it this time. I'll only ask one thing. I just want — I just want a son. Don't look like that! I want one. It's hard." His voice had grown hurried, so that he hardly knew it for his own, and twice he jerked his head back as if struggling for breath. It was the sight of her eyes fixed on him, dark with a sort of fascinated fright, which pulled him together and changed that painful incoherence to anger.

"Is it so very unnatural?" he said between his teeth, "Is it unnatural to want a child from one's own wife? You wrecked our life and put this blight on everything. We go on only half alive, and without any future. Is it so very unflattering to you that in spite of everything I— I still want you for my wife? Speak, for Goodness' sake! do speak."

Irene seemed to try, but did not succeed.

"I don't want to frighten you," said Soames more gently. "Heaven knows. I only want you to see that I can't go on like this. I want you back. I want you."

Irene raised one hand and covered the lower part of her face, but her eyes never moved from his, as though she trusted in them to keep him at bay. And all those years, barren and bitter, since — ah! when? — almost since he had first known her, surged up in one great wave of recollection in Soames; and a spasm that for his life he could not control constricted his face.

"It's not too late," he said; "it's not — if you'll only believe it."

Irene uncovered her lips, and both her hands made a writhing gesture in front of her breast. Soames seized them.

"Don't!" she said under her breath. But he stood holding on to them, trying to stare into her eyes which did not waver. Then she said quietly:

"I am alone here. You won't behave again as you once behaved."

Dropping her hands as though they had been hot irons, he turned away. Was it possible that there could be such relentless unforgiveness! Could that one act of violent possession be still alive within her? Did it bar him thus utterly? And doggedly he said, without looking up:

"I am not going till you've answered me. I am offering what few men would bring themselves to offer, I want a — a reasonable answer."

And almost with surprise he heard her say:

"You can't have a reasonable answer. Reason has nothing to do with it. You can only have the brutal truth: I would rather die."

Soames stared at her.

"Oh!" he said. And there intervened in him a sort of paralysis of speech and movement, the kind of quivering which comes when a man has received a deadly insult, and does not yet know how he is going to take it, or rather what it is going to do with him.

"Oh!" he said again, "as bad as that? Indeed! You would rather die. That's pretty!"

"I am sorry. You wanted me to answer. I can't help the truth, can I?"

At that queer spiritual appeal Soames turned for relief to actuality. He snapped the brooch back into its case and put it in his pocket.

"The truth!" he said; "there's no such thing with women. It's nerves-nerves."

He heard the whisper:

"Yes; nerves don't lie. Haven't you discovered that?" He was silent, obsessed by the thought: 'I will hate this woman. I will hate her.' That was the trouble! If only he could! He shot a glance at her who stood unmoving against the wall with her head up and her hands clasped, for all the world as if she were going to be shot. And he said quickly:

"I don't believe a word of it. You have a lover. If you hadn't, you wouldn't be such a — such a little idiot." He was conscious, before the expression in her eyes, that he had uttered something of a non-sequitur, and dropped back too abruptly into the verbal freedom of his connubial days. He turned away to the door. But he could not go out. Something within him — that most deep and secret Forsyte quality, the impossibility of letting go, the impossibility of seeing the fantastic and forlorn nature of his own tenacity — prevented him. He turned about again, and there stood, with his back against the door, as hers was against the wall opposite, quite unconscious of anything ridiculous in this separation by the whole width of the room.

"Do you ever think of anybody but yourself?" he said.

Irene's lips quivered; then she answered slowly:

"Do you ever think that I found out my mistake — my hopeless, terrible mistake — the very first week of our marriage; that I went on trying three years — you know I went on trying? Was it for myself?"

Soames gritted his teeth. "God knows what it was. I've never understood you; I shall never understand you. You had everything you wanted; and you can have it again, and more. What's the matter with me? I ask you a plain question: What is it?" Unconscious of the pathos in that enquiry, he went on passionately: "I'm not lame, I'm not loathsome, I'm not a boor, I'm not a fool. What is it? What's the mystery about me?"

Her answer was a long sigh.

He clasped his hands with a gesture that for him was strangely full of expression. "When I came here to-night I was — I hoped — I meant everything that I could to do away with the past, and start fair again. And you meet me with 'nerves,' and silence, and sighs. There's nothing tangible. It's like — it's like a spider's web."

"Yes."

That whisper from across the room maddened Soames afresh.

"Well, I don't choose to be in a spider's web. I'll cut it." He walked straight up to her. "Now!" What he had gone up to her to do he really did not know. But when he was close, the old familiar scent of her clothes suddenly affected him. He put his hands on her shoulders and bent forward to kiss her. He kissed not her lips, but a little hard line where the lips had been drawn in; then his face was pressed away by her hands; he heard her say: "Oh! No!" Shame, compunction, sense of futility flooded his whole being, he turned on his heel and went straight out.

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Chapter 3

Visit to Irene

Jolyon found June waiting on the platform at Paddington. She had received his telegram while at breakfast. Her abode — a studio and two bedrooms in a St. John's Wood garden — had been selected by her for the complete independence which it guaranteed. Unwatched by Mrs. Grundy, unhindered by permanent domestics, she could receive lame ducks at any hour of day or night, and not seldom had a duck without studio of its own made use of June's. She enjoyed her freedom, and possessed herself with a sort of virginal passion; the warmth which she would have lavished on Bosinney, and of which — given her Forsyte tenacity — he must surely have tired, she now expended in championship of the underdogs and budding 'geniuses' of the artistic world. She lived, in fact, to turn ducks into the swans she believed they were. The very fervour of her protection warped her judgments. But she was loyal and liberal; her small eager hand was ever against the oppressions of academic and commercial opinion, and though her income was considerable, her bank balance was often a minus quantity.

She had come to Paddington Station heated in her soul by a visit to Eric Cobbley. A miserable Gallery had refused to let that straight-haired genius have his one-man show after all. Its impudent manager, after visiting his studio, had expressed the opinion that it would only be a 'one-horse show from the selling point of view.' This crowning example of commercial cowardice towards her favourite lame duck — and he so hard up, with a wife and two children, that he had caused her account to be overdrawn — was still making the blood glow in her small, resolute face, and her red-gold hair to shine more than ever. She gave her father a hug, and got into a cab with him, having as many fish to fry with him as he with her. It became at once a question which would fry them first.

Jolyon had reached the words: "My dear, I want you to come with me," when, glancing at her face, he perceived by her blue eyes moving from side to side — like the tail of a preoccupied cat — that she was not attending. "Dad, is it true that I absolutely can't get at any of my money?"

"Only the income, fortunately, my love."

"How perfectly beastly! Can't it be done somehow? There must be a way. I know I could buy a small Gallery for ten thousand pounds."

"A small Gallery," murmured Jolyon, "seems a modest desire. But your grandfather foresaw it."

"I think," cried June vigorously, "that all this care about money is awful, when there's so much genius in the world simply crushed out for want of a little. I shall never marry and have children; why shouldn't I be able to do some good instead of having it all tied up in case of things which will never come off?"

"Our name is Forsyte, my dear," replied Jolyon in the ironical voice to which his impetuous daughter had never quite grown accustomed; "and Forsytes, you know, are people who so settle their property that their grandchildren, in case they should die before their parents, have to make wills leaving the property that will only come to themselves when their parents die. Do you follow that? Nor do I, but it's a fact, anyway; we live by the principle that so long as there is a possibility of keeping wealth in the family it must not go out; if you die unmarried, your money goes to Jolly and Holly and their children if they marry. Isn't it pleasant to know that whatever you do you can none of you be destitute?"

"But can't I borrow the money?"

Jolyon shook his head. "You could rent a Gallery, no doubt, if you could manage it out of your income."

June uttered a contemptuous sound.

"Yes; and have no income left to help anybody with."

"My dear child," murmured Jolyon, "wouldn't it come to the same thing?"

"No," said June shrewdly, "I could buy for ten thousand; that would only be four hundred a year. But I should have to pay a thousand a year rent, and that would only leave me five hundred. If I had the Gallery, Dad, think what I could do. I could make Eric Cobbley's name in no time, and ever so many others."

"Names worth making make themselves in time."

“When they’re dead.”

“Did you ever know anybody living, my dear, improved by having his name made?”

“Yes, you,” said June, pressing his arm.

Jolyon started. ‘I?’ he thought. ‘Oh! Ah! Now she’s going to ask me to do something. We take it out, we Forsytes, each in our different ways.’

June came closer to him in the cab.

“Darling,” she said, “you buy the Gallery, and I’ll pay you four hundred a year for it. Then neither of us will be any the worse off. Besides, it’s a splendid investment.”

Jolyon wriggled. “Don’t you think,” he said, “that for an artist to buy a Gallery is a bit dubious? Besides, ten thousand pounds is a lump, and I’m not a commercial character.”

June looked at him with admiring appraisement.

“Of course you’re not, but you’re awfully businesslike. And I’m sure we could make it pay. It’ll be a perfect way of scoring off those wretched dealers and people.” And again she squeezed her father’s arm.

Jolyon’s face expressed quizzical despair.

“Where is this desirable Gallery? Splendidly situated, I suppose?”

“Just off Cork Street.”

‘Ah!’ thought Jolyon, ‘I knew it was just off somewhere. Now for what I want out of her!’

“Well, I’ll think of it, but not just now. You remember Irene? I want you to come with me and see her. Soames is after her again. She might be safer if we could give her asylum somewhere.”

The word asylum, which he had used by chance, was of all most calculated to rouse June’s interest.

“Irene! I haven’t seen her since! Of course! I’d love to help her.”

It was Jolyon’s turn to squeeze her arm, in warm admiration for this spirited, generous-hearted little creature of his begetting.

“Irene is proud,” he said, with a sidelong glance, in sudden doubt of June’s discretion; “she’s difficult to help. We must tread gently. This is the place. I wired her to expect us. Let’s send up our cards.”

“I can’t bear Soames,” said June as she got out; “he sneers at everything that isn’t successful”

Irene was in what was called the ‘Ladies’ drawing-room’ of the Piedmont Hotel.

Nothing if not morally courageous, June walked straight up to her former friend, kissed her cheek, and the two settled down on a sofa never sat on since the hotel’s foundation. Jolyon could see that Irene was deeply affected by this simple forgiveness.

“So Soames has been worrying you?” he said.

“I had a visit from him last night; he wants me to go back to him.”

“You’re not going, of course?” cried June.

Irene smiled faintly and shook her head. “But his position is horrible,” she murmured.

“It’s his own fault; he ought to have divorced you when he could.”

Jolyon remembered how fervently in the old days June had hoped that no divorce would smirch her dead and faithless lover’s name.

“Let us hear what Irene is going to do,” he said.

Irene’s lips quivered, but she spoke calmly.

“I’d better give him fresh excuse to get rid of me.”

“How horrible!” cried June.

“What else can I do?”

“Out of the question,” said Jolyon very quietly, “sans amour.”

He thought she was going to cry; but, getting up quickly, she half turned her back on them, and stood regaining control of herself.

June said suddenly:

“Well, I shall go to Soames and tell him he must leave you alone. What does he want at his age?”

“A child. It’s not unnatural”

“A child!” cried June scornfully. “Of course! To leave his money to. If he wants one badly enough let him take somebody and have one; then you can divorce him, and he can marry her.”

Jolyon perceived suddenly that he had made a mistake to bring June — her violent partizanship was fighting Soames’ battle.

“It would be best for Irene to come quietly to us at Robin Hill, and see how things shape.”

“Of course,” said June; “only. . . . ”

Irene looked full at Jolyon — in all his many attempts afterwards to analyze that glance he never could succeed.

“No! I should only bring trouble on you all. I will go abroad.”

He knew from her voice that this was final. The irrelevant thought flashed through him: ‘Well, I could see her there.’ But he said:

“Don’t you think you would be more helpless abroad, in case he followed?”

“I don’t know. I can but try.”

June sprang up and paced the room. “It’s all horrible,” she said. “Why should people be tortured and kept miserable and helpless year after year by this disgusting sanctimonious law?” But someone had come into the room, and June came to a standstill. Jolyon went up to Irene:

“Do you want money?”

“No.”

“And would you like me to let your flat?”

“Yes, Jolyon, please.”

“When shall you be going?”

“To-morrow.”

“You won’t go back there in the meantime, will you?” This he said with an anxiety strange to himself.

“No; I’ve got all I want here.”

“You’ll send me your address?”

She put out her hand to him. “I feel you’re a rock.”

“Built on sand,” answered Jolyon, pressing her hand hard; “but it’s a pleasure to do anything, at any time, remember that. And if you change your mind. . . .! Come along, June; say good-bye.”

June came from the window and flung her arms round Irene.

“Don’t think of him,” she said under her breath; “enjoy yourself, and bless you!”

With a memory of tears in Irene’s eyes, and of a smile on her lips, they went away extremely silent, passing the lady who had interrupted the interview and was turning over the papers on the table.

Opposite the National Gallery June exclaimed:

“Of all undignified beasts and horrible laws!”

But Jolyon did not respond. He had something of his father’s balance, and could see things impartially even when his emotions were roused. Irene was right; Soames’ position was as bad or worse than her own. As for the law — it catered for a human nature of which it took a naturally low view. And, feeling that if he stayed in his daughter’s company he would in one way or another commit an indiscretion, he told her he must catch his train back to Oxford; and hailing a cab, left her to Turner’s water-colours, with the promise that he would think over that Gallery.

But he thought over Irene instead. Pity, they said, was akin to love! If so he was certainly in danger of loving her, for he pitied her profoundly. To think of her drifting about Europe so handicapped and lonely! ‘I hope to goodness she’ll keep her head!’ he thought; ‘she might easily grow desperate.’ In fact, now that she had cut loose from her poor threads of occupation, he couldn’t imagine how she would go on — so beautiful a creature, hopeless, and fair game for anyone! In his exasperation was more than a little fear and jealousy. Women did strange things when they were driven into corners. ‘I wonder what Soames will do now!' he thought. 'A rotten, idiotic state of things! And I suppose they would say it was her own fault.' Very preoccupied and sore at heart, he got into his train, mislaid his ticket, and on the platform at Oxford took his hat off to a lady whose face he seemed to remember without being able to put a name to her, not even when he saw her having tea at the Rainbow.

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CHAPTER 4

WHERE FORSYTES FEAR TO TREAD

Quivering from the defeat of his hopes, with the green morocco case still flat against his heart, Soames revolved thoughts bitter as death. A spider's web! Walking fast, and noting nothing in the moonlight, he brooded over the scene he had been through, over the memory of her figure rigid in his grasp. And the more he brooded, the more certain he became that she had a lover — her words, 'I would sooner die!' were ridiculous if she had not. Even if she had never loved him, she had made no fuss until Bosinney came on the scene. No; she was in love again, or she would not have made that melodramatic answer to his proposal, which in all the circumstances was reasonable! Very well! That simplified matters.

'I'll take steps to know where I am,' he thought; 'I'll go to Polteed's the first thing tomorrow morning.'

But even in forming that resolution he knew he would have trouble with himself. He had employed Polteed's agency several times in the routine of his profession, even quite lately over Dartie's case, but he had never thought it possible to employ them to watch his own wife.

It was too insulting to himself!

He slept over that project and his wounded pride — or rather, kept vigil. Only while shaving did he suddenly remember that she called herself by her maiden name of Heron. Polteed would not know, at first at all events, whose wife she was, would not look at him obsequiously and leer behind his back. She would just be the wife of one of his clients. And that would be true — for was he not his own solicitor?

He was literally afraid not to put his design into execution at the first possible moment, lest, after all, he might fail himself. And making Warmson bring him an early cup of coffee; he stole out of the house before the hour of breakfast. He walked rapidly to one of those small West End streets where Polteed's and other firms ministered to the virtues of the wealthier classes. Hitherto he had always had Polteed to see him in the Poultry; but he well knew their address, and reached it at the opening hour. In the outer office, a room furnished so cosily that it might have been a money-lender's, he was attended by a lady who might have been a schoolmistress.

"I wish to see Mr. Claud Polteed. He knows me — never mind my name."

To keep everybody from knowing that he, Soames Forsyte, was reduced to having his wife spied on, was the overpowering consideration.

Mr. Claud Polteed — so different from Mr. Lewis Polteed — was one of those men with dark hair, slightly curved noses, and quick brown eyes, who might be taken for Jews but are really Phoenicians; he received Soames in a room hushed by thickness of carpet and curtains. It was, in fact, confidentially furnished, without trace of document anywhere to be seen.

Greeting Soames deferentially, he turned the key in the only door with a certain ostentation.

"If a client sends for me," he was in the habit of saying, "he takes what precaution he likes. If he comes here, we convince him that we have no leakages. I may safely say we lead in security, if in nothing else. . . . Now, sir, what can I do for you?"

Soames' gorge had risen so that he could hardly speak. It was absolutely necessary to hide from this man that he had any but professional interest in the matter; and, mechanically, his face assumed its sideway smile.

"I've come to you early like this because there's not an hour to lose"— if he lost an hour he might fail himself yet! "Have you a really trustworthy woman free?"

Mr. Polteed unlocked a drawer, produced a memorandum, ran his eyes over it, and locked the drawer up again.

"Yes," he said; "the very woman."

Soames had seated himself and crossed his legs — nothing but a faint flush, which might have been his normal complexion, betrayed him.

"Send her off at once, then, to watch a Mrs. Irene Heron of Flat C, Truro Mansions, Chelsea, till further notice."

"Precisely," said Mr. Polteed; "divorce, I presume?" and he blew into a speaking-tube. "Mrs. Blanch in? I shall want to speak to her in ten minutes.”

“Deal with any reports yourself,” resumed Soames, “and send them to me personally, marked confidential, sealed and registered. My client exacts the utmost secrecy.”

Mr. Polteed smiled, as though saying, ‘You are teaching your grandmother, my dear sir;’ and his eyes slid over Soames’ face for one unprofessional instant.

“Make his mind perfectly easy,” he said. “Do you smoke?”

“No,” said Soames. “Understand me: Nothing may come of this. If a name gets out, or the watching is suspected, it may have very serious consequences.”

Mr. Polteed nodded. “I can put it into the cipher category. Under that system a name is never mentioned; we work by numbers.”

He unlocked another drawer and took out two slips of paper, wrote on them, and handed one to Soames.

“Keep that, sir; it’s your key. I retain this duplicate. The case we’ll call 7x. The party watched will be 17; the watcher 19; the Mansions 25; yourself — I should say, your firm — 31; my firm 32, myself 2. In case you should have to mention your client in writing I have called him 43; any person we suspect will be 47; a second person 51. Any special hint or instruction while we’re about it?”

“No,” said Soames; “that is — every consideration compatible.”

Again Mr. Polteed nodded. “Expense?”

Soames shrugged. “In reason,” he answered curtly, and got up. “Keep it entirely in your own hands.”

“Entirely,” said Mr. Polteed, appearing suddenly between him and the door. “I shall be seeing you in that other case before long. Good morning, sir.” His eyes slid unprofessionally over Soames once more, and he unlocked the door.

“Good morning,” said Soames, looking neither to right nor left.

Out in the street he swore deeply, quietly, to himself. A spider’s web, and to cut it he must use this spidery, secret, unclean method, so utterly repugnant to one who regarded his private life as his most sacred piece of property. But the die was cast, he could not go back. And he went on into the Poultry, and locked away the green morocco case and the key to that cipher destined to make crystal-clear his domestic bankruptcy.

Odd that one whose life was spent in bringing to the public eye all the private coils of property, the domestic disagreements of others, should dread so utterly the public eye turned on his own; and yet not odd, for who should know so well as he the whole unfeeling process of legal regulation.

He worked hard all day. Winifred was due at four o’clock; he was to take her down to a conference in the Temple with Dreamer Q.C., and waiting for her he re-read the letter he had caused her to write the day of Dartie’s departure, requiring him to return.

“DEAR MONTAGUE,

“I have received your letter with the news that you have left me for ever and are on your way to Buenos Aires. It has naturally been a great shock. I am taking this earliest opportunity of writing to tell you that I am prepared to let bygones be bygones if you will return to me at once. I beg you to do so. I am very much upset, and will not say any more now. I am sending this letter registered to the address you left at your Club. Please cable to me.

“Your still affectionate wife, “WINIFRED DARTIE.”

Ugh! What bitter humbug! He remembered leaning over Winifred while she copied what he had pencilled, and how she had said, laying down her pen, “Suppose he comes, Soames!” in such a strange tone of voice, as if she did not know her own mind. “He won’t come,” he had answered, “till he’s spent his money. That’s why we must act at once.” Annexed to the copy of that letter was the original of Dartie’s drunken scrawl from the Iseeum Club. Soames could have wished it had not been so manifestly penned in liquor. Just the sort of thing the Court would pitch on. He seemed to hear the Judge’s voice say: “You took this seriously! Seriously enough to write him as you did? Do you think he meant it?” Never mind! The fact was clear that Dartie had sailed and had not returned. Annexed also was his cabled answer: “Impossible return. Dartie.” Soames shook his head. If the whole thing were not disposed of within the next few months the fellow would turn up again like a bad penny. It saved a thousand a year at least to get rid of him, besides all the worry to Winifred and his father. ‘I must stiffen Dreamer’s back,’ he thought; ‘we must push it on.’

Winifred, who had adopted a kind of half-mourning which became her fair hair and tall figure very well, arrived in James' barouche drawn by James' pair. Soames had not seen it in the City since his father retired from business five years ago, and its incongruity gave him a shock. 'Times are changing,' he thought; 'one doesn't know what'll go next!' Top hats even were scarcer. He enquired after Val. Val, said Winifred, wrote that he was going to play polo next term. She thought he was in a very good set. She added with fashionably disguised anxiety: "Will there be much publicity about my affair, Soames? Must it be in the papers? It's so bad for him, and the girls."

With his own calamity all raw within him, Soames answered:

"The papers are a pushing lot; it's very difficult to keep things out. They pretend to be guarding the public's morals, and they corrupt them with their beastly reports. But we haven't got to that yet. We're only seeing Dreamer to-day on the restitution question. Of course he understands that it's to lead to a divorce; but you must seem genuinely anxious to get Dartie back — you might practice that attitude to-day."

Winifred sighed.

"Oh! What a clown Monty's been!" she said.

Soames gave her a sharp look. It was clear to him that she could not take her Dartie seriously, and would go back on the whole thing if given half a chance. His own instinct had been firm in this matter from the first. To save a little scandal now would only bring on his sister and her children real disgrace and perhaps ruin later on if Dartie were allowed to hang on to them, going down-hill and spending the money James would leave his daughter. Though it was all tied up, that fellow would milk the settlements somehow, and make his family pay through the nose to keep him out of bankruptcy or even perhaps gaol! They left the shining carriage, with the shining horses and the shining-hatted servants on the Embankment, and walked up to Dreamer Q.C.'s Chambers in Crown Office Row.

"Mr. Bellby is here, sir," said the clerk; "Mr. Dreamer will be ten minutes."

Mr. Bellby, the junior — not as junior as he might have been, for Soames only employed barristers of established reputation; it was, indeed, something of a mystery to him how barristers ever managed to establish that which made him employ them — Mr. Bellby was seated, taking a final glance through his papers. He had come from Court, and was in wig and gown, which suited a nose jutting out like the handle of a tiny pump, his small shrewd blue eyes, and rather protruding lower lip — no better man to supplement and stiffen Dreamer.

The introduction to Winifred accomplished, they leaped the weather and spoke of the war. Soames interrupted suddenly:

"If he doesn't comply we can't bring proceedings for six months. I want to get on with the matter, Bellby."

Mr. Bellby, who had the ghost of an Irish brogue, smiled at Winifred and murmured: "The Law's delays, Mrs. Dartie."

"Six months!" repeated Soames; "it'll drive it up to June! We shan't get the suit on till after the long vacation. We must put the screw on, Bellby"— he would have all his work cut out to keep Winifred up to the scratch.

"Mr. Dreamer will see you now, sir."

They filed in, Mr. Bellby going first, and Soames escorting Winifred after an interval of one minute by his watch.

Dreamer Q.C., in a gown but divested of wig, was standing before the fire, as if this conference were in the nature of a treat; he had the leathery, rather oily complexion which goes with great learning, a considerable nose with glasses perched on it, and little greyish whiskers; he luxuriated in the perpetual cocking of one eye, and the concealment of his lower with his upper lip, which gave a smothered turn to his speech. He had a way, too, of coming suddenly round the corner on the person he was talking to; this, with a disconcerting tone of voice, and a habit of growling before he began to speak — had secured a reputation second in Probate and Divorce to very few. Having listened, eye cocked, to Mr. Bellby's breezy recapitulation of the facts, he growled, and said:

"I know all that;" and coming round the corner at Winifred, smothered the words:

"We want to get him back, don't we, Mrs. Dartie?"

Soames interposed sharply:

"My sister's position, of course, is intolerable."

Dreamer growled. "Exactly. Now, can we rely on the cabled refusal, or must we wait till after Christmas to give him a chance to have written — that's the point, isn't it?"

“The sooner. . . . ” Soames began.

“What do you say, Bellby?” said Dreamer, coming round his corner.

Mr. Bellby seemed to sniff the air like a hound.

“We won’t be on till the middle of December. We’ve no need to give um more rope than that.”

“No,” said Soames, “why should my sister be incommoded by his choosing to go . . . ”

“To Jericho!” said Dreamer, again coming round his corner; “quite so. People oughtn’t to go to Jericho, ought they, Mrs. Dartie?” And he raised his gown into a sort of fantail. “I agree. We can go forward. Is there anything more?”

“Nothing at present,” said Soames meaningly; “I wanted you to see my sister.”

Dreamer growled softly: “Delighted. Good evening!” And let fall the protection of his gown.

They filed out. Winifred went down the stairs. Soames lingered. In spite of himself he was impressed by Dreamer.

“The evidence is all right, I think,” he said to Bellby. “Between ourselves, if we don’t get the thing through quick, we never may. D’you think he understands that?”

“I’ll make um,” said Bellby. “Good man though — good man.”

Soames nodded and hastened after his sister. He found her in a draught, biting her lips behind her veil, and at once said:

“The evidence of the stewardess will be very complete.”

Winifred’s face hardened; she drew herself up, and they walked to the carriage. And, all through that silent drive back to Green Street, the souls of both of them revolved a single thought: ‘Why, oh! why should I have to expose my misfortune to the public like this? Why have to employ spies to peer into my private troubles? They were not of my making.’

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Chapter 5

Jolly Sits in Judgment

The possessive instinct, which, so determinedly balked, was animating two members of the Forsyte family towards riddance of what they could no longer possess, was hardening daily in the British body politic. Nicholas, originally so doubtful concerning a war which must affect property, had been heard to say that these Boers were a pig-headed lot; they were causing a lot of expense, and the sooner they had their lesson the better. He would send out Wolseley! Seeing always a little further than other people — whence the most considerable fortune of all the Forsytes — he had perceived already that Buller was not the man —'a bull of a chap, who just went butting, and if they didn't look out Ladysmith would fall.' This was early in December, so that when Black Week came, he was enabled to say to everybody: 'I told you so.' During that week of gloom such as no Forsyte could remember, very young Nicholas attended so many drills in his corps, 'The Devil's Own,' that young Nicholas consulted the family physician about his son's health and was alarmed to find that he was perfectly sound. The boy had only just eaten his dinners and been called to the bar, at some expense, and it was in a way a nightmare to his father and mother that he should be playing with military efficiency at a time when military efficiency in the civilian population might conceivably be wanted. His grandfather, of course, pooh-poohed the notion, too thoroughly educated in the feeling that no British war could be other than little and professional, and profoundly distrustful of Imperial commitments, by which, moreover, he stood to lose, for he owned De Beers, now going down fast, more than a sufficient sacrifice on the part of his grandson.

At Oxford, however, rather different sentiments prevailed. The inherent effervescence of conglomerate youth had, during the two months of the term before Black Week, been gradually crystallising out into vivid oppositions. Normal adolescence, ever in England of a conservative tendency though not taking things too seriously, was vehement for a fight to a finish and a good licking for the Boers. Of this larger faction Val Dartie was naturally a member. Radical youth, on the other hand, a small but perhaps more vocal body, was for stopping the war and giving the Boers autonomy. Until Black Week, however, the groups were amorphous, without sharp edges, and argument remained but academic. Jolly was one of those who knew not where he stood. A streak of his grandfather old Jolyon's love of justice prevented, him from seeing one side only. Moreover, in his set of 'the best' there was a 'jumping-Jesus' of extremely advanced opinions and some personal magnetism. Jolly wavered. His father, too, seemed doubtful in his views. And though, as was proper at the age of twenty, he kept a sharp eye on his father, watchful for defects which might still be remedied, still that father had an 'air' which gave a sort of glamour to his creed of ironic tolerance. Artists of course; were notoriously Hamlet-like, and to this extent one must discount for one's father, even if one loved him. But Jolyon's original view, that to 'put your nose in where you aren't wanted' (as the Uitlanders had done) 'and then work the oracle till you get on top is not being quite the clean potato,' had, whether founded in fact or no, a certain attraction for his son, who thought a deal about gentility. On the other hand Jolly could not abide such as his set called 'cranks,' and Val's set called 'smugs,' so that he was still balancing when the clock of Black Week struck. One — two — three, came those ominous repulses at Stormberg, Magersfontein, Colenso. The sturdy English soul reacting after the first cried, 'Ah! but Methuen!' after the second: 'Ah! but Buller!' then, in inspissated gloom, hardened. And Jolly said to himself: 'No, damn it! We've got to lick the beggars now; I don't care whether we're right or wrong.' And, if he had known it, his father was thinking the same thought.

That next Sunday, last of the term, Jolly was bidden to wine with 'one of the best.' After the second toast, 'Buller and damnation to the Boers,' drunk — no heel taps — in the college Burgundy, he noticed that Val Dartie, also a guest, was looking at him with a grin and saying something to his neighbour. He was sure it was disparaging. The last boy in the world to make himself conspicuous or cause public disturbance, Jolly grew rather red and shut his lips. The queer hostility he had always felt towards his second-cousin was strongly and suddenly reinforced. 'All right!' he thought, 'you wait, my friend!' More wine than was good for him, as the custom was, helped him to remember, when they all trooped forth to a secluded spot, to touch Val on the arm.

"What did you say about me in there?"

"Mayn't I say what I like?"

"No."

“Well, I said you were a pro-Boer — and so you are!”

“You’re a liar!”

“D’you want a row?”

“Of course, but not here; in the garden.”

“All right. Come on.”

They went, eyeing each other askance, unsteady, and unflinching; they climbed the garden railings. The spikes on the top slightly ripped Val’s sleeve, and occupied his mind. Jolly’s mind was occupied by the thought that they were going to fight in the precincts of a college foreign to them both. It was not the thing, but never mind — the young beast!

They passed over the grass into very nearly darkness, and took off their coats.

“You’re not screwed, are you?” said Jolly suddenly. “I can’t fight you if you’re screwed.”

“No more than you.”

“All right then.”

Without shaking hands, they put themselves at once into postures of defence. They had drunk too much for science, and so were especially careful to assume correct attitudes, until Jolly smote Val almost accidentally on the nose. After that it was all a dark and ugly scrimmage in the deep shadow of the old trees, with no one to call ‘time,’ till, battered and blown, they unclinched and staggered back from each other, as a voice said:

“Your names, young gentlemen?”

At this bland query spoken from under the lamp at the garden gate, like some demand of a god, their nerves gave way, and snatching up their coats, they ran at the railings, shinned up them, and made for the secluded spot whence they had issued to the fight. Here, in dim light, they mopped their faces, and without a word walked, ten paces apart, to the college gate. They went out silently, Val going towards the Broad along the Brewery, Jolly down the lane towards the High. His head, still fumed, was busy with regret that he had not displayed more science, passing in review the counters and knockout blows which he had not delivered. His mind strayed on to an imagined combat, infinitely unlike that which he had just been through, infinitely gallant, with sash and sword, with thrust and parry, as if he were in the pages of his beloved Dumas. He fancied himself La Mole, and Aramis, Bussy, Chicot, and D’Artagnan rolled into one, but he quite failed to envisage Val as Coconnas, Brissac, or Rochefort. The fellow was just a confounded cousin who didn’t come up to Cocker. Never mind! He had given him one or two. ‘Pro-Boer!’ The word still rankled, and thoughts of enlisting jostled his aching head; of riding over the veldt, firing gallantly, while the Boers rolled over like rabbits. And, turning up his smarting eyes, he saw the stars shining between the housetops of the High, and himself lying out on the Karoo (whatever that was) rolled in a blanket, with his rifle ready and his gaze fixed on a glittering heaven.

He had a fearful ‘head’ next morning, which he doctored, as became one of ‘the best,’ by soaking it in cold water, brewing strong coffee which he could not drink, and only sipping a little Hock at lunch. The legend that ‘some fool’ had run into him round a corner accounted for a bruise on his cheek. He would on no account have mentioned the fight, for, on second thoughts, it fell far short of his standards.

The next day he went ‘down,’ and travelled through to Robin Hill. Nobody was there but June and Holly, for his father had gone to Paris. He spent a restless and unsettled Vacation, quite out of touch with either of his sisters. June, indeed, was occupied with lame ducks, whom, as a rule, Jolly could not stand, especially that Eric Cobbley and his family, ‘hopeless outsiders,’ who were always littering up the house in the Vacation. And between Holly and himself there was a strange division, as if she were beginning to have opinions of her own, which was so — unnecessary. He punched viciously at a ball, rode furiously but alone in Richmond Park, making a point of jumping the stiff, high hurdles put up to close certain worn avenues of grass — keeping his nerve in, he called it. Jolly was more afraid of being afraid than most boys are. He bought a rifle, too, and put a range up in the home field, shooting across the pond into the kitchen-garden wall, to the peril of gardeners, with the thought that some day, perhaps, he would enlist and save South Africa for his country. In fact, now that they were appealing for Yeomanry recruits the boy was thoroughly upset. Ought he to go? None of ‘the best,’ so far as he knew — and he was in correspondence with several — were thinking of joining. If they had been making a move he would have gone at once — very competitive, and with a strong sense of form, he could not bear to be left behind in anything — but to do it off his own bat might look like ‘swagger’; because of course it wasn’t really necessary. Besides, he did not want to go, for the other side of this young Forsyte recoiled from leaping before he looked. It was altogether mixed pickles within him, hot and sickly pickles, and he became quite unlike his serene and rather lordly self.

And then one day he saw that which moved him to uneasy wrath — two riders, in a glade of the Park close to the Ham Gate, of whom she on the left-hand was most assuredly Holly on her silver roan, and he on the right-hand as assuredly that 'squirt' Val Dartie. His first impulse was to urge on his own horse and demand the meaning of this portent, tell the fellow to 'bunk,' and take Holly home. His second — to feel that he would look a fool if they refused. He reined his horse in behind a tree, then perceived that it was equally impossible to spy on them. Nothing for it but to go home and await her coming! Sneaking out with that young bounder! He could not consult with June, because she had gone up that morning in the train of Eric Cobbley and his lot. And his father was still in 'that rotten Paris.' He felt that this was emphatically one of those moments for which he had trained himself, assiduously, at school, where he and a boy called Brent had frequently set fire to newspapers and placed them in the centre of their studies to accustom them to coolness in moments of danger. He did not feel at all cool waiting in the stable-yard, idly stroking the dog Balthasar, who queasy as an old fat monk, and sad in the absence of his master, turned up his face, panting with gratitude for this attention. It was half an hour before Holly came, flushed and ever so much prettier than she had any right to look. He saw her look at him quickly — guiltily of course — then followed her in, and, taking her arm, conducted her into what had been their grandfather's study. The room, not much used now, was still vaguely haunted for them both by a presence with which they associated tenderness, large drooping white moustaches, the scent of cigar smoke, and laughter. Here Jolly, in the prime of his youth, before he went to school at all, had been wont to wrestle with his grandfather, who even at eighty had an irresistible habit of crooking his leg. Here Holly, perched on the arm of the great leather chair, had stroked hair curving silvery over an ear into which she would whisper secrets. Through that window they had all three sallied times without number to cricket on the lawn, and a mysterious game called 'Wopsy-doozle,' not to be understood by outsiders, which made old Jolyon very hot. Here once on a warm night Holly had appeared in her 'nighty,' having had a bad dream, to have the clutch of it released. And here Jolly, having begun the day badly by introducing fizzy magnesia into Mademoiselle Beauce's new-laid egg, and gone on to worse, had been sent down (in the absence of his father) to the ensuing dialogue:

"Now, my boy, you mustn't go on like this."

"Well, she boxed my ears, Gran, so I only boxed hers, and then she boxed mine again."

"Strike a lady? That'll never do! Have you begged her pardon?"

"Not yet."

"Then you must go and do it at once. Come along."

"But she began it, Gran; and she had two to my one."

"My dear, it was an outrageous thing to do."

"Well, she lost her temper; and I didn't lose mine."

"Come along."

"You come too, then, Gran."

"Well — this time only."

And they had gone hand in hand.

Here — where the Waverley novels and Byron's works and Gibbon's Roman Empire and Humboldt's Cosmos, and the bronzes on the mantelpiece, and that masterpiece of the oily school, 'Dutch Fishing-Boats at Sunset,' were fixed as fate, and for all sign of change old Jolyon might have been sitting there still, with legs crossed, in the arm chair, and domed forehead and deep eyes grave above The Times — here they came, those two grandchildren. And Jolly said:

"I saw you and that fellow in the Park."

The sight of blood rushing into her cheeks gave him some satisfaction; she ought to be ashamed!

"Well?" she said.

Jolly was surprised; he had expected more, or less.

"Do you know," he said weightily, "that he called me a pro-Boer last term? And I had to fight him."

"Who won?"

Jolly wished to answer: 'I should have,' but it seemed beneath him.

"Look here!" he said, "what's the meaning of it? Without telling anybody!"

"Why should I? Dad isn't here; why shouldn't I ride with him?"

"You've got me to ride with. I think he's an awful young rotter."

Holly went pale with anger.

"He isn't. It's your own fault for not liking him."

And slipping past her brother she went out, leaving him staring at the bronze Venus sitting on a tortoise, which had been shielded from him so far by his sister's dark head under her soft felt riding hat. He felt queerly disturbed, shaken to his young foundations. A lifelong domination lay shattered round his feet. He went up to the Venus and mechanically inspected the tortoise.

Why didn't he like Val Dartie? He could not tell. Ignorant of family history, barely aware of that vague feud which had started thirteen years before with Bosinney's defection from June in favour of Soames' wife, knowing really almost nothing about Val he was at sea. He just did dislike him. The question, however, was: What should he do? Val Dartie, it was true, was a second-cousin, but it was not the thing for Holly to go about with him. And yet to 'tell' of what he had chanced on was against his creed. In this dilemma he went and sat in the old leather chair and crossed his legs. It grew dark while he sat there staring out through the long window at the old oak-tree, ample yet bare of leaves, becoming slowly just a shape of deeper dark printed on the dusk.

'Grandfather!' he thought without sequence, and took out his watch. He could not see the hands, but he set the repeater going. 'Five o'clock!' His grandfather's first gold hunter watch, butter-smooth with age — all the milling worn from it, and dented with the mark of many a fall. The chime was like a little voice from out of that golden age, when they first came from St. John's Wood, London, to this house — came driving with grandfather in his carriage, and almost instantly took to the trees. Trees to climb, and grandfather watering the geranium-beds below! What was to be done? Tell Dad he must come home? Confide in June? — only she was so — so sudden! Do nothing and trust to luck? After all, the Vac. would soon be over. Go up and see Val and warn him off? But how get his address? Holly wouldn't give it him! A maze of paths, a cloud of possibilities! He lit a cigarette. When he had smoked it halfway through his brow relaxed, almost as if some thin old hand had been passed gently over it; and in his ear something seemed to whisper: 'Do nothing; be nice to Holly, be nice to her, my dear!' And Jolly heaved a sigh of contentment, blowing smoke through his nostrils. . . .

But up in her room, divested of her habit, Holly was still frowning. 'He is not — he is not!' were the words which kept forming on her lips.

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CHAPTER 6

JOLYON IN TWO MINDS

A little private hotel over a well-known restaurant near the Gare St. Lazare was Jolyon's haunt in Paris. He hated his fellow Forsytes abroad — vapid as fish out of water in their well-trodden runs, the Opera, Rue de Rivoli, and Moulin Rouge. Their air of having come because they wanted to be somewhere else as soon as possible annoyed him. But no other Forsyte came near this haunt, where he had a wood fire in his bedroom and the coffee was excellent. Paris was always to him more attractive in winter. The acrid savour from woodsmoke and chestnut-roasting braziers, the sharpness of the wintry sunshine on bright rays, the open cafes defying keen-aired winter, the self-contained brisk boulevard crowds, all informed him that in winter Paris possessed a soul which, like a migrant bird, in high summer flew away.

He spoke French well, had some friends, knew little places where pleasant dishes could be met with, queer types observed. He felt philosophic in Paris, the edge of irony sharpened; life took on a subtle, purposeless meaning, became a bunch of flavours tasted, a darkness shot with shifting gleams of light.

When in the first week of December he decided to go to Paris, he was far from admitting that Irene's presence was influencing him. He had not been there two days before he owned that the wish to see her had been more than half the reason. In England one did not admit what was natural. He had thought it might be well to speak to her about the letting of her flat and other matters, but in Paris he at once knew better. There was a glamour over the city. On the third day he wrote to her, and received an answer which procured him a pleasurable shiver of the nerves: "MY DEAR JOLYON,

"It will be a happiness for me to see you. "IRENE."

He took his way to her hotel on a bright day with a feeling such as he had often had going to visit an adored picture. No woman, so far as he remembered, had ever inspired in him this special sensuous and yet impersonal sensation. He was going to sit and feast his eyes, and come away knowing her no better, but ready to go and feast his eyes again to-morrow. Such was his feeling, when in the tarnished and ornate little lounge of a quiet hotel near the river she came to him preceded by a small page-boy who uttered the word, "Madame," and vanished. Her face, her smile, the poise of her figure, were just as he had pictured, and the expression of her face said plainly: 'A friend!'

"Well," he said, "what news, poor exile?"

"None."

"Nothing from Soames?"

"Nothing."

"I have let the flat for you, and like a good steward I bring you some money. How do you like Paris?"

While he put her through this catechism, it seemed to him that he had never seen lips so fine and sensitive, the lower lip curving just a little upwards, the upper touched at one corner by the least conceivable dimple. It was like discovering a woman in what had hitherto been a sort of soft and breathed-on statue, almost impersonally admired. She owned that to be alone in Paris was a little difficult; and yet, Paris was so full of its own life that it was often, she confessed, as innocuous as a desert. Besides, the English were not liked just now!

"That will hardly be your case," said Jolyon; "you should appeal to the French."

"It has its disadvantages."

Jolyon nodded.

"Well, you must let me take you about while I'm here. We'll start to-morrow. Come and dine at my pet restaurant; and we'll go to the Opera-Comique."

It was the beginning of daily meetings.

Jolyon soon found that for those who desired a static condition of the affections, Paris was at once the first and last place in which to be friendly with a pretty woman. Revelation was alighting like a bird in his heart, singing: 'Elle est ton reve! Elle est ton reve! Sometimes this seemed natural, sometimes ludicrous — a bad case of elderly rapture. Having once been ostracised by Society, he had never since had any real regard for conventional morality; but the idea of a love which she could never return — and how could she at his age? — hardly mounted beyond his subconscious mind. He was full, too, of resentment, at the waste and loneliness of her life. Aware of being some comfort to her, and of the pleasure she clearly took in their many little outings, he was amiably desirous of doing and saying nothing to destroy that pleasure. It was like watching a starved plant draw up water, to see her drink in his companionship. So far as they could tell, no one knew her address except himself; she was unknown in Paris, and he but little known, so that discretion seemed unnecessary in those walks, talks, visits to concerts, picture-galleries, theatres, little dinners, expeditions to Versailles, St. Cloud, even Fontainebleau. And time fled — one of those full months without past to it or future. What in his youth would certainly have been headlong passion, was now perhaps as deep a feeling, but far gentler, tempered to protective companionship by admiration, hopelessness, and a sense of chivalry — arrested in his veins at least so long as she was there, smiling and happy in their friendship, and always to him more beautiful and spiritually responsive: for her philosophy of life seemed to march in admirable step with his own, conditioned by emotion more than by reason, ironically mistrustful, susceptible to beauty, almost passionately humane and tolerant, yet subject to instinctive rigidities of which as a mere man he was less capable. And during all this companionable month he never quite lost that feeling with which he had set out on the first day as if to visit an adored work of art, a well-nigh impersonal desire. The future — inexorable pendant to the present he took care not to face, for fear of breaking up his untroubled manner; but he made plans to renew this time in places still more delightful, where the sun was hot and there were strange things to see and paint. The end came swiftly on the 20th of January with a telegram:

"Have enlisted in Imperial Yeomanry. JOLLY."

Jolyon received it just as he was setting out to meet her at the Louvre. It brought him up with a round turn. While he was lotus-eating here, his boy, whose philosopher and guide he ought to be, had taken this great step towards danger, hardship, perhaps even death. He felt disturbed to the soul, realising suddenly how Irene had twined herself round the roots of his being. Thus threatened with severance, the tie between them — for it had become a kind of tie — no longer had impersonal quality. The tranquil enjoyment of things in common, Jolyon perceived, was gone for ever. He saw his feeling as it was, in the nature of an infatuation. Ridiculous, perhaps, but so real that sooner or later it must disclose itself. And now, as it seemed to him, he could not, must not, make any such disclosure. The news of Jolly stood inexorably in the way. He was proud of this enlistment; proud of his boy for going off to fight for the country; for on Jolyon's pro-Boerism, too, Black Week had left its mark. And so the end was reached before the beginning! Well, luckily he had never made a sign!

When he came into the Gallery she was standing before the 'Virgin of the Rocks,' graceful, absorbed, smiling and unconscious. 'Have I to give up seeing that?' he thought. 'It's unnatural, so long as she's willing that I should see her.' He stood, unnoticed, watching her, storing up the image of her figure, envying the picture on which she was bending that long scrutiny. Twice she turned her head towards the entrance, and he thought: 'That's for me!' At last he went forward.

"Look!" he said.

She read the telegram, and he heard her sigh.

That sigh, too, was for him! His position was really cruel! To be loyal to his son he must just shake her hand and go. To be loyal to the feeling in his heart he must at least tell her what that feeling was. Could she, would she understand the silence in which he was gazing at that picture?

"I'm afraid I must go home at once," he said at last. "I shall miss all this awfully."

"So shall I; but, of course, you must go."

"Well!" said Jolyon holding out his hand.

Meeting her eyes, a flood of feeling nearly mastered him.

"Such is life!" he said. "Take care of yourself, my dear!"

He had a stumbling sensation in his legs and feet, as if his brain refused to steer him away from her. From the doorway, he saw her lift her hand and touch its fingers with her lips. He raised his hat solemnly, and did not look back again.

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CHAPTER 7

DARTIE VERSUS DARTIE

The suit — Dartie versus Dartie — for restitution of those conjugal rights concerning which Winifred was at heart so deeply undecided, followed the laws of subtraction towards day of judgment. This was not reached before the Courts rose for Christmas, but the case was third on the list when they sat again. Winifred spent the Christmas holidays a thought more fashionably than usual, with the matter locked up in her low-cut bosom. James was particularly liberal to her that Christmas, expressing thereby his sympathy, and relief, at the approaching dissolution of her marriage with that 'precious rascal,' which his old heart felt but his old lips could not utter.

The disappearance of Dartie made the fall in Consols a comparatively small matter; and as to the scandal — the real animus he felt against that fellow, and the increasing lead which property was attaining over reputation in a true Forsyte about to leave this world, served to drug a mind from which all allusions to the matter (except his own) were studiously kept. What worried him as a lawyer and a parent was the fear that Dartie might suddenly turn up and obey the Order of the Court when made. That would be a pretty how-de-do! The fear preyed on him in fact so much that, in presenting Winifred with a large Christmas cheque, he said: "It's chiefly for that chap out there; to keep him from coming back." It was, of course, to pitch away good money, but all in the nature of insurance against that bankruptcy which would no longer hang over him if only the divorce went through; and he questioned Winifred rigorously until she could assure him that the money had been sent. Poor woman! — it cost her many a pang to send what must find its way into the vanity-bag of 'that creature!' Soames, hearing of it, shook his head. They were not dealing with a Forsyte, reasonably tenacious of his purpose. It was very risky without knowing how the land lay out there. Still, it would look well with the Court; and he would see that Dreamer brought it out. "I wonder," he said suddenly, "where that ballet goes after the Argentine"; never omitting a chance of reminder; for he knew that Winifred still had a weakness, if not for Dartie, at least for not laundering him in public. Though not good at showing admiration, he admitted that she was behaving extremely well, with all her children at home gaping like young birds for news of their father — Imogen just on the point of coming out, and Val very restive about the whole thing. He felt that Val was the real heart of the matter to Winifred, who certainly loved him beyond her other children. The boy could spoke the wheel of this divorce yet if he set his mind to it. And Soames was very careful to keep the proximity of the preliminary proceedings from his nephew's ears. He did more. He asked him to dine at the Remove, and over Val's cigar introduced the subject which he knew to be nearest to his heart.

"I hear," he said, "that you want to play polo up at Oxford."

Val became less recumbent in his chair.

"Rather!" he said.

"Well," continued Soames, "that's a very expensive business. Your grandfather isn't likely to consent to it unless he can make sure that he's not got any other drain on him." And he paused to see whether the boy understood his meaning.

Val's thick dark lashes concealed his eyes, but a slight grimace appeared on his wide mouth, and he muttered:

"I suppose you mean my Dad!"

"Yes," said Soames; "I'm afraid it depends on whether he continues to be a drag or not;" and said no more, letting the boy dream it over.

But Val was also dreaming in those days of a silver-roan palfrey and a girl riding it. Though Crum was in town and an introduction to Cynthia Dark to be had for the asking, Val did not ask; indeed, he shunned Crum and lived a life strange even to himself, except in so far as accounts with tailor and livery stable were concerned. To his mother, his sisters, his young brother, he seemed to spend this Vacation in 'seeing fellows,' and his evenings sleepily at home. They could not propose anything in daylight that did not meet with the one response: "Sorry; I've got to see a fellow"; and he was put to extraordinary shifts to get in and out of the house unobserved in riding clothes; until, being made a member of the Goat's Club, he was able to transport them there, where he could change unregarded and slip off on his hack to Richmond Park. He kept his growing sentiment religiously to himself. Not for a world would he breathe to the 'fellows,' whom he was not 'seeing,' anything so ridiculous from the point of view of their creed and his. But he could not help its destroying his other appetites. It was coming between him and the legitimate pleasures of youth at last on its own in a way which must, he knew, make him a milksop in the eyes of Crum. All he cared for was to dress in his last-created riding togs, and steal away to the Robin Hill Gate, where presently the silver roan would come demurely sidling with its slim and dark-haired rider, and in the glades bare of leaves they would go off side by side, not talking very much, riding races sometimes, and sometimes holding hands. More than once of an evening, in a moment of expansion, he had been tempted to tell his mother how this shy sweet cousin had stolen in upon him and wrecked his 'life.' But bitter experience, that all persons above thirty-five were spoil-sports, prevented him. After all, he supposed he would have to go through with College, and she would have to 'come out,' before they could be married; so why complicate things, so long as he could see her? Sisters were teasing and unsympathetic beings, a brother worse, so there was no one to confide in. Ah! And this beastly divorce business! What a misfortune to have a name which other people hadn't! If only he had been called Gordon or Scott or Howard or something fairly common! But Dartie — there wasn't another in the directory! One might as well have been named Morkin for all the covert it afforded! So matters went on, till one day in the middle of January the silver-roan palfrey and its rider were missing at the tryst. Lingering in the cold, he debated whether he should ride on to the house: But Jolly might be there, and the memory of their dark encounter was still fresh within him. One could not be always fighting with her brother! So he returned dismally to town and spent an evening plunged in gloom. At breakfast next day he noticed that his mother had on an unfamiliar dress and was wearing her hat. The dress was black with a glimpse of peacock blue, the hat black and large — she looked exceptionally well. But when after breakfast she said to him, "Come in here, Val," and led the way to the drawing-room, he was at once beset by qualms. Winifred carefully shut the door and passed her handkerchief over her lips; inhaling the violette de Parme with which it had been soaked, Val thought: 'Has she found out about Holly?'

Her voice interrupted

"Are you going to be nice to me, dear boy?"

Val grinned doubtfully.

"Will you come with me this morning. . . . "

"I've got to see. . . . " began Val, but something in her face stopped him. "I say," he said, "you don't mean. . . . "

"Yes, I have to go to the Court this morning." Already! — that d —-d business which he had almost succeeded in forgetting, since nobody ever mentioned it. In self-commiseration he stood picking little bits of skin off his fingers. Then noticing that his mother's lips were all awry, he said impulsively: "All right, mother; I'll come. The brutes!" What brutes he did not know, but the expression exactly summed up their joint feeling, and restored a measure of equanimity.

"I suppose I'd better change into a 'shooter,'" he muttered, escaping to his room. He put on the 'shooter,' a higher collar, a pearl pin, and his neatest grey spats, to a somewhat blasphemous accompaniment. Looking at himself in the glass, he said, "Well, I'm damned if I'm going to show anything!" and went down. He found his grandfather's carriage at the door, and his mother in furs, with the appearance of one going to a Mansion House Assembly. They seated themselves side by side in the closed barouche, and all the way to the Courts of Justice Val made but one allusion to the business in hand. "There'll be nothing about those pearls, will there?"

The little tufted white tails of Winifred's muff began to shiver.

"Oh, no," she said, "it'll be quite harmless to-day. Your grandmother wanted to come too, but I wouldn't let her. I thought you could take care of me. You look so nice, Val. Just pull your coat collar up a little more at the back — that's right."

"If they bully you. . . . " began Val.

"Oh! they won't. I shall be very cool. It's the only way."

"They won't want me to give evidence or anything?"

"No, dear; it's all arranged." And she patted his hand. The determined front she was putting on it stayed the turmoil in Val's chest, and he busied himself in drawing his gloves off and on. He had taken what he now saw was the wrong pair to go with his spats; they should have been grey, but were deerskin of a dark tan; whether to keep them on or not he could not decide. They arrived soon after ten. It was his first visit to the Law Courts, and the building struck him at once.

"By Jove!" he said as they passed into the hall, "this'd make four or five jolly good racket courts."

Soames was awaiting them at the foot of some stairs.

“Here you are!” he said, without shaking hands, as if the event had made them too familiar for such formalities. “It’s Happerly Browne, Court I. We shall be on first.”

A sensation such as he had known when going in to bat was playing now in the top of Val’s chest, but he followed his mother and uncle doggedly, looking at no more than he could help, and thinking that the place smelled ‘fuggy.’ People seemed to be lurking everywhere, and he plucked Soames by the sleeve.

“I say, Uncle, you’re not going to let those beastly papers in, are you?”

Soames gave him the sideway look which had reduced many to silence in its time.

“In here,” he said. “You needn’t take off your furs, Winifred.”

Val entered behind them, nettled and with his head up. In this confounded hole everybody — and there were a good many of them — seemed sitting on everybody else’s knee, though really divided from each other by pews; and Val had a feeling that they might all slip down together into the well. This, however, was but a momentary vision — of mahogany, and black gowns, and white blobs of wigs and faces and papers, all rather secret and whispery — before he was sitting next his mother in the front row, with his back to it all, glad of her violette de Parme, and taking off his gloves for the last time. His mother was looking at him; he was suddenly conscious that she had really wanted him there next to her, and that he counted for something in this business.

All right! He would show them! Squaring his shoulders, he crossed his legs and gazed inscrutably at his spats. But just then an ‘old Johnny’ in a gown and long wig, looking awfully like a funny raddled woman, came through a door into the high pew opposite, and he had to uncross his legs hastily, and stand up with everybody else.

‘Dartie versus Dartie!’

It seemed to Val unspeakably disgusting to have one’s name called out like this in public! And, suddenly conscious that someone nearly behind him had begun talking about his family, he screwed his face round to see an old be-wigged buffer, who spoke as if he were eating his own words — queer-looking old cuss, the sort of man he had seen once or twice dining at Park Lane and punishing the port; he knew now where they ‘dug them up.’ All the same he found the old buffer quite fascinating, and would have continued to stare if his mother had not touched his arm. Reduced to gazing before him, he fixed his eyes on the Judge’s face instead. Why should that old ‘sportsman’ with his sarcastic mouth and his quick-moving eyes have the power to meddle with their private affairs — hadn’t he affairs of his own, just as many, and probably just as nasty? And there moved in Val, like an illness, all the deep-seated individualism of his breed. The voice behind him droned along: “Differences about money matters — extravagance of the respondent” (What a word! Was that his father?) —“strained situation — frequent absences on the part of Mr. Dartie. My client, very rightly, your Ludship will agree, was anxious to check a course — but lead to ruin — remonstrated — gambling at cards and on the racecourse —” (‘That’s right!’ thought Val, ‘pile it on!’) “Crisis early in October, when the respondent wrote her this letter from his Club.” Val sat up and his ears burned. “I propose to read it with the emendations necessary to the epistle of a gentleman who has been — shall we say dining, me Lud?”

‘Old brute!’ thought Val, flushing deeper; ‘you’re not paid to make jokes!’

“‘You will not get the chance to insult me again in my own house. I am leaving the country to-morrow. It’s played out’— an expression, your Ludship, not unknown in the mouths of those who have not met with conspicuous success.”

‘Sniggering owls!’ thought Val, and his flush deepened.

“‘I am tired of being insulted by you.’ My client will tell your Ludship that these so-called insults consisted in her calling him ‘the limit’ — a very mild expression, I venture to suggest, in all the circumstances.”

Val glanced sideways at his mother’s impassive face, it had a hunted look in the eyes. ‘Poor mother,’ he thought, and touched her arm with his own. The voice behind droned on.

“‘I am going to live a new life. M. D.’”

“And next day, me Lud, the respondent left by the steamship Tuscarora for Buenos Aires. Since then we have nothing from him but a cabled refusal in answer to the letter which my client wrote the following day in great distress, begging him to return to her. With your Ludship’s permission. I shall now put Mrs. Dartie in the box.”

When his mother rose, Val had a tremendous impulse to rise too and say: ‘Look here! I’m going to see you jolly well treat her decently.’ He subdued it, however; heard her saying, ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,’ and looked up. She made a rich figure of it, in her furs and large hat, with a slight flush on her cheek-bones, calm, matter-of-fact; and he felt proud of her thus confronting all these 'confounded lawyers.' The examination began. Knowing that this was only the preliminary to divorce, Val followed with a certain glee the questions framed so as to give the impression that she really wanted his father back. It seemed to him that they were 'foxing Old Bagwigs finely.'

And he received a most unpleasant jar when the Judge said suddenly:

"Now, why did your husband leave you — not because you called him 'the limit,' you know?"

Val saw his uncle lift his eyes to the witness box, without moving his face; heard a shuffle of papers behind him; and instinct told him that the issue was in peril. Had Uncle Soames and the old buffer behind made a mess of it? His mother was speaking with a slight drawl.

"No, my Lord, but it had gone on a long time."

"What had gone on?"

"Our differences about money."

"But you supplied the money. Do you suggest that he left you to better his position?"

'The brute! The old brute, and nothing but the brute!' thought Val suddenly. 'He smells a rat he's trying to get at the pastry!' And his heart stood still. If — if he did, then, of course, he would know that his mother didn't really want his father back. His mother spoke again, a thought more fashionably.

"No, my Lord, but you see I had refused to give him any more money. It took him a long time to believe that, but he did at last — and when he did. . . . "

"I see, you had refused. But you've sent him some since."

"My Lord, I wanted him back."

"And you thought that would bring him?"

"I don't know, my Lord, I acted on my father's advice."

Something in the Judge's face, in the sound of the papers behind him, in the sudden crossing of his uncle's legs, told Val that she had made just the right answer. 'Crafty!' he thought; 'by Jove, what humbug it all is!'

The Judge was speaking:

"Just one more question, Mrs. Dartie. Are you still fond of your husband?"

Val's hands, slack behind him, became fists. What business had that Judge to make things human suddenly? To make his mother speak out of her heart, and say what, perhaps, she didn't know herself, before all these people! It wasn't decent. His mother answered, rather low: "Yes, my Lord." Val saw the Judge nod. 'Wish I could take a cock-shy at your head!' he thought irreverently, as his mother came back to her seat beside him. Witnesses to his father's departure and continued absence followed — one of their own maids even, which struck Val as particularly beastly; there was more talking, all humbug; and then the Judge pronounced the decree for restitution, and they got up to go. Val walked out behind his mother, chin squared, eyelids drooped, doing his level best to despise everybody. His mother's voice in the corridor roused him from an angry trance.

"You behaved beautifully, dear. It was such a comfort to have you. Your uncle and I are going to lunch."

"All right," said Val; "I shall have time to go and see that fellow." And, parting from them abruptly, he ran down the stairs and out into the air. He bolted into a hansom, and drove to the Goat's Club. His thoughts were on Holly and what he must do before her brother showed her this thing in to-morrow's paper.

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When Val had left them Soames and Winifred made their way to the Cheshire Cheese. He had suggested it as a meeting place with Mr. Bellby. At that early hour of noon they would have it to themselves, and Winifred had thought it would be 'amusing' to see this far-famed hostelry. Having ordered a light repast, to the consternation of the waiter, they awaited its arrival together with that of Mr. Bellby, in silent reaction after the hour and a half's suspense on the tenterhooks of publicity. Mr. Bellby entered presently, preceded by his nose, as cheerful as they were glum. Well! they had got the decree of restitution, and what was the matter with that!

"Quite," said Soames in a suitably low voice, "but we shall have to begin again to get evidence. He'll probably try the divorce — it will look fishy if it comes out that we knew of misconduct from the start. His questions showed well enough that he doesn't like this restitution dodge."

"Pho!" said Mr. Bellby cheerily, "he'll forget! Why, man, he'll have tried a hundred cases between now and then. Besides, he's bound by precedent to give ye your divorce, if the evidence is satisfactory. We won't let um know that Mrs. Dartie had knowledge of the facts. Dreamer did it very nicely — he's got a fatherly touch about um!"

Soames nodded.

"And I compliment ye, Mrs. Dartie," went on Mr. Bellby; "ye've a natural gift for giving evidence. Steady as a rock."

Here the, waiter arrived with three plates balanced on one arm, and the remark: "I 'urried up the pudden, sir. You'll find plenty o' lark in it to-day."

Mr. Bellby applauded his forethought with a dip of his nose. But Soames and Winifred looked with dismay at their light lunch of gravified brown masses, touching them gingerly with their forks in the hope of distinguishing the bodies of the tasty little song-givers. Having begun, however, they found they were hungrier than they thought, and finished the lot, with a glass of port apiece. Conversation turned on the war. Soames thought Ladysmith would fall, and it might last a year. Bellby thought it would be over by the summer. Both agreed that they wanted more men. There was nothing for it but complete victory, since it was now a question of prestige. Winifred brought things back to more solid ground by saying that she did not want the divorce suit to come on till after the summer holidays had begun at Oxford, then the boys would have forgotten about it before Val had to go up again; the London season too would be over. The lawyers reassured her, an interval of six months was necessary — after that the earlier the better. People were now beginning to come in, and they parted — Soames to the city, Bellby to his chambers, Winifred in a hansom to Park Lane to let her mother know how she had fared. The issue had been so satisfactory on the whole that it was considered advisable to tell James, who never failed to say day after day that he didn't know about Winifred's affair, he couldn't tell. As his sands ran out; the importance of mundane matters became increasingly grave to him, as if he were feeling: 'I must make the most of it, and worry well; I shall soon have nothing to worry about.'

He received the report grudgingly. It was a new-fangled way of going about things, and he didn't know! But he gave Winifred a cheque, saying:

"I expect you'll have a lot of expense. That's a new hat you've got on. Why doesn't Val come and see us?"

Winifred promised to bring him to dinner soon. And, going home, she sought her bedroom where she could be alone. Now that her husband had been ordered back into her custody with a view to putting him away from her for ever, she would try once more to find out from her sore and lonely heart what she really wanted.

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CHAPTER 8

THE CHALLENGE

The morning had been misty, verging on frost, but the sun came out while Val was jogging towards the Roehampton Gate, whence he would canter on to the usual tryst. His spirits were rising rapidly. There had been nothing so very terrible in the morning's proceedings beyond the general disgrace of violated privacy. 'If we were engaged!' he thought, 'what happens wouldn't matter.' He felt, indeed, like human society, which kicks and clamours at the results of matrimony, and hastens to get married. And he galloped over the winter-dried grass of Richmond Park, fearing to be late. But again he was alone at the trysting spot, and this second defection on the part of Holly upset him dreadfully. He could not go back without seeing her to-day! Emerging from the Park, he proceeded towards Robin Hill. He could not make up his mind for whom to ask. Suppose her father were back, or her sister or brother were in! He decided to gamble, and ask for them all first, so that if he were in luck and they were not there, it would be quite natural in the end to ask for Holly; while if any of them were in — an 'excuse for a ride' must be his saving grace.

"Only Miss Holly is in, sir."

"Oh! thanks. Might I take my horse round to the stables? And would you say — her cousin, Mr. Val Dartie."

When he returned she was in the hall, very flushed and shy. She led him to the far end, and they sat down on a wide window-seat.

"I've been awfully anxious," said Val in a low voice. "What's the matter?"

"Jolly knows about our riding."

"Is he in?"

"No; but I expect he will be soon."

"Then!" cried Val, and diving forward, he seized her hand. She tried to withdraw it, failed, gave up the attempt, and looked at him wistfully.

"First of all," he said, "I want to tell you something about my family. My Dad, you know, isn't altogether — I mean, he's left my mother and they're trying to divorce him; so they've ordered him to come back, you see. You'll see that in the paper to-morrow."

Her eyes deepened in colour and fearful interest; her hand squeezed his. But the gambler in Val was roused now, and he hurried on:

"Of course there's nothing very much at present, but there will be, I expect, before it's over; divorce suits are beastly, you know. I wanted to tell you, because — because — you ought to know — if —" and he began to stammer, gazing at her troubled eyes, "if — if you're going to be a darling and love me, Holly. I love you — ever so; and I want to be engaged." He had done it in a manner so inadequate that he could have punched his own head; and dropping on his knees, he tried to get nearer to that soft, troubled face. "You do love me — don't you? If you don't I. . . . " There was a moment of silence and suspense, so awful that he could hear the sound of a mowing-machine far out on the lawn pretending there was grass to cut. Then she swayed forward; her free hand touched his hair, and he gasped: "Oh, Holly!"

Her answer was very soft: "Oh, Val!"

He had dreamed of this moment, but always in an imperative mood, as the masterful young lover, and now he felt humble, touched, trembly. He was afraid to stir off his knees lest he should break the spell; lest, if he did, she should shrink and deny her own surrender — so tremulous was she in his grasp, with her eyelids closed and his lips nearing them. Her eyes opened, seemed to swim a little; he pressed his lips to hers. Suddenly he sprang up; there had been footsteps, a sort of startled grunt. He looked round. No one! But the long curtains which barred off the outer hall were quivering.

"My God! Who was that?"

Holly too was on her feet.

"Jolly, I expect," she whispered.

Val clenched fists and resolution.

“All right!” he said, “I don’t care a bit now we’re engaged,” and striding towards the curtains, he drew them aside. There at the fireplace in the hall stood Jolly, with his back elaborately turned. Val went forward. Jolly faced round on him.

“I beg your pardon for hearing,” he said.

With the best intentions in the world, Val could not help admiring him at that moment; his face was clear, his voice quiet, he looked somehow distinguished, as if acting up to principle.

“Well!” Val said abruptly, “it’s nothing to you.”

“Oh!” said Jolly; “you come this way,” and he crossed the hall. Val followed. At the study door he felt a touch on his arm; Holly’s voice said:

“I’m coming too.”

“No,” said Jolly.

“Yes,” said Holly.

Jolly opened the door, and they all three went in. Once in the little room, they stood in a sort of triangle on three corners of the worn Turkey carpet; awkwardly upright, not looking at each other, quite incapable of seeing any humour in the situation.

Val broke the silence.

“Holly and I are engaged.”,

Jolly stepped back and leaned against the lintel of the window.

“This is our house,” he said; “I’m not going to insult you in it. But my father’s away. I’m in charge of my sister. You’ve taken advantage of me.

“I didn’t mean to,” said Val hotly.

“I think you did,” said Jolly. “If you hadn’t meant to, you’d have spoken to me, or waited for my father to come back.”

“There were reasons,” said Val.

“What reasons?”

“About my family — I’ve just told her. I wanted her to know before things happen.”

Jolly suddenly became less distinguished.

“You’re kids,” he said, “and you know you are.

“I am not a kid,” said Val.

“You are — you’re not twenty.”

“Well, what are you?”

“I am twenty,” said Jolly.

“Only just; anyway, I’m as good a man as you.”

Jolly’s face crimsoned, then clouded. Some struggle was evidently taking place in him; and Val and Holly stared at him, so clearly was that struggle marked; they could even hear him breathing. Then his face cleared up and became oddly resolute.

“We’ll see that,” he said. “I dare you to do what I’m going to do.”

“Dare me?”

Jolly smiled. “Yes,” he said, “dare you; and I know very well you won’t.”

A stab of misgiving shot through Val; this was riding very blind.

“I haven’t forgotten that you’re a fire-eater,” said Jolly slowly, “and I think that’s about all you are; or that you called me a pro-Boer.”

Val heard a gasp above the sound of his own hard breathing, and saw Holly’s face poked a little forward, very pale, with big eyes.

“Yes,” went on Jolly with a sort of smile, “we shall soon see. I’m going to join the Imperial Yeomanry, and I dare you to do the same, Mr. Val Dartie.”

Val’s head jerked on its stem. It was like a blow between the eyes, so utterly unthought of, so extreme and ugly in the midst of his dreaming; and he looked at Holly with eyes grown suddenly, touchingly haggard.

“Sit down!” said Jolly. “Take your time! Think it over well.” And he himself sat down on the arm of his grandfather’s chair.

Val did not sit down; he stood with hands thrust deep into his breeches’ pockets-hands clenched and quivering. The full awfulness of this decision one way or the other knocked at his mind with double knocks as of an angry postman. If he did not take that ‘dare’ he was disgraced in Holly’s eyes, and in the eyes of that young enemy, her brute of a brother. Yet if he took it, ah! then all would vanish — her face, her eyes, her hair, her kisses just begun!

“Take your time,” said Jolly again; “I don’t want to be unfair.”

And they both looked at Holly. She had recoiled against the bookshelves reaching to the ceiling; her dark head leaned against Gibbon’s Roman Empire, her eyes in a sort of soft grey agony were fixed on Val. And he, who had not much gift of insight, had suddenly a gleam of vision. She would be proud of her brother — that enemy! She would be ashamed of him! His hands came out of his pockets as if lifted by a spring.

“All right!” he said. “Done!”

Holly’s face — oh! it was queer! He saw her flush, start forward. He had done the right thing — her face was shining with wistful admiration. Jolly stood up and made a little bow as who should say: ‘You’ve passed.’

“To-morrow, then,” he said, “we’ll go together.”

Recovering from the impetus which had carried him to that decision, Val looked at him maliciously from under his lashes. ‘All right,’ he thought, ‘one to you. I shall have to join — but I’ll get back on you somehow.’ And he said with dignity: “I shall be ready.”

“We’ll meet at the main Recruiting Office, then,” said Jolly, “at twelve o’clock.” And, opening the window, he went out on to the terrace, conforming to the creed which had made him retire when he surprised them in the hall.

The confusion in the mind of Val thus left alone with her for whom he had paid this sudden price was extreme. The mood of ‘showing-off’ was still, however, uppermost. One must do the wretched thing with an air.

“We shall get plenty of riding and shooting, anyway,” he said; “that’s one comfort.” And it gave him a sort of grim pleasure to hear the sigh which seemed to come from the bottom of her heart.

“Oh! the war’ll soon be over,” he said; “perhaps we shan’t even have to go out. I don’t care, except for you.” He would be out of the way of that beastly divorce. It was an ill-wind! He felt her warm hand slip into his. Jolly thought he had stopped their loving each other, did he? He held her tightly round the waist, looking at her softly through his lashes, smiling to cheer her up, promising to come down and see her soon, feeling somehow six inches taller and much more in command of her than he had ever dared feel before. Many times he kissed her before he mounted and rode back to town. So, swiftly, on the least provocation, does the possessive instinct flourish and grow.

❦

CHAPTER 9

DINNER AT JAMES'

Dinner parties were not now given at James' in Park Lane — to every house the moment comes when Master or Mistress is no longer 'up to it'; no more can nine courses be served to twenty mouths above twenty fine white expanses; nor does the household cat any longer wonder why she is suddenly shut up.

So with something like excitement Emily — who at seventy would still have liked a little feast and fashion now and then — ordered dinner for six instead of two, herself wrote a number of foreign words on cards, and arranged the flowers — mimosa from the Riviera, and white Roman hyacinths not from Rome. There would only be, of course, James and herself, Soames, Winifred, Val, and Imogen — but she liked to pretend a little and dally in imagination with the glory of the past. She so dressed herself that James remarked:

"What are you putting on that thing for? You'll catch cold."

But Emily knew that the necks of women are protected by love of shining, unto fourscore years, and she only answered:

"Let me put you on one of those dickies I got you, James; then you'll only have to change your trousers, and put on your velvet coat, and there you'll be. Val likes you to look nice."

"Dicky!" said James. "You're always wasting your money on something."

But he suffered the change to be made till his neck also shone, murmuring vaguely:

"He's an extravagant chap, I'm afraid."

A little brighter in the eye, with rather more colour than usual in his cheeks, he took his seat in the drawing-room to wait for the sound of the front-door bell.

"I've made it a proper dinner party," Emily said comfortably; "I thought it would be good practice for Imogen — she must get used to it now she's coming out."

James uttered an indeterminate sound, thinking of Imogen as she used to climb about his knee or pull Christmas crackers with him.

"She'll be pretty," he muttered, "I shouldn't wonder."

"She is pretty," said Emily; "she ought to make a good match."

"There you go," murmured James; "she'd much better stay at home and look after her mother." A second Dartie carrying off his pretty granddaughter would finish him! He had never quite forgiven Emily for having been as much taken in by Montague Dartie as he himself had been.

"Where's Warmson?" he said suddenly. "I should like a glass of Madeira to-night."

"There's champagne, James."

James shook his head. "No body," he said; "I can't get any good out of it."

Emily reached forward on her side of the fire and rang the bell.

"Your master would like a bottle of Madeira opened, Warmson."

"No, no!" said James, the tips of his ears quivering with vehemence, and his eyes fixed on an object seen by him alone. "Look here, Warmson, you go to the inner cellar, and on the middle shelf of the end bin on the left you'll see seven bottles; take the one in the centre, and don't shake it. It's the last of the Madeira I had from Mr. Jolyon when we came in here — never been moved; it ought to be in prime condition still; but I don't know, I can't tell."

"Very good, sir," responded the withdrawing Warmson.

"I was keeping it for our golden wedding," said James suddenly, "but I shan't live three years at my age."

"Nonsense, James," said Emily, "don't talk like that."

"I ought to have got it up myself," murmured James, "he'll shake it as likely as not." And he sank into silent recollection of long moments among the open gas-jets, the cobwebs and the good smell of wine-soaked corks, which had been appetiser to so many feasts. In the wine from that cellar was written the history of the forty odd years since he had come to the Park Lane house with his young bride, and of the many generations of friends and acquaintances who had passed into the unknown; its depleted bins preserved the record of family festivity — all the marriages, births, deaths of his kith and kin. And when he was gone there it would be, and he didn't know what would become of it. It'd be drunk or spoiled, he shouldn't wonder!

From that deep reverie the entrance of his son dragged him, followed very soon by that of Winifred and her two eldest.

They went down arm-in-arm — James with Imogen, the debutante, because his pretty grandchild cheered him; Soames with Winifred; Emily with Val, whose eyes lighting on the oysters brightened. This was to be a proper full 'blowout' with 'fizz' and port! And he felt in need of it, after what he had done that day, as yet undivulged. After the first glass or two it became pleasant to have this bombshell up his sleeve, this piece of sensational patriotism, or example, rather, of personal daring, to display — for his pleasure in what he had done for his Queen and Country was so far entirely personal. He was now a 'blood,' indissolubly connected with guns and horses; he had a right to swagger — not, of course, that he was going to. He should just announce it quietly, when there was a pause. And, glancing down the menu, he determined on 'Bombe aux fraises' as the proper moment; there would be a certain solemnity while they were eating that. Once or twice before they reached that rosy summit of the dinner he was attacked by remembrance that his grandfather was never told anything! Still, the old boy was drinking Madeira, and looking jolly fit! Besides, he ought to be pleased at this set-off to the disgrace of the divorce. The sight of his uncle opposite, too, was a sharp incentive. He was so far from being a sportsman that it would be worth a lot to see his face. Besides, better to tell his mother in this way than privately, which might upset them both! He was sorry for her, but after all one couldn't be expected to feel much for others when one had to part from Holly.

His grandfather's voice travelled to him thinly. "Val, try a little of the Madeira with your ice. You won't get that up at college."

Val watched the slow liquid filling his glass, the essential oil of the old wine glazing the surface; inhaled its aroma, and thought: 'Now for it!' It was a rich moment. He sipped, and a gentle glow spread in his veins, already heated. With a rapid look round, he said, "I joined the Imperial Yeomanry to-day, Granny," and emptied his glass as though drinking the health of his own act.

"What!" It was his mother's desolate little word.

"Young Jolly Forsyte and I went down there together."

"You didn't sign?" from Uncle Soames.

"Rather! We go into camp on Monday."

"I say!" cried Imogen.

All looked at James. He was leaning forward with his hand behind his ear.

"What's that?" he said. "What's he saying? I can't hear."

Emily reached forward to pat Val's hand.

"It's only that Val has joined the Yeomanry, James; it's very nice for him. He'll look his best in uniform."

"Joined the — rubbish!" came from James, tremulously loud. "You can't see two yards before your nose. He — he'll have to go out there. Why! he'll be fighting before he knows where he is."

Val saw Imogen's eyes admiring him, and his mother still and fashionable with her handkerchief before her lips.

Suddenly his uncle spoke.

"You're under age."

"I thought of that," smiled Val; "I gave my age as twenty-one."

He heard his grandmother's admiring, "Well, Val, that was plucky of you;" was conscious of Warmson deferentially filling his champagne glass; and of his grandfather's voice moaning: "I don't know what'll become of you if you go on like this."

Imogen was patting his shoulder, his uncle looking at him sidelong; only his mother sat unmoving, till, affected by her stillness, Val said:

"It's all right, you know; we shall soon have them on the run. I only hope I shall come in for something."

He felt elated, sorry, tremendously important all at once. This would show Uncle Soames, and all the Forsytes, how to be sportsmen. He had certainly done something heroic and exceptional in giving his age as twenty-one.

Emily's voice brought him back to earth.

"You mustn't have a second glass, James. Warmson!"

"Won't they be astonished at Timothy's!" burst out Imogen. "I'd give anything to see their faces. Do you have a sword, Val, or only a popgun?"

"What made you?"

His uncle's voice produced a slight chill in the pit of Val's stomach. Made him? How answer that? He was grateful for his grandmother's comfortable:

"Well, I think it's very plucky of Val. I'm sure he'll make a splendid soldier; he's just the figure for it. We shall all be proud of him."

"What had young Jolly Forsyte to do with it? Why did you go together?" pursued Soames, uncannily relentless. "I thought you weren't friendly with him?"

"I'm not," mumbled Val, "but I wasn't going to be beaten by him." He saw his uncle look at him quite differently, as if approving. His grandfather was nodding too, his grandmother tossing her head. They all approved of his not being beaten by that cousin of his. There must be a reason! Val was dimly conscious of some disturbing point outside his range of vision; as it might be, the unlocated centre of a cyclone. And, staring at his uncle's face, he had a quite unaccountable vision of a woman with dark eyes, gold hair, and a white neck, who smelt nice, and had pretty silken clothes which he had liked feeling when he was quite small. By Jove, yes! Aunt Irene! She used to kiss him, and he had bitten her arm once, playfully, because he liked it — so soft. His grandfather was speaking:

"What's his father doing?"

"He's away in Paris," Val said, staring at the very queer expression on his uncle's face, like — like that of a snarling dog.

"Artists!" said James. The word coming from the very bottom of his soul, broke up the dinner.

Opposite his mother in the cab going home, Val tasted the after-fruits of heroism, like medlars over-ripe.

She only said, indeed, that he must go to his tailor's at once and have his uniform properly made, and not just put up with what they gave him. But he could feel that she was very much upset. It was on his lips to console her with the spoken thought that he would be out of the way of that beastly divorce, but the presence of Imogen, and the knowledge that his mother would not be out of the way, restrained him. He felt aggrieved that she did not seem more proud of him. When Imogen had gone to bed, he risked the emotional.

"I'm awfully sorry to have to leave you, Mother."

"Well, I must make the best of it. We must try and get you a commission as soon as we can; then you won't have to rough it so. Do you know any drill, Val?"

"Not a scrap."

"I hope they won't worry you much. I must take you about to get the things to-morrow. Good-night; kiss me."

With that kiss, soft and hot, between his eyes, and those words, 'I hope they won't worry you much,' in his ears, he sat down to a cigarette, before a dying fire. The heat was out of him — the glow of cutting a dash. It was all a damned heart-aching bore. 'I'll be even with that chap Jolly,' he thought, trailing up the stairs, past the room where his mother was biting her pillow to smother a sense of desolation which was trying to make her sob.

And soon only one of the diners at James' was awake — Soames, in his bedroom above his father's.

So that fellow Jolyon was in Paris — what was he doing there? Hanging round Irene! The last report from Polteed had hinted that there might be something soon. Could it be this? That fellow, with his beard and his cursed amused way of speaking — son of the old man who had given him the nickname 'Man of Property,' and bought the fatal house from him. Soames had ever resented having had to sell the house at Robin Hill; never forgiven his uncle for having bought it, or his cousin for living in it.

Reckless of the cold, he threw his window up and gazed out across the Park. Bleak and dark the January night; little sound of traffic; a frost coming; bare trees; a star or two. 'I'll see Polteed to-morrow,' he thought. 'By God! I'm mad, I think, to want her still. That fellow! If . . .? Um! No!'

CHAPTER 10

DEATH OF THE DOG BALTHASAR

Jolyon, who had crossed from Calais by night, arrived at Robin Hill on Sunday morning. He had sent no word beforehand, so walked up from the station, entering his domain by the coppice gate. Coming to the log seat fashioned out of an old fallen trunk, he sat down, first laying his overcoat on it.

‘Lumbago!’ he thought; ‘that’s what love ends in at my time of life!’ And suddenly Irene seemed very near, just as she had been that day of rambling at Fontainebleau when they had sat on a log to eat their lunch. Hauntingly near! Odour drawn out of fallen leaves by the pale-filtering sunlight soaked his nostrils. ‘I’m glad it isn’t spring,’ he thought. With the scent of sap, and the song of birds, and the bursting of the blossoms, it would have been unbearable! ‘I hope I shall be over it by then, old fool that I am!’ and picking up his coat, he walked on into the field. He passed the pond and mounted the hill slowly.

Near the top a hoarse barking greeted him. Up on the lawn above the fernery he could see his old dog Balthasar. The animal, whose dim eyes took his master for a stranger, was warning the world against him. Jolyon gave his special whistle. Even at that distance of a hundred yards and more he could see the dawning recognition in the obese brown-white body. The old dog got off his haunches, and his tail, close-curled over his back, began a feeble, excited fluttering; he came waddling forward, gathered momentum, and disappeared over the edge of the fernery. Jolyon expected to meet him at the wicket gate, but Balthasar was not there, and, rather alarmed, he turned into the fernery. On his fat side, looking up with eyes already glazing, the old dog lay.

“What is it, my poor old man?” cried Jolyon. Balthasar’s curled and fluffy tail just moved; his filming eyes seemed saying: “I can’t get up, master, but I’m glad to see you.”

Jolyon knelt down; his eyes, very dimmed, could hardly see the slowly ceasing heave of the dog’s side. He raised the head a little — very heavy.

“What is it, dear man? Where are you hurt?” The tail fluttered once; the eyes lost the look of life. Jolyon passed his hands all over the inert warm bulk. There was nothing — the heart had simply failed in that obese body from the emotion of his master’s return. Jolyon could feel the muzzle, where a few whitish bristles grew, cooling already against his lips. He stayed for some minutes kneeling; with his hand beneath the stiffening head. The body was very heavy when he bore it to the top of the field; leaves had drifted there, and he strewed it with a covering of them; there was no wind, and they would keep him from curious eyes until the afternoon. ‘I’ll bury him myself,’ he thought. Eighteen years had gone since he first went into the St. John’s Wood house with that tiny puppy in his pocket. Strange that the old dog should die just now! Was it an omen? He turned at the gate to look back at that russet mound, then went slowly towards the house, very choky in the throat.

June was at home; she had come down hotfoot on hearing the news of Jolly’s enlistment. His patriotism had conquered her feeling for the Boers. The atmosphere of his house was strange and pocketty when Jolyon came in and told them of the dog Balthasar’s death. The news had a unifying effect. A link with the past had snapped — the dog Balthasar! Two of them could remember nothing before his day; to June he represented the last years of her grandfather; to Jolyon that life of domestic stress and aesthetic struggle before he came again into the kingdom of his father’s love and wealth! And he was gone!

In the afternoon he and Jolly took picks and spades and went out to the field. They chose a spot close to the russet mound, so that they need not carry him far, and, carefully cutting off the surface turf, began to dig. They dug in silence for ten minutes, and then rested.

“Well, old man,” said Jolyon, “so you thought you ought?”

“Yes,” answered Jolly; “I don’t want to a bit, of course.”

How exactly those words represented Jolyon’s own state of mind

“I admire you for it, old boy. I don’t believe I should have done it at your age — too much of a Forsyte, I’m afraid. But I suppose the type gets thinner with each generation. Your son, if you have one, may be a pure altruist; who knows?”

"He won't be like me, then, Dad; I'm beastly selfish."

"No, my dear, that you clearly are not." Jolly shook his head, and they dug again.

"Strange life a dog's," said Jolyon suddenly: "The only four-footer with rudiments of altruism and a sense of God!"

Jolly looked at his father.

"Do you believe in God, Dad? I've never known."

At so searching a question from one to whom it was impossible to make a light reply, Jolyon stood for a moment feeling his back tried by the digging.

"What do you mean by God?" he said; "there are two irreconcilable ideas of God. There's the Unknowable Creative Principle — one believes in That. And there's the Sum of altruism in man — naturally one believes in That."

"I see. That leaves out Christ, doesn't it?"

Jolyon stared. Christ, the link between those two ideas! Out of the mouth of babes! Here was orthodoxy scientifically explained at last! The sublime poem of the Christ life was man's attempt to join those two irreconcilable conceptions of God. And since the Sum of human altruism was as much a part of the Unknowable Creative Principle as anything else in Nature and the Universe, a worse link might have been chosen after all! Funny — how one went through life without seeing it in that sort of way!

"What do you think, old man?" he said.

Jolly frowned. "Of course, my first year we talked a good bit about that sort of thing. But in the second year one gives it up; I don't know why — it's awfully interesting."

Jolyon remembered that he also had talked a good deal about it his first year at Cambridge, and given it up in his second.

"I suppose," said Jolly, "it's the second God, you mean, that old Balthasar had a sense of."

"Yes, or he would never have burst his poor old heart because of something outside himself."

"But wasn't that just selfish emotion, really?"

Jolyon shook his head. "No, dogs are not pure Forsytes, they love something outside themselves."

Jolly smiled.

"Well, I think I'm one," he said. "You know, I only enlisted because I dared Val Dartie to."

"But why?"

"We bar each other," said Jolly shortly.

"Ah!" muttered Jolyon. So the feud went on, unto the third generation — this modern feud which had no overt expression?

'Shall I tell the boy about it?' he thought. But to what end — if he had to stop short of his own part?

And Jolly thought: 'It's for Holly to let him know about that chap. If she doesn't, it means she doesn't want him told, and I should be sneaking. Anyway, I've stopped it. I'd better leave well alone!'

So they dug on in silence, till Jolyon said:

"Now, old man, I think it's big enough." And, resting on their spades, they gazed down into the hole where a few leaves had drifted already on a sunset wind.

"I can't bear this part of it," said Jolyon suddenly.

"Let me do it, Dad. He never cared much for me."

Jolyon shook his head.

"We'll lift him very gently, leaves and all. I'd rather not see him again. I'll take his head. Now!"

With extreme care they raised the old dog's body, whose faded tan and white showed here and there under the leaves stirred by the wind. They laid it, heavy, cold, and unresponsive, in the grave, and Jolly spread more leaves over it, while Jolyon, deeply afraid to show emotion before his son, began quickly shovelling the earth on to that still shape. There went the past! If only there were a joyful future to look forward to! It was like stamping down earth on one's own life. They replaced the turf carefully on the smooth little mound, and, grateful that they had spared each other's feelings, returned to the house arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER 11

TIMOTHY STAYS THE ROT

On Forsyte 'Change news of the enlistment spread fast, together with the report that June, not to be outdone, was going to become a Red Cross nurse. These events were so extreme, so subversive of pure Forsyteism, as to have a binding effect upon the family, and Timothy's was thronged next Sunday afternoon by members trying to find out what they thought about it all, and exchange with each other a sense of family credit. Giles and Jesse Hayman would no longer defend the coast but go to South Africa quite soon; Jolly and Val would be following in April; as to June — well, you never knew what she would really do.

The retirement from Spion Kop and the absence of any good news from the seat of war imparted an air of reality to all this, clinched in startling fashion by Timothy. The youngest of the old Forsytes — scarcely eighty, in fact popularly supposed to resemble their father, 'Superior Dosset,' even in his best-known characteristic of drinking Sherry — had been invisible for so many years that he was almost mythical. A long generation had elapsed since the risks of a publisher's business had worked on his nerves at the age of forty, so that he had got out with a mere thirty-five thousand pounds in the world, and started to make his living by careful investment. Putting by every year, at compound interest, he had doubled his capital in forty years without having once known what it was like to shake in his shoes over money matters. He was now putting aside some two thousand a year, and, with the care he was taking of himself, expected, so Aunt Hester said, to double his capital again before he died. What he would do with it then, with his sisters dead and himself dead, was often mockingly queried by free spirits such as Francie, Euphemia, or young Nicholas' second, Christopher, whose spirit was so free that he had actually said he was going on the stage. All admitted, however, that this was best known to Timothy himself, and possibly to Soames, who never divulged a secret.

Those few Forsytes who had seen him reported a man of thick and robust appearance, not very tall, with a brown-red complexion, grey hair, and little of the refinement of feature with which most of the Forsytes had been endowed by 'Superior Dosset's' wife, a woman of some beauty and a gentle temperament. It was known that he had taken surprising interest in the war, sticking flags into a map ever since it began, and there was uneasiness as to what would happen if the English were driven into the sea, when it would be almost impossible for him to put the flags in the right places. As to his knowledge of family movements or his views about them, little was known, save that Aunt Hester was always declaring that he was very upset. It was, then, in the nature of a portent when Forsytes, arriving on the Sunday after the evacuation of Spion Kop, became conscious, one after the other, of a presence seated in the only really comfortable armchair, back to the light, concealing the lower part of his face with a large hand, and were greeted by the awed voice of Aunt Hester:

"Your Uncle Timothy, my dear."

Timothy's greeting to them all was somewhat identical; and rather, as it were, passed over by him than expressed:

"How de do? How de do? 'Xcuse me gettin' up!"

Francie was present, and Eustace had come in his car; Winifred had brought Imogen, breaking the ice of the restitution proceedings with the warmth of family appreciation at Val's enlistment; and Marian Tweetyman with the last news of Giles and Jesse. These with Aunt Juley and Hester, young Nicholas, Euphemia, and — of all people! — George, who had come with Eustace in the car, constituted an assembly worthy of the family's palmiest days. There was not one chair vacant in the whole of the little drawing-room, and anxiety was felt lest someone else should arrive.

The constraint caused by Timothy's presence having worn off a little, conversation took a military turn. George asked Aunt Juley when she was going out with the Red Cross, almost reducing her to a state of gaiety; whereon he turned to Nicholas and said:

"Young Nick's a warrior bold, isn't he? When's he going to don the wild khaki?"

Young Nicholas, smiling with a sort of sweet deprecation, intimated that of course his mother was very anxious.

"The Dromios are off, I hear," said George, turning to Marian Tweetyman; "we shall all be there soon. En avant, the Forsytes! Roll, bowl, or pitch! Who's for a cooler?"

Aunt Juley gurgled, George was so droll! Should Hester get Timothy's map? Then he could show them all where they were.

At a sound from Timothy, interpreted as assent, Aunt Hester left the room.

George pursued his image of the Forsyte advance, addressing Timothy as Field Marshal; and Imogen, whom he had noted at once for 'a pretty filly,'— as Vivandiere; and holding his top hat between his knees, he began to beat it with imaginary drumsticks. The reception accorded to his fantasy was mixed. All laughed — George was licensed; but all felt that the family was being 'rotted'; and this seemed to them unnatural, now that it was going to give five of its members to the service of the Queen. George might go too far; and there was relief when he got up, offered his arm to Aunt Juley, marched up to Timothy, saluted him, kissed his aunt with mock passion, said, "Oh! what a treat, dear papa! Come on, Eustace!" and walked out, followed by the grave and fastidious Eustace, who had never smiled.

Aunt Juley's bewildered, "Fancy not waiting for the map! You mustn't mind him, Timothy. He's so droll!" broke the hush, and Timothy removed the hand from his mouth.

"I don't know what things are comin' to," he was heard to say. "What's all this about goin' out there? That's not the way to beat those Boers."

Francie alone had the hardihood to observe: "What is, then, Uncle Timothy?"

"All this new-fangled volunteerin' and expense — lettin' money out of the country."

Just then Aunt Hester brought in the map, handling it like a baby with eruptions. With the assistance of Euphemia it was laid on the piano, a small Colwood grand, last played on, it was believed, the summer before Aunt Ann died, thirteen years ago. Timothy rose. He walked over to the piano, and stood looking at his map while they all gathered round.

"There you are," he said; "that's the position up to date; and very poor it is. H'm!"

"Yes," said Francie, greatly daring, "but how are you going to alter it, Uncle Timothy, without more men?"

"Men!" said Timothy; "you don't want men — wastin' the country's money. You want a Napoleon, he'd settle it in a month."

"But if you haven't got him, Uncle Timothy?"

"That's their business," replied Timothy. "What have we kept the Army up for — to eat their heads off in time of peace! They ought to be ashamed of themselves, comin' on the country to help them like this! Let every man stick to his business, and we shall get on."

And looking round him, he added almost angrily:

"Volunteerin', indeed! Throwin' good money after bad! We must save! Conserve energy that's the only way." And with a prolonged sound, not quite a sniff and not quite a snort, he trod on Euphemia's toe, and went out, leaving a sensation and a faint scent of barley-sugar behind him.

The effect of something said with conviction by one who has evidently made a sacrifice to say it is ever considerable. And the eight Forsytes left behind, all women except young Nicholas, were silent for a moment round the map. Then Francie said:

"Really, I think he's right, you know. After all, what is the Army for? They ought to have known. It's only encouraging them."

"My dear!" cried Aunt Juley, "but they've been so progressive. Think of their giving up their scarlet. They were always so proud of it. And now they all look like convicts. Hester and I were saying only yesterday we were sure they must feel it very much. Fancy what the Iron Duke would have said!"

"The new colour's very smart," said Winifred; "Val looks quite nice in his."

Aunt Juley sighed.

"I do so wonder what Jolyon's boy is like. To think we've never seen him! His father must be so proud of him."

"His father's in Paris," said Winifred.

Aunt Hester's shoulder was seen to mount suddenly, as if to ward off her sister's next remark, for Juley's crumpled cheeks had gushed.

"We had dear little Mrs. MacAnder here yesterday, just back from Paris. And whom d'you think she saw there in the street? You'll never guess."

“We shan’t try, Auntie,” said Euphemia.

“Irene! Imagine! After all this time; walking with a fair beard. . . . ”

“Auntie! you’ll kill me! A fair beard. . . . ”

“I was going to say,” said Aunt Juley severely, “a fair-bearded gentleman. And not a day older; she was always so pretty,” she added, with a sort of lingering apology.

“Oh! tell us about her, Auntie,” cried Imogen; “I can just remember her. She’s the skeleton in the family cupboard, isn’t she? And they’re such fun.”

Aunt Hester sat down. Really, Juley had done it now!

“She wasn’t much of a skeleton as I remember her,” murmured Euphemia, “extremely well-covered.”

“My dear!” said Aunt Juley, “what a peculiar way of putting it — not very nice.”

“No, but what was she like?” persisted Imogen.

“I’ll tell you, my child,” said Francie; “a kind of modern Venus, very well-dressed.”

Euphemia said sharply: “Venus was never dressed, and she had blue eyes of melting sapphire.”

At this juncture Nicholas took his leave.

“Mrs. Nick is awfully strict,” said Francie with a laugh.

“She has six children,” said Aunt Juley; “it’s very proper she should be careful.”

“Was Uncle Soames awfully fond of her?” pursued the inexorable Imogen, moving her dark luscious eyes from face to face.

Aunt Hester made a gesture of despair, just as Aunt Juley answered:

“Yes, your Uncle Soames was very much attached to her.”

“I suppose she ran off with someone?”

“No, certainly not; that is — not precisely.’

“What did she do, then, Auntie?”

“Come along, Imogen,” said Winifred, “we must be getting back.”

But Aunt Juley interjected resolutely: “She — she didn’t behave at all well.”

“Oh, bother!” cried Imogen; “that’s as far as I ever get.”

“Well, my dear,” said Francie, “she had a love affair which ended with the young man’s death; and then she left your uncle. I always rather liked her.”

“She used to give me chocolates,” murmured Imogen, “and smell nice.”

“Of course!” remarked Euphemia.

“Not of course at all!” replied Francie, who used a particularly expensive essence of gillyflower herself.

“I can’t think what we are about,” said Aunt Juley, raising her hands, “talking of such things!”

“Was she divorced?” asked Imogen from the door.

“Certainly not,” cried Aunt Juley; “that is — certainly not.”

A sound was heard over by the far door. Timothy had re-entered the back drawing-room. “I’ve come for my map,” he said. “Who’s been divorced?”

“No one, Uncle,” replied Francie with perfect truth.

Timothy took his map off the piano.

“Don’t let’s have anything of that sort in the family,” he said. “All this enlistin’s bad enough. The country’s breakin’ up; I don’t know what we’re comin’ to.” He shook a thick finger at the room: “Too many women nowadays, and they don’t know what they want.”

So saying, he grasped the map firmly with both hands, and went out as if afraid of being answered.

The seven women whom he had addressed broke into a subdued murmur, out of which emerged Francie’s, “Really, the Forsytes!” and Aunt Juley’s: “He must have his feet in mustard and hot water to-night, Hester; will you tell Jane? The blood has gone to his head again, I’m afraid. . . . ”

That evening, when she and Hester were sitting alone after dinner, she dropped a stitch in her crochet, and looked up:

“Hester, I can’t think where I’ve heard that dear Soames wants Irene to come back to him again. Who was it told us that George had made a funny drawing of him with the words, ‘He won’t be happy till he gets it’?”

“Eustace,” answered Aunt Hester from behind The Times; “he had it in his pocket, but he wouldn’t show it us.”

Aunt Juley was silent, ruminating. The clock ticked, The Times crackled, the fire sent forth its rustling purr. Aunt Juley dropped another stitch.

“Hester,” she said, “I have had such a dreadful thought.”

“Then don’t tell me,” said Aunt Hester quickly.

“Oh! but I must. You can’t think how dreadful!” Her voice sank to a whisper:

“Jolyon — Jolyon, they say, has a — has a fair beard, now.”

❦

CHAPTER 12

PROGRESS OF THE CHASE

Two days after the dinner at James', Mr. Polteed provided Soames with food for thought.

"A gentleman," he said, consulting the key concealed in his left hand, "47 as we say, has been paying marked attention to 17 during the last month in Paris. But at present there seems to have been nothing very conclusive. The meetings have all been in public places, without concealment — restaurants, the Opera, the Comique, the Louvre, Luxembourg Gardens, lounge of the hotel, and so forth. She has not yet been traced to his rooms, nor vice versa. They went to Fontainebleau — but nothing of value. In short, the situation is promising, but requires patience." And, looking up suddenly, he added:

"One rather curious point — 47 has the same name as — er — 31!"

'The fellow knows I'm her husband,' thought Soames.

"Christian name — an odd one — Jolyon," continued Mr. Polteed. "We know his address in Paris and his residence here. We don't wish, of course, to be running a wrong hare."

"Go on with it, but be careful," said Soames doggedly.

Instinctive certainty that this detective fellow had fathomed his secret made him all the more reticent.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Polteed, "I'll just see if there's anything fresh in."

He returned with some letters. Relocking the door, he glanced at the envelopes.

"Yes, here's a personal one from 19 to myself."

"Well?" said Soames.

"Um!" said Mr. Polteed, "she says: '47 left for England to-day. Address on his baggage: Robin Hill. Parted from 17 in Louvre Gallery at 3.30; nothing very striking. Thought it best to stay and continue observation of 17. You will deal with 47 in England if you think desirable, no doubt.'" And Mr. Polteed lifted an unprofessional glance on Soames, as though he might be storing material for a book on human nature after he had gone out of business. "Very intelligent woman, 19, and a wonderful make-up. Not cheap, but earns her money well. There's no suspicion of being shadowed so far. But after a time, as you know, sensitive people are liable to get the feeling of it, without anything definite to go on. I should rather advise letting-up on 17, and keeping an eye on 47. We can't get at correspondence without great risk. I hardly advise that at this stage. But you can tell your client that it's looking up very well." And again his narrowed eyes gleamed at his taciturn customer.

"No," said Soames suddenly, "I prefer that you should keep the watch going discreetly in Paris, and not concern yourself with this end."

"Very well," replied Mr. Polteed, "we can do it."

"What — what is the manner between them?"

"I'll read you what she says," said Mr. Polteed, unlocking a bureau drawer and taking out a file of papers; "she sums it up somewhere confidentially. Yes, here it is! '17 very attractive — conclude 47, longer in the tooth' (slang for age, you know) —'distinctly gone — waiting his time — 17 perhaps holding off for terms, impossible to say without knowing more. But inclined to think on the whole — doesn't know her mind — likely to act on impulse some day. Both have style.'"

"What does that mean?" said Soames between close lips.

"Well," murmured Mr. Polteed with a smile, showing many white teeth, "an expression we use. In other words, it's not likely to be a weekend business — they'll come together seriously or not at all."

"H'm!" muttered Soames, "that's all, is it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Polteed, "but quite promising."

'Spider!' thought Soames. "Good-day!"

He walked into the Green Park that he might cross to Victoria Station and take the Underground into the City. For so late in January it was warm; sunlight, through the haze, sparkled on the frosty grass — an illumined cobweb of a day.

Little spiders — and great spiders! And the greatest spinner of all, his own tenacity, for ever wrapping its cocoon of threads round any clear way out. What was that fellow hanging round Irene for? Was it really as Polteed suggested? Or was Jolyon but taking compassion on her loneliness, as he would call it — sentimental radical chap that he had always been? If it were, indeed, as Polteed hinted! Soames stood still. It could not be! The fellow was seven years older than himself, no better looking! No richer! What attraction had he?

'Besides, he's come back,' he thought; 'that doesn't look —-I'll go and see him!' and, taking out a card, he wrote:

"If you can spare half an hour some afternoon this week, I shall be at the Connoisseurs any day between 5.30 and 6, or I could come to the Hotch Potch if you prefer it. I want to see you. — S. F."

He walked up St. James's Street and confided it to the porter at the Hotch Potch.

"Give Mr. Jolyon Forsyte this as soon as he comes in," he said, and took one of the new motor cabs into the City. . . .

Jolyon received that card the same afternoon, and turned his face towards the Connoisseurs. What did Soames want now? Had he got wind of Paris? And stepping across St. James's Street, he determined to make no secret of his visit. 'But it won't do,' he thought, 'to let him know she's there, unless he knows already.' In this complicated state of mind he was conducted to where Soames was drinking tea in a small bay-window.

"No tea, thanks," said Jolyon, "but I'll go on smoking if I may."

The curtains were not yet drawn, though the lamps outside were lighted; the two cousins sat waiting on each other.

"You've been in Paris, I hear," said Soames at last.

"Yes; just back."

"Young Val told me; he and your boy are going off, then?" Jolyon nodded.

"You didn't happen to see Irene, I suppose. It appears she's abroad somewhere."

Jolyon wreathed himself in smoke before he answered: "Yes, I saw her."

"How was she?"

"Very well."

There was another silence; then Soames roused himself in his chair.

"When I saw you last," he said, "I was in two minds. We talked, and you expressed your opinion. I don't wish to reopen that discussion. I only wanted to say this: My position with her is extremely difficult. I don't want you to go using your influence against me. What happened is a very long time ago. I'm going to ask her to let bygones be bygones."

"You have asked her, you know," murmured Jolyon.

"The idea was new to her then; it came as a shock. But the more she thinks of it, the more she must see that it's the only way out for both of us."

"That's not my impression of her state of mind," said Jolyon with particular calm. "And, forgive my saying, you misconceive the matter if you think reason comes into it at all."

He saw his cousin's pale face grow paler — he had used, without knowing it, Irene's own words.

"Thanks," muttered Soames, "but I see things perhaps more plainly than you think. I only want to be sure that you won't try to influence her against me."

"I don't know what makes you think I have any influence," said Jolyon; "but if I have I'm bound to use it in the direction of what I think is her happiness. I am what they call a 'feminist,' I believe."

"Feminist!" repeated Soames, as if seeking to gain time. "Does that mean that you're against me?"

"Bluntly," said Jolyon, "I'm against any woman living with any man whom she definitely dislikes. It appears to me rotten."

"And I suppose each time you see her you put your opinions into her mind."

"I am not likely to be seeing her."

"Not going back to Paris?"

"Not so far as I know," said Jolyon, conscious of the intent watchfulness in Soames' face.

"Well, that's all I had to say. Anyone who comes between man and wife, you know, incurs heavy responsibility."

Jolyon rose and made him a slight bow.

“Good-bye,” he said, and, without offering to shake hands, moved away, leaving Soames staring after him. ‘We Forsytes,’ thought Jolyon, hailing a cab, ‘are very civilised. With simpler folk that might have come to a row. If it weren’t for my boy going to the war. . . . ’ The war! A gust of his old doubt swept over him. A precious war! Domination of peoples or of women! Attempts to master and possess those who did not want you! The negation of gentle decency! Possession, vested rights; and anyone ‘agin’ ’em — outcast! ‘Thank Heaven!’ he thought, ‘I always felt “agin” ’em, anyway!’ Yes! Even before his first disastrous marriage he could remember fuming over the bludgeoning of Ireland, or the matrimonial suits of women trying to be free of men they loathed. Parsons would have it that freedom of soul and body were quite different things! Pernicious doctrine! Body and soul could not thus be separated. Free will was the strength of any tie, and not its weakness. ‘I ought to have told Soames,’ he thought, ‘that I think him comic. Ah! but he’s tragic, too!’ Was there anything, indeed, more tragic in the world than a man enslaved by his own possessive instinct, who couldn’t see the sky for it, or even enter fully into what another person felt! ‘I must write and warn her,’ he thought; ‘he’s going to have another try.’ And all the way home to Robin Hill he rebelled at the strength of that duty to his son which prevented him from posting back to Paris. . . .

But Soames sat long in his chair, the prey of a no less gnawing ache — a jealous ache, as if it had been revealed to him that this fellow held precedence of himself, and had spun fresh threads of resistance to his way out. ‘Does that mean that you’re against me?’ he had got nothing out of that disingenuous question. Feminist! Phrasey fellow! ‘I mustn’t rush things,’ he thought. ‘I have some breathing space; he’s not going back to Paris, unless he was lying. I’ll let the spring come!’ Though how the spring could serve him, save by adding to his ache, he could not tell. And gazing down into the street, where figures were passing from pool to pool of the light from the high lamps, he thought: ‘Nothing seems any good — nothing seems worth while. I’m loney — that’s the trouble.’

He closed his eyes; and at once he seemed to see Irene, in a dark street below a church — passing, turning her neck so that he caught the gleam of her eyes and her white forehead under a little dark hat, which had gold spangles on it and a veil hanging down behind. He opened his eyes — so vividly he had seen her! A woman was passing below, but not she! Oh no, there was nothing there!

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Chapter 13

'Here We are Again!'

Imogen's frocks for her first season exercised the judgment of her mother and the purse of her grandfather all through the month of March. With Forsyte tenacity Winifred quested for perfection. It took her mind off the slowly approaching rite which would give her a freedom but doubtfully desired; took her mind, too, off her boy and his fast approaching departure for a war from which the news remained disquieting. Like bees busy on summer flowers, or bright gadflies hovering and darting over spiky autumn blossoms, she and her 'little daughter,' tall nearly as herself and with a bust measurement not far inferior, hovered in the shops of Regent Street, the establishments of Hanover Square and of Bond Street, lost in consideration and the feel of fabrics. Dozens of young women of striking deportment and peculiar gait paraded before Winifred and Imogen, draped in 'creations.' The models —'Very new, modom; quite the latest thing —' which those two reluctantly turned down, would have filled a museum; the models which they were obliged to have nearly emptied James' bank. It was no good doing things by halves, Winifred felt, in view of the need for making this first and sole untarnished season a conspicuous success. Their patience in trying the patience of those impersonal creatures who swam about before them could alone have been displayed by such as were moved by faith. It was for Winifred a long prostration before her dear goddess Fashion, fervent as a Catholic might make before the Virgin; for Imogen an experience by no means too unpleasant — she often looked so nice, and flattery was implicit everywhere: in a word it was 'amusing.'

On the afternoon of the 20th of March, having, as it were, gutted Skywards, they had sought refreshment over the way at Caramel and Baker's, and, stored with chocolate frothed at the top with cream, turned homewards through Berkeley Square of an evening touched with spring. Opening the door — freshly painted a light olive-green; nothing neglected that year to give Imogen a good send-off — Winifred passed towards the silver basket to see if anyone had called, and suddenly her nostrils twitched. What was that scent?

Imogen had taken up a novel sent from the library, and stood absorbed. Rather sharply, because of the queer feeling in her breast, Winifred said:

"Take that up, dear, and have a rest before dinner."

Imogen, still reading, passed up the stairs. Winifred heard the door of her room slammed to, and drew a long savouring breath. Was it spring tickling her senses — whipping up nostalgia for her 'clown,' against all wisdom and outraged virtue? A male scent! A faint reek of cigars and lavender-water not smelt since that early autumn night six months ago, when she had called him 'the limit.' Whence came it, or was it ghost of scent — sheer emanation from memory? She looked round her. Nothing — not a thing, no tiniest disturbance of her hall, nor of the diningroom. A little day-dream of a scent — illusory, saddening, silly! In the silver basket were new cards, two with 'Mr. and Mrs. Polegate Thom,' and one with 'Mr. Polegate Thom' thereon; she sniffed them, but they smelled severe. 'I must be tired,' she thought, 'I'll go and lie down.' Upstairs the drawing-room was darkened, waiting for some hand to give it evening light; and she passed on up to her bedroom. This, too, was half-curtained and dim, for it was six o'clock. Winifred threw off her coat — that scent again! — then stood, as if shot, transfixed against the bed-rail. Something dark had risen from the sofa in the far corner. A word of horror — in her family — escaped her: "God!"

"It's I— Monty," said a voice.

Clutching the bed-rail, Winifred reached up and turned the switch of the light hanging above her dressing-table. He appeared just on the rim of the light's circumference, emblazoned from the absence of his watch-chain down to boots neat and sooty brown, but — yes! — split at the toecap. His chest and face were shadowy. Surely he was thin — or was it a trick of the light? He advanced, lighted now from toe-cap to the top of his dark head — surely a little grizzled! His complexion had darkened, sallowed; his black moustache had lost boldness, become sardonic; there were lines which she did not know about his face. There was no pin in his tie. His suit — ah! — she knew that — but how unpressed, unglossy! She stared again at the toe-cap of his boot. Something big and relentless had been 'at him,' had turned and twisted, raked and scraped him. And she stayed, not speaking, motionless, staring at that crack across the toe.

"Well!" he said, "I got the order. I'm back."

Winifred's bosom began to heave. The nostalgia for her husband which had rushed up with that scent was struggling with a deeper jealousy than any she had felt yet. There he was — a dark, and as if harried, shadow of his sleek and brazen self! What force had done this to him — squeezed him like an orange to its dry rind! That woman!

"I'm back," he said again. "I've had a beastly time. By God! I came steerage. I've got nothing but what I stand up in, and that bag."

"And who has the rest?" cried Winifred, suddenly alive. "How dared you come? You knew it was just for divorce that you got that order to come back. Don't touch me!"

They held each to the rail of the big bed where they had spent so many years of nights together. Many times, yes — many times she had wanted him back. But now that he had come she was filled with this cold and deadly resentment. He put his hand up to his moustache; but did not frizz and twist it in the old familiar way, he just pulled it downwards.

"Gad!" he said: "If you knew the time I've had!"

"I'm glad I don't!"

"Are the kids all right?"

Winifred nodded. "How did you get in?"

"With my key."

"Then the maids don't know. You can't stay here, Monty."

He uttered a little sardonic laugh.

"Where then?"

"Anywhere."

"Well, look at me! That — that damned. . . . "

"If you mention her," cried Winifred, "I go straight out to Park Lane and I don't come back."

Suddenly he did a simple thing, but so uncharacteristic that it moved her. He shut his eyes. It was as if he had said: 'All right! I'm dead to the world!'

"You can have a room for the night," she said; "your things are still here. Only Imogen is at home."

He leaned back against the bed-rail. "Well, it's in your hands," and his own made a writhing movement. "I've been through it. You needn't hit too hard — it isn't worth while. I've been frightened; I've been frightened, Freddie."

That old pet name, disused for years and years, sent a shiver through Winifred.

'What am I to do with him?' she thought. 'What in God's name am I to do with him?'

"Got a cigarette?"

She gave him one from a little box she kept up there for when she couldn't sleep at night, and lighted it. With that action the matter-of-fact side of her nature came to life again.

"Go and have a hot bath. I'll put some clothes out for you in the dressing-room. We can talk later."

He nodded, and fixed his eyes on her — they looked half-dead, or was it that the folds in the lids had become heavier?

'He's not the same,' she thought. He would never be quite the same again! But what would he be?

"All right!" he said, and went towards the door. He even moved differently, like a man who has lost illusion and doubts whether it is worth while to move at all.

When he was gone, and she heard the water in the bath running, she put out a complete set of garments on the bed in his dressing-room, then went downstairs and fetched up the biscuit box and whisky. Putting on her coat again, and listening a moment at the bathroom door, she went down and out. In the street she hesitated. Past seven o'clock! Would Soames be at his Club or at Park Lane? She turned towards the latter. Back!

Soames had always feared it — she had sometimes hoped it. . . . Back! So like him — clown that he was — with this: 'Here we are again!' to make fools of them all — of the Law, of Soames, of herself!

Yet to have done with the Law, not to have that murky cloud hanging over her and the children! What a relief! Ah! but how to accept his return? That 'woman' had ravaged him, taken from him passion such as he had never bestowed on herself, such as she had not thought him capable of. There was the sting! That selfish, blatant 'clown' of hers, whom she herself had never really stirred, had been swept and ungarnished by another woman! Insulting! Too insulting! Not right, not decent to take him back! And yet she had asked for him; the Law perhaps would make her now! He was as much her husband as ever — she had put herself out of court! And all he wanted, no doubt, was money — to keep him in cigars and lavender-water! That scent! ‘After all, I’m not old,’ she thought, ‘not old yet!’ But that woman who had reduced him to those words: ‘I’ve been through it. I’ve been frightened — frightened, Freddie!’ She neared her father’s house, driven this way and that, while all the time the Forsyte undertow was drawing her to deep conclusion that after all he was her property, to be held against a robbing world. And so she came to James’.

“Mr. Soames? In his room? I’ll go up; don’t say I’m here.”

Her brother was dressing. She found him before a mirror, tying a black bow with an air of despising its ends.

“Hullo!” he said, contemplating her in the glass; “what’s wrong?”

“Monty!” said Winifred stonily.

Soames spun round. “What!”

“Back!”

“Hoist,” muttered Soames, “with our own petard. Why the deuce didn’t you let me try cruelty? I always knew it was too much risk this way.”

“Oh! Don’t talk about that! What shall I do?”

Soames answered, with a deep, deep sound.

“Well?” said Winifred impatiently.

“What has he to say for himself?”

“Nothing. One of his boots is split across the toe.”

Soames stared at her.

“Ah!” he said, “of course! On his beam ends. So — it begins again! This’ll about finish father.”

“Can’t we keep it from him?”

“Impossible. He has an uncanny flair for anything that’s worrying.”

And he brooded, with fingers hooked into his blue silk braces. “There ought to be some way in law,” he muttered, “to make him safe.”

“No,” cried Winifred, “I won’t be made a fool of again; I’d sooner put up with him.”

The two stared at each other. Their hearts were full of feeling, but they could give it no expression — Forsytes that they were.

“Where did you leave him?”

“In the bath,” and Winifred gave a little bitter laugh. “The only thing he’s brought back is lavender-water.”

“Steady!” said Soames, “you’re thoroughly upset. I’ll go back with you.”

“What’s the use?”

“We ought to make terms with him.”

“Terms! It’ll always be the same. When he recovers — cards and betting, drink and . . . .!” She was silent, remembering the look on her husband’s face. The burnt child — the burnt child. Perhaps . . .!

“Recovers?” replied Soames: “Is he ill?”

“No; burnt out; that’s all.”

Soames took his waistcoat from a chair and put it on, he took his coat and got into it, he scented his handkerchief with eau-de-Cologne, threaded his watch-chain, and said: “We haven’t any luck.”

And in the midst of her own trouble Winifred was sorry for him, as if in that little saying he had revealed deep trouble of his own.

“I’d like to see mother,” she said.

“She’ll be with father in their room. Come down quietly to the study. I’ll get her.”

Winifred stole down to the little dark study, chiefly remarkable for a Canaletto too doubtful to be placed elsewhere, and a fine collection of Law Reports unopened for many years. Here she stood, with her back to maroon-coloured curtains close-drawn, staring at the empty grate, till her mother came in followed by Soames.

"Oh! my poor dear!" said Emily: "How miserable you look in here! This is too bad of him, really!"

As a family they had so guarded themselves from the expression of all unfashionable emotion that it was impossible to go up and give her daughter a good hug. But there was comfort in her cushioned voice, and her still dimpled shoulders under some rare black lace. Summoning pride and the desire not to distress her mother, Winifred said in her most off-hand voice:

"It's all right, Mother; no good fussing."

"I don't see," said Emily, looking at Soames, "why Winifred shouldn't tell him that she'll prosecute him if he doesn't keep off the premises. He took her pearls; and if he's not brought them back, that's quite enough."

Winifred smiled. They would all plunge about with suggestions of this and that, but she knew already what she would be doing, and that was — nothing. The feeling that, after all, she had won a sort of victory, retained her property, was every moment gaining ground in her. No! if she wanted to punish him, she could do it at home without the world knowing.

"Well," said Emily, "come into the dining-room comfortably — you must stay and have dinner with us. Leave it to me to tell your father." And, as Winifred moved towards the door, she turned out the light. Not till then did they see the disaster in the corridor.

There, attracted by light from a room never lighted, James was standing with his duncoloured camel-hair shawl folded about him, so that his arms were not free and his silvered head looked cut off from his fashionably trousered legs as if by an expanse of desert. He stood, inimitably stork-like, with an expression as if he saw before him a frog too large to swallow.

"What's all this?" he said. "Tell your father? You never tell me anything."

The moment found Emily without reply. It was Winifred who went up to him, and, laying one hand on each of his swathed, helpless arms, said:

"Monty's not gone bankrupt, Father. He's only come back."

They all three expected something serious to happen, and were glad she had kept that grip of his arms, but they did not know the depth of root in that shadowy old Forsyte. Something wry occurred about his shaven mouth and chin, something scratchy between those long silvery whiskers. Then he said with a sort of dignity: "He'll be the death of me. I knew how it would be."

"You mustn't worry, Father," said Winifred calmly. "I mean to make him behave."

"Ah!" said James. "Here, take this thing off, I'm hot." They unwound the shawl. He turned, and walked firmly to the dining-room.

"I don't want any soup," he said to Warmson, and sat down in his chair. They all sat down too, Winifred still in her hat, while Warmson laid the fourth place. When he left the room, James said: "What's he brought back?"

"Nothing, Father."

James concentrated his eyes on his own image in a tablespoon. "Divorce!" he muttered; "rubbish! What was I about? I ought to have paid him an allowance to stay out of England. Soames you go and propose it to him."

It seemed so right and simple a suggestion that even Winifred was surprised when she said: "No, I'll keep him now he's back; he must just behave — that's all."

They all looked at her. It had always been known that Winifred had pluck.

"Out there!" said James elliptically, "who knows what cut-throats! You look for his revolver! Don't go to bed without. You ought to have Warmson to sleep in the house. I'll see him myself tomorrow."

They were touched by this declaration, and Emily said comfortably: "That's right, James, we won't have any nonsense."

"Ah!" muttered James darkly, "I can't tell."

The advent of Warmson with fish diverted conversation.

When, directly after dinner, Winifred went over to kiss her father good-night, he looked up with eyes so full of question and distress that she put all the comfort she could into her voice.

"It's all right, Daddy, dear; don't worry. I shan't need anyone — he's quite bland. I shall only be upset if you worry.

Good-night, bless you!”

James repeated the words, “Bless you!” as if he did not quite know what they meant, and his eyes followed her to the door.

She reached home before nine, and went straight upstairs.

Dartie was lying on the bed in his dressing-room, fully redressed in a blue serge suit and pumps; his arms were crossed behind his head, and an extinct cigarette drooped from his mouth.

Winifred remembered ridiculously the flowers in her window-boxes after a blazing summer day; the way they lay, or rather stood — parched, yet rested by the sun’s retreat. It was as if a little dew had come already on her burnt-up husband.

He said apathetically: “I suppose you’ve been to Park Lane. How’s the old man?”

Winifred could not help the bitter answer: “Not dead.”

He winced, actually he winced.

“Understand, Monty,” she said, “I will not have him worried. If you aren’t going to behave yourself, you may go back, you may go anywhere. Have you had dinner?”

No.

“Would you like some?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Imogen offered me some. I didn’t want any.”

Imogen! In the plenitude of emotion Winifred had forgotten her.

“So you’ve seen her? What did she say?”

“She gave me a kiss.”

With mortification Winifred saw his dark sardonic face relaxed. ‘Yes!’ she thought, ‘he cares for her, not for me a bit.’

Dartie’s eyes were moving from side to side.

“Does she know about me?” he said.

It flashed through Winifred that here was the weapon she needed. He minded their knowing!

“No. Val knows. The others don’t; they only know you went away.”

She heard him sigh with relief.

“But they shall know,” she said firmly, “if you give me cause.”

“All right!” he muttered, “hit me! I’m down!”

Winifred went up to the bed. “Look here, Monty! I don’t want to hit you. I don’t want to hurt you. I shan’t allude to anything. I’m not going to worry. What’s the use?” She was silent a moment. “I can’t stand any more, though, and I won’t! You’d better know. You’ve made me suffer. But I used to be fond of you. For the sake of that. . . . ” She met the heavy-lidded gaze of his brown eyes with the downward stare of her green-grey eyes; touched his hand suddenly, turned her back, and went into her room.

She sat there a long time before her glass, fingering her rings, thinking of this subdued dark man, almost a stranger to her, on the bed in the other room; resolutely not ‘worrying,’ but gnawed by jealousy of what he had been through, and now and again just visited by pity.

⁂

Chapter 14

Outlandish Night

Soames doggedly let the spring come — no easy task for one conscious that time was flying, his birds in the bush no nearer the hand, no issue from the web anywhere visible. Mr. Polteed reported nothing, except that his watch went on — costing a lot of money. Val and his cousin were gone to the war, whence came news more favourable; Dartie was behaving himself so far; James had retained his health; business prospered almost terribly — there was nothing to worry Soames except that he was 'held up,' could make no step in any direction.

He did not exactly avoid Soho, for he could not afford to let them think that he had 'piped off,' as James would have put it — he might want to 'pipe on' again at any minute. But he had to be so restrained and cautious that he would often pass the door of the Restaurant Bretagne without going in, and wander out of the purlieus of that region which always gave him the feeling of having been possessively irregular.

He wandered thus one May night into Regent Street and the most amazing crowd he had ever seen; a shrieking, whistling, dancing, jostling, grotesque and formidably jovial crowd, with false noses and mouth-organs, penny whistles and long feathers, every appanage of idiocy, as it seemed to him. Mafeking! Of course, it had been relieved! Good! But was that an excuse? Who were these people, what were they, where had they come from into the West End? His face was tickled, his ears whistled into. Girls cried: 'Keep your hair on, stucco!' A youth so knocked off his top-hat that he recovered it with difficulty. Crackers were exploding beneath his nose, between his feet. He was bewildered, exasperated, offended. This stream of people came from every quarter, as if impulse had unlocked flood-gates, let flow waters of whose existence he had heard, perhaps, but believed in never. This, then, was the populace, the innumerable living negation of gentility and Forsyteism. This was — egad! — Democracy! It stank, yelled, was hideous! In the East End, or even Soho, perhaps — but here in Regent Street, in Piccadilly! What were the police about! In 1900, Soames, with his Forsyte thousands, had never seen the cauldron with the lid off; and now looking into it, could hardly believe his scorching eyes. The whole thing was unspeakable! These people had no restraint, they seemed to think him funny; such swarms of them, rude, coarse, laughing — and what laughter!

Nothing sacred to them! He shouldn't be surprised if they began to break windows. In Pall Mall, past those august dwellings, to enter which people paid sixty pounds, this shrieking, whistling, dancing dervish of a crowd was swarming. From the Club windows his own kind were looking out on them with regulated amusement. They didn't realise! Why, this was serious — might come to anything! The crowd was cheerful, but some day they would come in different mood! He remembered there had been a mob in the late eighties, when he was at Brighton; they had smashed things and made speeches. But more than dread, he felt a deep surprise. They were hysterical — it wasn't English! And all about the relief of a little town as big as — Watford, six thousand miles away. Restraint, reserve! Those qualities to him more dear almost than life, those indispensable attributes of property and culture, where were they? It wasn't English! No, it wasn't English! So Soames brooded, threading his way on. It was as if he had suddenly caught sight of someone cutting the covenant 'for quiet possession' out of his legal documents; or of a monster lurking and stalking out in the future, casting its shadow before. Their want of stolidity, their want of reverence! It was like discovering that nine-tenths of the people of England were foreigners. And if that were so — then, anything might happen!

At Hyde Park Corner he ran into George Forsyte, very sunburnt from racing, holding a false nose in his hand.

"Hallo, Soames!" he said, "have a nose!"

Soames responded with a pale smile.

"Got this from one of these sportsmen," went on George, who had evidently been dining; "had to lay him out — for trying to bash my hat. I say, one of these days we shall have to fight these chaps, they're getting so damned cheeky — all radicals and socialists. They want our goods. You tell Uncle James that, it'll make him sleep."

'In vino veritas,' thought Soames, but he only nodded, and passed on up Hamilton Place. There was but a trickle of roysterers in Park Lane, not very noisy. And looking up at the houses he thought: 'After all, we're the backbone of the country. They won't upset us easily. Possession's nine points of the law.'

But, as he closed the door of his father’s house behind him, all that queer outlandish nightmare in the streets passed out of his mind almost as completely as if, having dreamed it, he had awakened in the warm clean morning comfort of his spring-mattressed bed.

Walking into the centre of the great empty drawing-room, he stood still.

A wife! Somebody to talk things over with. One had a right! Damn it! One had a right!

❦

PART III

CHAPTER 1

SOAMES IN PARIS

Soames had travelled little. Aged nineteen he had made the 'petty tour' with his father, mother, and Winifred — Brussels, the Rhine, Switzerland, and home by way of Paris. Aged twenty-seven, just when he began to take interest in pictures, he had spent five hot weeks in Italy, looking into the Renaissance — not so much in it as he had been led to expect — and a fortnight in Paris on his way back, looking into himself, as became a Forsyte surrounded by people so strongly self-centred and 'foreign' as the French. His knowledge of their language being derived from his public school, he did not understand them when they spoke. Silence he had found better for all parties; one did not make a fool of oneself. He had disliked the look of the men's clothes, the closed-in cabs, the theatres which looked like bee-hives, the Galleries which smelled of beeswax. He was too cautious and too shy to explore that side of Paris supposed by Forsytes to constitute its attraction under the rose; and as for a collector's bargain — not one to be had! As Nicholas might have put it — they were a grasping lot. He had come back uneasy, saying Paris was overrated.

When, therefore, in June of 1900 he went to Paris, it was but his third attempt on the centre of civilisation. This time, however, the mountain was going to Mahomet; for he felt by now more deeply civilised than Paris, and perhaps he really was. Moreover, he had a definite objective. This was no mere genuflexion to a shrine of taste and immorality, but the prosecution of his own legitimate affairs. He went, indeed, because things were getting past a joke. The watch went on and on, and — nothing — nothing! Jolyon had never returned to Paris, and no one else was 'suspect!' Busy with new and very confidential matters, Soames was realising more than ever how essential reputation is to a solicitor. But at night and in his leisure moments he was ravaged by the thought that time was always flying and money flowing in, and his own future as much 'in irons' as ever. Since Mafeking night he had become aware that a 'young fool of a doctor' was hanging round Annette. Twice he had come across him — a cheerful young fool, not more than thirty.

Nothing annoyed Soames so much as cheerfulness — an indecent, extravagant sort of quality, which had no relation to facts. The mixture of his desires and hopes was, in a word, becoming torture; and lately the thought had come to him that perhaps Irene knew she was being shadowed: It was this which finally decided him to go and see for himself; to go and once more try to break down her repugnance, her refusal to make her own and his path comparatively smooth once more. If he failed again — well, he would see what she did with herself, anyway!

He went to an hotel in the Rue Caumartin, highly recommended to Forsytes, where practically nobody spoke French. He had formed no plan. He did not want to startle her; yet must contrive that she had no chance to evade him by flight. And next morning he set out in bright weather.

Paris had an air of gaiety, a sparkle over its star-shape which almost annoyed Soames. He stepped gravely, his nose lifted a little sideways in real curiosity. He desired now to understand things French. Was not Annette French? There was much to be got out of his visit, if he could only get it. In this laudable mood and the Place de la Concorde he was nearly run down three times. He came on the 'Cours la Reine,' where Irene's hotel was situated, almost too suddenly, for he had not yet fixed on his procedure. Crossing over to the river side, he noted the building, white and cheerful-looking, with green sunblinds, seen through a screen of plane-tree leaves. And, conscious that it would be far better to meet her casually in some open place than to risk a call, he sat down on a bench whence he could watch the entrance. It was not quite eleven o'clock, and improbable that she had yet gone out. Some pigeons were strutting and preening their feathers in the pools of sunlight between the shadows of the plane-trees. A workman in a blue blouse passed, and threw them crumbs from the paper which contained his dinner. A 'bonne' coiffed with ribbon shepherded two little girls with pig-tails and frilled drawers. A cab meandered by, whose cocher wore a blue coat and a black-glazed hat. To Soames a kind of affectation seemed to cling about it all, a sort of picturesqueness which was out of date. A theatrical people, the French! He lit one of his rare cigarettes, with a sense of injury that Fate should be casting his life into outlandish waters. He shouldn't wonder if Irene quite enjoyed this foreign life; she had never been properly English — even to look at! And he began considering which of those windows could be hers under the green sunblinds. How could he word what he had come to say so that it might pierce the defence of her proud obstinacy? He threw the fag-end of his cigarette at a pigeon, with the thought: 'I can't stay here for ever twiddling my thumbs. Better give it up and call on her in the late afternoon.' But he still sat on, heard twelve strike, and then half-past. 'I'll wait till one,' he thought, 'while I'm about it.' But just then he started up, and shrinkingly sat down again. A woman had come out in a cream-coloured frock, and was moving away under a fawn-coloured parasol. Irene herself! He waited till she was too far away to recognise him, then set out after her. She was strolling as though she had no particular objective; moving, if he remembered rightly, toward the Bois de Boulogne. For half an hour at least he kept his distance on the far side of the way till she had passed into the Bois itself. Was she going to meet someone after all? Some confounded Frenchman — one of those 'Bel Ami' chaps, perhaps, who had nothing to do but hang about women — for he had read that book with difficulty and a sort of disgusted fascination. He followed doggedly along a shady alley, losing sight of her now and then when the path curved. And it came back to him how, long ago, one night in Hyde Park he had slid and sneaked from tree to tree, from seat to seat, hunting blindly, ridiculously, in burning jealousy for her and young Bosinney. The path bent sharply, and, hurrying, he came on her sitting in front of a small fountain — a little green-bronze Niobe veiled in hair to her slender hips, gazing at the pool she had wept: He came on her so suddenly that he was past before he could turn and take off his hat. She did not start up. She had always had great self-command — it was one of the things he most admired in her, one of his greatest grievances against her, because he had never been able to tell what she was thinking. Had she realised that he was following? Her self-possession made him angry; and, disdaining to explain his presence, he pointed to the mournful little Niobe, and said:

"That's rather a good thing."

He could see, then, that she was struggling to preserve her composure.

"I didn't want to startle you; is this one of your haunts?"

"Yes."

"A little lonely." As he spoke, a lady, strolling by, paused to look at the fountain and passed on.

Irene's eyes followed her.

"No," she said, prodding the ground with her parasol, "never lonely. One has always one's shadow."

Soames understood; and, looking at her hard, he exclaimed:

"Well, it's your own fault. You can be free of it at any moment. Irene, come back to me, and be free."

Irene laughed.

"Don't!" cried Soames, stamping his foot; "it's inhuman. Listen! Is there any condition I can make which will bring you back to me? If I promise you a separate house — and just a visit now and then?"

Irene rose, something wild suddenly in her face and figure.

"None! None! None! You may hunt me to the grave. I will not come."

Outraged and on edge, Soames recoiled.

"Don't make a scene!" he said sharply. And they both stood motionless, staring at the little Niobe, whose greenish flesh the sunlight was burnishing.

"That's your last word, then," muttered Soames, clenching his hands; "you condemn us both."

Irene bent her head. "I can't come back. Good-bye!"

A feeling of monstrous injustice flared up in Soames.

"Stop!" he said, "and listen to me a moment. You gave me a sacred vow — you came to me without a penny. You had all I could give you. You broke that vow without cause, you made me a by-word; you refused me a child; you've left me in prison; you — you still move me so that I want you — I want you. Well, what do you think of yourself?"

Irene turned, her face was deadly pale, her eyes burning dark.

"God made me as I am," she said; "wicked if you like — but not so wicked that I'll give myself again to a man I hate."

The sunlight gleamed on her hair as she moved away, and seemed to lay a caress all down her clinging cream-coloured frock.

Soames could neither speak nor move. That word 'hate'— so extreme, so primitive — made all the Forsyte in him tremble. With a deep imprecation he strode away from where she had vanished, and ran almost into the arms of the lady sauntering back — the fool, the shadowing fool!

He was soon dripping with perspiration, in the depths of the Bois.

‘Well,’ he thought, ‘I need have no consideration for her now; she has not a grain of it for me. I’ll show her this very day that she’s my wife still.’

But on the way home to his hotel, he was forced to the conclusion that he did not know what he meant. One could not make scenes in public, and short of scenes in public what was there he could do? He almost cursed his own thin-skinnedness. She might deserve no consideration; but he — alas! deserved some at his own hands. And sitting lunchless in the hall of his hotel, with tourists passing every moment, Baedeker in hand, he was visited by black dejection. In irons! His whole life, with every natural instinct and every decent yearning gagged and fettered, and all because Fate had driven him seventeen years ago to set his heart upon this woman — so utterly, that even now he had no real heart to set on any other! Cursed was the day he had met her, and his eyes for seeing in her anything but the cruel Venus she was! And yet, still seeing her with the sunlight on the clinging China crepe of her gown, he uttered a little groan, so that a tourist who was passing, thought: ‘Man in pain! Let’s see! what did I have for lunch?’

Later, in front of a cafe near the Opera, over a glass of cold tea with lemon and a straw in it, he took the malicious resolution to go and dine at her hotel. If she were there, he would speak to her; if she were not, he would leave a note. He dressed carefully, and wrote as follows:

“Your idyll with that fellow Jolyon Forsyte is known to me at all events. If you pursue it, understand that I will leave no stone unturned to make things unbearable for him. ‘S. F.’”

He sealed this note but did not address it, refusing to write the maiden name which she had impudently resumed, or to put the word Forsyte on the envelope lest she should tear it up unread. Then he went out, and made his way through the glowing streets, abandoned to evening pleasure-seekers. Entering her hotel, he took his seat in a far corner of the dining-room whence he could see all entrances and exits. She was not there. He ate little, quickly, watchfully. She did not come. He lingered in the lounge over his coffee, drank two liqueurs of brandy. But still she did not come. He went over to the keyboard and examined the names. Number twelve, on the first floor! And he determined to take the note up himself. He mounted red-carpeted stairs, past a little salon; eight-ten-twelve! Should he knock, push the note under, or. . . .? He looked furtively round and turned the handle. The door opened, but into a little space leading to another door; he knocked on that — no answer. The door was locked. It fitted very closely to the floor; the note would not go under. He thrust it back into his pocket, and stood a moment listening. He felt somehow certain that she was not there. And suddenly he came away, passing the little salon down the stairs. He stopped at the bureau and said:

“Will you kindly see that Mrs. Heron has this note?”

“Madame Heron left to-day, Monsieur — suddenly, about three o’clock. There was illness in her family.”

Soames compressed his lips. “Oh!” he said; “do you know her address?”

“Non, Monsieur. England, I think.”

Soames put the note back into his pocket and went out. He hailed an open horse-cab which was passing.

“Drive me anywhere!”

The man, who, obviously, did not understand, smiled, and waved his whip. And Soames was borne along in that little yellow-wheeled Victoria all over star-shaped Paris, with here and there a pause, and the question, “C’est par ici, Monsieur?” “No, go on,” till the man gave it up in despair, and the yellow-wheeled chariot continued to roll between the tall, flat-fronted shuttered houses and plane-tree avenues — a little Flying Dutchman of a cab.

‘Like my life,’ thought Soames, ‘without object, on and on!’

❦

Chapter 2

In the Web

Soames returned to England the following day, and on the third morning received a visit from Mr. Polteed, who wore a flower and carried a brown billycock hat. Soames motioned him to a seat.

"The news from the war is not so bad, is it?" said Mr. Polteed. "I hope I see you well, sir."

"Thanks! quite."

Mr. Polteed leaned forward, smiled, opened his hand, looked into it, and said softly:

"I think we've done your business for you at last."

"What?" ejaculated Soames.

"Nineteen reports quite suddenly what I think we shall be justified in calling conclusive evidence," and Mr. Polteed paused.

"Well?"

"On the 10th instant, after witnessing an interview between 17 and a party, earlier in the day, 19 can swear to having seen him coming out of her bedroom in the hotel about ten o'clock in the evening. With a little care in the giving of the evidence that will be enough, especially as 17 has left Paris — no doubt with the party in question. In fact, they both slipped off, and we haven't got on to them again, yet; but we shall — we shall. She's worked hard under very difficult circumstances, and I'm glad she's brought it off at last." Mr. Polteed took out a cigarette, tapped its end against the table, looked at Soames, and put it back. The expression on his client's face was not encouraging.

"Who is this new person?" said Soames abruptly.

"That we don't know. She'll swear to the fact, and she's got his appearance pat."

Mr. Polteed took out a letter, and began reading:

"'Middle-aged, medium height, blue dittoes in afternoon, evening dress at night, pale, dark hair, small dark moustache, flat cheeks, good chin, grey eyes, small feet, guilty look. . . . '"

Soames rose and went to the window. He stood there in sardonic fury. Congenital idiot — spidery congenital idiot! Seven months at fifteen pounds a week — to be tracked down as his own wife's lover! Guilty look! He threw the window open.

"It's hot," he said, and came back to his seat.

Crossing his knees, he bent a supercilious glance on Mr. Polteed.

"I doubt if that's quite good enough," he said, drawling the words, "with no name or address. I think you may let that lady have a rest, and take up our friend 47 at this end." Whether Polteed had spotted him he could not tell; but he had a mental vision of him in the midst of his cronies dissolved in inextinguishable laughter. 'Guilty look!' Damnation!

Mr. Polteed said in a tone of urgency, almost of pathos: "I assure you we have put it through sometimes on less than that. It's Paris, you know. Attractive woman living alone. Why not risk it, sir? We might screw it up a peg."

Soames had sudden insight. The fellow's professional zeal was stirred: 'Greatest triumph of my career; got a man his divorce through a visit to his own wife's bedroom! Something to talk of there, when I retire!' And for one wild moment he thought: 'Why not?' After all, hundreds of men of medium height had small feet and a guilty look!

"I'm not authorised to take any risk!" he said shortly.

Mr. Polteed looked up.

"Pity," he said, "quite a pity! That other affair seemed very costive."

Soames rose.

"Never mind that. Please watch 47, and take care not to find a mare's nest. Good-morning!"

Mr. Polteed's eye glinted at the words 'mare's nest!'

"Very good. You shall be kept informed."

And Soames was alone again. The spidery, dirty, ridiculous business! Laying his arms on the table, he leaned his forehead on them. Full ten minutes he rested thus, till a managing clerk roused him with the draft prospectus of a new issue of shares, very desirable, in Manifold and Topping's. That afternoon he left work early and made his way to the Restaurant Bretagne. Only Madame Lamotte was in. Would Monsieur have tea with her?

Soames bowed.

When they were seated at right angles to each other in the little room, he said abruptly:

"I want a talk with you, Madame."

The quick lift of her clear brown eyes told him that she had long expected such words.

"I have to ask you something first: That young doctor — what's his name? Is there anything between him and Annette?"

Her whole personality had become, as it were, like jet — clear-cut, black, hard, shining.

"Annette is young," she said; "so is monsieur le docteur. Between young people things move quickly; but Annette is a good daughter. Ah! what a jewel of a nature!"

The least little smile twisted Soames' lips.

"Nothing definite, then?"

"But definite — no, indeed! The young man is veree nice, but — what would you? There is no money at present."

She raised her willow-patterned tea-cup; Soames did the same. Their eyes met.

"I am a married man," he said, "living apart from my wife for many years. I am seeking to divorce her."

Madame Lamotte put down her cup. Indeed! What tragic things there were! The entire absence of sentiment in her inspired a queer species of contempt in Soames.

"I am a rich man," he added, fully conscious that the remark was not in good taste. "It is useless to say more at present, but I think you understand."

Madame's eyes, so open that the whites showed above them, looked at him very straight.

"Ah! ca — mais nous avons le temps!" was all she said. "Another little cup?" Soames refused, and, taking his leave, walked westward.

He had got that off his mind; she would not let Annette commit herself with that cheerful young ass until. . . .! But what chance of his ever being able to say: 'I'm free.' What chance? The future had lost all semblance of reality. He felt like a fly, entangled in cobweb filaments, watching the desirable freedom of the air with pitiful eyes.

He was short of exercise, and wandered on to Kensington Gardens, and down Queen's Gate towards Chelsea. Perhaps she had gone back to her flat. That at all events he could find out. For since that last and most ignominious repulse his wounded self-respect had taken refuge again in the feeling that she must have a lover. He arrived before the little Mansions at the dinner-hour. No need to enquire! A grey-haired lady was watering the flower-boxes in her window. It was evidently let. And he walked slowly past again, along the river — an evening of clear, quiet beauty, all harmony and comfort, except within his heart.

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CHAPTER 3

RICHMOND PARK

On the afternoon that Soames crossed to France a cablegram was received by Jolyon at Robin Hill:

“Your son down with enteric no immediate danger will cable again.”

It reached a household already agitated by the imminent departure of June, whose berth was booked for the following day. She was, indeed, in the act of confiding Eric Cobbley and his family to her father’s care when the message arrived.

The resolution to become a Red Cross nurse, taken under stimulus of Jolly’s enlistment, had been loyally fulfilled with the irritation and regret which all Forsytes feel at what curtails their individual liberties. Enthusiastic at first about the ‘wonderfulness’ of the work, she had begun after a month to feel that she could train herself so much better than others could train her. And if Holly had not insisted on following her example, and being trained too, she must inevitably have ‘cried off.’ The departure of Jolly and Val with their troop in April had further stiffened her failing resolve. But now, on the point of departure, the thought of leaving Eric Cobbley, with a wife and two children, adrift in the cold waters of an unappreciative world weighed on her so that she was still in danger of backing out. The reading of that cablegram, with its disquieting reality, clinched the matter. She saw herself already nursing Jolly — for of course they would let her nurse her own brother! Jolyon — ever wide and doubtful — had no such hope. Poor June!

Could any Forsyte of her generation grasp how rude and brutal life was? Ever since he knew of his boy’s arrival at Cape Town the thought of him had been a kind of recurrent sickness in Jolyon. He could not get reconciled to the feeling that Jolly was in danger all the time. The cablegram, grave though it was, was almost a relief. He was now safe from bullets, anyway. And yet — this enteric was a virulent disease! The Times was full of deaths therefrom. Why could he not be lying out there in that up-country hospital, and his boy safe at home? The un-Forsytean self-sacrifice of his three children, indeed, had quite bewildered Jolyon. He would eagerly change places with Jolly, because he loved his boy; but no such personal motive was influencing them. He could only think that it marked the decline of the Forsyte type.

Late that afternoon Holly came out to him under the old oak-tree. She had grown up very much during these last months of hospital training away from home. And, seeing her approach, he thought: ‘She has more sense than June, child though she is; more wisdom. Thank God she isn’t going out.’ She had seated herself in the swing, very silent and still. ‘She feels this,’ thought Jolyon, ‘as much as I’ and, seeing her eyes fixed on him, he said: “Don’t take it to heart too much, my child. If he weren’t ill, he might be in much greater danger.”

Holly got out of the swing.

“I want to tell you something, Dad. It was through me that Jolly enlisted and went out.”

“How’s that?”

“When you were away in Paris, Val Dartie and I fell in love. We used to ride in Richmond Park; we got engaged. Jolly found it out, and thought he ought to stop it; so he dared Val to enlist. It was all my fault, Dad; and I want to go out too. Because if anything happens to either of them I should feel awful. Besides, I’m just as much trained as June.”

Jolyon gazed at her in a stupefaction that was tinged with irony. So this was the answer to the riddle he had been asking himself; and his three children were Forsytes after all. Surely Holly might have told him all this before! But he smothered the sarcastic sayings on his lips. Tenderness to the young was perhaps the most sacred article of his belief. He had got, no doubt, what he deserved. Engaged! So this was why he had so lost touch with her! And to young Val Dartie — nephew of Soames — in the other camp! It was all terribly distasteful. He closed his easel, and set his drawing against the tree.

“Have you told June?”

“Yes; she says she’ll get me into her cabin somehow. It’s a single cabin; but one of us could sleep on the floor. If you consent, she’ll go up now and get permission.”

‘Consent?’ thought Jolyon. ‘Rather late in the day to ask for that!’ But again he checked himself.

"You're too young, my dear; they won't let you."

"June knows some people that she helped to go to Cape Town. If they won't let me nurse yet, I could stay with them and go on training there. Let me go, Dad!"

Jolyon smiled because he could have cried.

"I never stop anyone from doing anything," he said.

Holly flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh! Dad, you are the best in the world."

'That means the worst,' thought Jolyon. If he had ever doubted his creed of tolerance he did so then.

"I'm not friendly with Val's family," he said, "and I don't know Val, but Jolly didn't like him."

Holly looked at the distance and said:

"I love him."

"That settles it," said Jolyon dryly, then catching the expression on her face, he kissed her, with the thought: 'Is anything more pathetic than the faith of the young?' Unless he actually forbade her going it was obvious that he must make the best of it, so he went up to town with June. Whether due to her persistence, or the fact that the official they saw was an old school friend of Jolyon's, they obtained permission for Holly to share the single cabin. He took them to Surbiton station the following evening, and they duly slid away from him, provided with money, invalid foods, and those letters of credit without which Forsytes do not travel.

He drove back to Robin Hill under a brilliant sky to his late dinner, served with an added care by servants trying to show him that they sympathised, eaten with an added scrupulousness to show them that he appreciated their sympathy. But it was a real relief to get to his cigar on the terrace of flag-stones — cunningly chosen by young Bosinney for shape and colour — with night closing in around him, so beautiful a night, hardly whispering in the trees, and smelling so sweet that it made him ache. The grass was drenched with dew, and he kept to those flagstones, up and down, till presently it began to seem to him that he was one of three, not wheeling, but turning right about at each end, so that his father was always nearest to the house, and his son always nearest to the terrace edge. Each had an arm lightly within his arm; he dared not lift his hand to his cigar lest he should disturb them, and it burned away, dripping ash on him, till it dropped from his lips, at last, which were getting hot. They left him then, and his arms felt chilly. Three Jolyons in one Jolyon they had walked.

He stood still, counting the sounds — a carriage passing on the highroad, a distant train, the dog at Gage's farm, the whispering trees, the groom playing on his penny whistle. A multitude of stars up there — bright and silent, so far off! No moon as yet! Just enough light to show him the dark flags and swords of the iris flowers along the terrace edge — his favourite flower that had the night's own colour on its curving crumpled petals. He turned round to the house. Big, unlighted, not a soul beside himself to live in all that part of it. Stark loneliness! He could not go on living here alone. And yet, so long as there was beauty, why should a man feel lonely? The answer — as to some idiot's riddle — was: Because he did. The greater the beauty, the greater the loneliness, for at the back of beauty was harmony, and at the back of harmony was — union. Beauty could not comfort if the soul were out of it. The night, maddeningly lovely, with bloom of grapes on it in starshine, and the breath of grass and honey coming from it, he could not enjoy, while she who was to him the life of beauty, its embodiment and essence, was cut off from him, utterly cut off now, he felt, by honourable decency.

He made a poor fist of sleeping, striving too hard after that resignation which Forsytes find difficult to reach, bred to their own way and left so comfortably off by their fathers. But after dawn he dozed off, and soon was dreaming a strange dream.

He was on a stage with immensely high rich curtains — high as the very stars — stretching in a semi-circle from footlights to footlights. He himself was very small, a little black restless figure roaming up and down; and the odd thing was that he was not altogether himself, but Soames as well, so that he was not only experiencing but watching. This figure of himself and Soames was trying to find a way out through the curtains, which, heavy and dark, kept him in. Several times he had crossed in front of them before he saw with delight a sudden narrow rift — a tall chink of beauty the colour of iris flowers, like a glimpse of Paradise, remote, ineffable. Stepping quickly forward to pass into it, he found the curtains closing before him. Bitterly disappointed he — or was it Soames? — moved on, and there was the chink again through the parted curtains, which again closed too soon. This went on and on and he never got through till he woke with the word "Irene" on his lips. The dream disturbed him badly, especially that identification of himself with Soames.

Next morning, finding it impossible to work, he spent hours riding Jolly's horse in search of fatigue. And on the second day he made up his mind to move to London and see if he could not get permission to follow his daughters to South Africa. He had just begun to pack the following morning when he received this letter:

"GREEN HOTEL, "June 13. "RICHMOND. "MY DEAR JOLYON,

"You will be surprised to see how near I am to you. Paris became impossible — and I have come here to be within reach of your advice. I would so love to see you again. Since you left Paris I don't think I have met anyone I could really talk to. Is all well with you and with your boy? No one knows, I think, that I am here at present.

"Always your friend, "IRENE."

Irene within three miles of him! — and again in flight! He stood with a very queer smile on his lips. This was more than he had bargained for!

About noon he set out on foot across Richmond Park, and as he went along, he thought: 'Richmond Park! By Jove, it suits us Forsytes!' Not that Forsytes lived there — nobody lived there save royalty, rangers, and the deer — but in Richmond Park Nature was allowed to go so far and no further, putting up a brave show of being natural, seeming to say: 'Look at my instincts — they are almost passions, very nearly out of hand, but not quite, of course; the very hub of possession is to possess oneself.' Yes! Richmond Park possessed itself, even on that bright day of June, with arrowy cuckoos shifting the tree-points of their calls, and the wood doves announcing high summer.

The Green Hotel, which Jolyon entered at one o'clock, stood nearly opposite that more famous hostelry, the Crown and Sceptre; it was modest, highly respectable, never out of cold beef, gooseberry tart, and a dowager or two, so that a carriage and pair was almost always standing before the door.

In a room draped in chintz so slippery as to forbid all emotion, Irene was sitting on a piano stool covered with crewel work, playing 'Hansel and Gretel' out of an old score. Above her on a wall, not yet Morris-papered, was a print of the Queen on a pony, amongst deer-hounds, Scotch. caps, and slain stags; beside her in a pot on the window-sill was a white and rosy fuchsia. The Victorianism of the room almost talked; and in her clinging frock Irene seemed to Jolyon like Venus emerging from the shell of the past century.

"If the proprietor had eyes," he said, "he would show you the door; you have broken through his decorations." Thus lightly he smothered up an emotional moment. Having eaten cold beef, pickled walnut, gooseberry tart, and drunk stone-bottle ginger-beer, they walked into the Park, and light talk was succeeded by the silence Jolyon had dreaded.

"You haven't told me about Paris," he said at last.

"No. I've been shadowed for a long time; one gets used to that. But then Soames came. By the little Niobe — the same story; would I go back to him?"

"Incredible!"

She had spoken without raising her eyes, but she looked up now. Those dark eyes clinging to his said as no words could have: 'I have come to an end; if you want me, here I am.'

For sheer emotional intensity had he ever — old as he was — passed through such a moment?

The words: 'Irene, I adore you!' almost escaped him. Then, with a clearness of which he would not have believed mental vision capable, he saw Jolly lying with a white face turned to a white wall.

"My boy is very ill out there," he said quietly.

Irene slipped her arm through his.

"Let's walk on; I understand."

No miserable explanation to attempt! She had understood! And they walked on among the bracken, knee-high already, between the rabbit-holes and the oak-trees, talking of Jolly. He left her two hours later at the Richmond Hill Gate, and turned towards home.

'She knows of my feeling for her, then,' he thought. Of course! One could not keep knowledge of that from such a woman!

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CHAPTER 4

OVER THE RIVER

Jolly was tired to death of dreams. They had left him now too wan and weak to dream again; left him to lie torpid, faintly remembering far-off things; just able to turn his eyes and gaze through the window near his cot at the trickle of river running by in the sands, at the straggling milk-bush of the Karoo beyond. He knew what the Karoo was now, even if he had not seen a Boer roll over like a rabbit, or heard the whine of flying bullets. This pestilence had sneaked on him before he had smelled powder. A thirsty day and a rash drink, or perhaps a tainted fruit — who knew? Not he, who had not even strength left to grudge the evil thing its victory — just enough to know that there were many lying here with him, that he was sore with frenzied dreaming; just enough to watch that thread of river and be able to remember faintly those far-away things. . . .

The sun was nearly down. It would be cooler soon. He would have liked to know the time — to feel his old watch, so butter-smooth, to hear the repeater strike. It would have been friendly, home-like. He had not even strength to remember that the old watch was last wound the day he began to lie here. The pulse of his brain beat so feebly that faces which came and went, nurse's, doctor's, orderly's, were indistinguishable, just one indifferent face; and the words spoken about him meant all the same thing, and that almost nothing. Those things he used to do, though far and faint, were more distinct — walking past the foot of the old steps at Harrow 'bill'—'Here, sir! Here, sir!'— wrapping boots in the Westminster Gazette, greenish paper, shining boots — grandfather coming from somewhere dark — a smell of earth — the mushroom house! Robin Hill! Burying poor old Balthasar in the leaves! Dad! Home. . . .

Consciousness came again with noticing that the river had no water in it — someone was speaking too. Want anything? No. What could one want? Too weak to want — only to hear his watch strike. . . .

Holly! She wouldn't bowl properly. Oh! Pitch them up! Not sneaks! . . . 'Back her, Two and Bow!' He was Two! . . . Consciousness came once more with a sense of the violet dusk outside, and a rising blood-red crescent moon. His eyes rested on it fascinated; in the long minutes of brain-nothingness it went moving up and up. . . .

"He's going, doctor!" Not pack boots again? Never? 'Mind your form, Two!' Don't cry! Go quietly — over the river — sleep! . . . Dark? If somebody would — strike — his — watch! . . .

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CHAPTER 5

SOAMES ACTS

A sealed letter in the handwriting of Mr. Polteed remained unopened in Soames' pocket throughout two hours of sustained attention to the affairs of the 'New Colliery Company,' which, declining almost from the moment of old Jolyon's retirement from the Chairmanship, had lately run down so fast that there was now nothing for it but a 'winding-up.' He took the letter out to lunch at his City Club, sacred to him for the meals he had eaten there with his father in the early seventies, when James used to like him to come and see for himself the nature of his future life.

Here in a remote corner before a plate of roast mutton and mashed potato, he read:

"DEAR SIR,

"In accordance with your suggestion we have duly taken the matter up at the other end with gratifying results. Observation of 47 has enabled us to locate 17 at the Green Hotel, Richmond. The two have been observed to meet daily during the past week in Richmond Park. Nothing absolutely crucial has so far been notified. But in conjunction with what we had from Paris at the beginning of the year, I am confident we could now satisfy the Court. We shall, of course, continue to watch the matter until we hear from you.

"Very faithfully yours, "CLAUD POLTEED."

Soames read it through twice and beckoned to the waiter:

"Take this away; it's cold."

"Shall I bring you some more, sir?"

"No. Get me some coffee in the other room."

And, paying for what he had not eaten, he went out, passing two acquaintances without sign of recognition.

'Satisfy the Court!' he thought, sitting at a little round marble table with the coffee before him. That fellow Jolyon! He poured out his coffee, sweetened and drank it. He would disgrace him in the eyes of his own children! And rising, with that resolution hot within him, he found for the first time the inconvenience of being his own solicitor. He could not treat this scandalous matter in his own office. He must commit the soul of his private dignity to a stranger, some other professional dealer in family dishonour. Who was there he could go to? Linkman and Laver in Budge Row, perhaps — reliable, not too conspicuous, only nodding acquaintances. But before he saw them he must see Polteed again. But at this thought Soames had a moment of sheer weakness. To part with his secret? How find the words? How subject himself to contempt and secret laughter? Yet, after all, the fellow knew already — oh yes, he knew! And, feeling that he must finish with it now, he took a cab into the West End.

In this hot weather the window of Mr. Polteed's room was positively open, and the only precaution was a wire gauze, preventing the intrusion of flies. Two or three had tried to come in, and been caught, so that they seemed to be clinging there with the intention of being devoured presently. Mr. Polteed, following the direction of his client's eye, rose apologetically and closed the window.

'Posing ass!' thought Soames. Like all who fundamentally believe in themselves he was rising to the occasion, and, with his little sideway smile, he said: "I've had your letter. I'm going to act. I suppose you know who the lady you've been watching really is?" Mr. Polteed's expression at that moment was a masterpiece. It so clearly said: 'Well, what do you think? But mere professional knowledge, I assure you — pray forgive it!' He made a little half airy movement with his hand, as who should say: 'Such things — such things will happen to us all!'

"Very well, then," said Soames, moistening his lips: "there's no need to say more. I'm instructing Linkman and Laver of Budge Row to act for me. I don't want to hear your evidence, but kindly make your report to them at five o'clock, and continue to observe the utmost secrecy."

Mr. Polteed half closed his eyes, as if to comply at once. "My dear sir," he said.

"Are you convinced," asked Soames with sudden energy, "that there is enough?"

The faintest movement occurred to Mr. Polteed's shoulders.

“You can risk it,” he murmured; “with what we have, and human nature, you can risk it.”

Soames rose. “You will ask for Mr. Linkman. Thanks; don’t get up.” He could not bear Mr. Polteed to slide as usual between him and the door. In the sunlight of Piccadilly he wiped his forehead. This had been the worst of it — he could stand the strangers better. And he went back into the City to do what still lay before him.

That evening in Park Lane, watching his father dine, he was overwhelmed by his old longing for a son — a son, to watch him eat as he went down the years, to be taken on his knee as James on a time had been wont to take him; a son of his own begetting, who could understand him because he was the same flesh and blood — understand, and comfort him, and become more rich and cultured than himself because he would start even better off. To get old — like that thin, grey wiry-frail figure sitting there — and be quite alone with possessions heaping up around him; to take no interest in anything because it had no future and must pass away from him to hands and mouths and eyes for whom he cared no jot! No! He would force it through now, and be free to marry, and have a son to care for him before he grew to be like the old old man his father, wistfully watching now his sweetbread, now his son.

In that mood he went up to bed. But, lying warm between those fine linen sheets of Emily’s providing, he was visited by memories and torture. Visions of Irene, almost the solid feeling of her body, beset him. Why had he ever been fool enough to see her again, and let this flood back on him so that it was pain to think of her with that fellow — that stealing fellow.

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Chapter 6

A Summer Day

His boy was seldom absent from Jolyon's mind in the days which followed the first walk with Irene in Richmond Park. No further news had come; enquiries at the War Office elicited nothing; nor could he expect to hear from June and Holly for three weeks at least. In these days he felt how insufficient were his memories of Jolly, and what an amateur of a father he had been. There was not a single memory in which anger played a part; not one reconciliation, because there had never been a rupture; nor one heart-to-heart confidence, not even when Jolly's mother died. Nothing but half-ironical affection. He had been too afraid of committing himself in any direction, for fear of losing his liberty, or interfering with that of his boy.

Only in Irene's presence had he relief, highly complicated by the ever-growing perception of how divided he was between her and his son. With Jolly was bound up all that sense of continuity and social creed of which he had drunk deeply in his youth and again during his boy's public school and varsity life — all that sense of not going back on what father and son expected of each other. With Irene was bound up all his delight in beauty and in Nature. And he seemed to know less and less which was the stronger within him. From such sentimental paralysis he was rudely awakened, however, one afternoon, just as he was starting off to Richmond, by a young man with a bicycle and a face oddly familiar, who came forward faintly smiling.

"Mr. Jolyon Forsyte? Thank you!" Placing an envelope in Jolyon's hand he wheeled off the path and rode away. Bewildered, Jolyon opened it.

"Admiralty Probate and Divorce, Forsyte v. Forsyte and Forsyte!"

A sensation of shame and disgust was followed by the instant reaction 'Why, here's the very thing you want, and you don't like it!' But she must have had one too; and he must go to her at once. He turned things over as he went along. It was an ironical business. For, whatever the Scriptures said about the heart, it took more than mere longings to satisfy the law. They could perfectly well defend this suit, or at least in good faith try to. But the idea of doing so revolted Jolyon. If not her lover in deed he was in desire, and he knew that she was ready to come to him. Her face had told him so. Not that he exaggerated her feeling for him. She had had her grand passion, and he could not expect another from her at his age. But she had trust in him, affection for him, and must feel that he would be a refuge. Surely she would not ask him to defend the suit, knowing that he adored her! Thank Heaven she had not that maddening British conscientiousness which refused happiness for the sake of refusing! She must rejoice at this chance of being free after seventeen years of death in life! As to publicity, the fat was in the fire! To defend the suit would not take away the slur. Jolyon had all the proper feeling of a Forsyte whose privacy is threatened: If he was to be hung by the Law, by all means let it be for a sheep! Moreover the notion of standing in a witness box and swearing to the truth that no gesture, not even a word of love had passed between them seemed to him more degrading than to take the tacit stigma of being an adulterer — more truly degrading, considering the feeling in his heart, and just as bad and painful for his children. The thought of explaining away, if he could, before a judge and twelve average Englishmen, their meetings in Paris, and the walks in Richmond Park, horrified him. The brutality and hypocritical censoriousness of the whole process; the probability that they would not be believed — the mere vision of her, whom he looked on as the embodiment of Nature and of Beauty, standing there before all those suspicious, gloating eyes was hideous to him. No, no! To defend a suit only made a London holiday, and sold the newspapers. A thousand times better accept what Soames and the gods had sent!

'Besides,' he thought honestly, 'who knows whether, even for my boy's sake, I could have stood this state of things much longer? Anyway, her neck will be out of chancery at last!' Thus absorbed, he was hardly conscious of the heavy heat. The sky had become overcast, purplish with little streaks of white. A heavy heat-drop plashed a little star pattern in the dust of the road as he entered the Park. 'Phew!' he thought, 'thunder! I hope she's not come to meet me; there's a ducking up there!' But at that very minute he saw Irene coming towards the Gate. 'We must scuttle back to Robin Hill,' he thought.

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The storm had passed over the Poultry at four o'clock, bringing welcome distraction to the clerks in every office. Soames was drinking a cup of tea when a note was brought in to him:

“DEAR SIR,

“Forsyte v. Forsyte and Forsyte

“In accordance with your instructions, we beg to inform you that we personally served the respondent and co-respondent in this suit to-day, at Richmond, and Robin Hill, respectively. “Faithfully yours, “LINKMAN AND LAVER.”

For some minutes Soames stared at that note. Ever since he had given those instructions he had been tempted to annul them. It was so scandalous, such a general disgrace! The evidence, too, what he had heard of it, had never seemed to him conclusive; somehow, he believed less and less that those two had gone all lengths. But this, of course, would drive them to it; and he suffered from the thought. That fellow to have her love, where he had failed! Was it too late? Now that they had been brought up sharp by service of this petition, had he not a lever with which he could force them apart? ‘But if I don’t act at once,’ he thought, ‘it will be too late, now they’ve had this thing. I’ll go and see him; I’ll go down!’

And, sick with nervous anxiety, he sent out for one of the ‘new-fangled’ motor-cabs. It might take a long time to run that fellow to ground, and Goodness knew what decision they might come to after such a shock! ‘If I were a theatrical ass,’ he thought, ‘I suppose I should be taking a horse-whip or a pistol or something!’ He took instead a bundle of papers in the case of ‘Magentie versus Wake,’ intending to read them on the way down. He did not even open them, but sat quite still, jolted and jarred, unconscious of the draught down the back of his neck, or the smell of petrol. He must be guided by the fellow’s attitude; the great thing was to keep his head!

London had already begun to disgorge its workers as he neared Putney Bridge; the ant-heap was on the move outwards. What a lot of ants, all with a living to get, holding on by their eyelids in the great scramble! Perhaps for the first time in his life Soames thought: ‘I could let go if I liked! Nothing could touch me; I could snap my fingers, live as I wished — enjoy myself!’ No! One could not live as he had and just drop it all — settle down in Capua, to spend the money and reputation he had made. A man’s life was what he possessed and sought to possess. Only fools thought otherwise — fools, and socialists, and libertines!

The cab was passing villas now, going a great pace. ‘Fifteen miles an hour, I should think!’ he mused; ‘this’ll take people out of town to live!’ and he thought of its bearing on the portions of London owned by his father — he himself had never taken to that form of investment, the gambler in him having all the outlet needed in his pictures. And the cab sped on, down the hill past Wimbledon Common. This interview! Surely a man of fifty-two with grown-up children, and hung on the line, would not be reckless. ‘He won’t want to disgrace the family,’ he thought; ‘he was as fond of his father as I am of mine, and they were brothers. That woman brings destruction — what is it in her? I’ve never known.’ The cab branched off, along the side of a wood, and he heard a late cuckoo calling, almost the first he had heard that year. He was now almost opposite the site he had originally chosen for his house, and which had been so unceremoniously rejected by Bosinney in favour of his own choice. He began passing his handkerchief over his face and hands, taking deep breaths to give him steadiness. ‘Keep one’s head,’ he thought, ‘keep one’s head!’

The cab turned in at the drive which might have been his own, and the sound of music met him. He had forgotten the fellow’s daughters.

“I may be out again directly,” he said to the driver, “or I may be kept some time”; and he rang the bell.

Following the maid through the curtains into the inner hall, he felt relieved that the impact of this meeting would be broken by June or Holly, whichever was playing in there, so that with complete surprise he saw Irene at the piano, and Jolyon sitting in an armchair listening. They both stood up. Blood surged into Soames’ brain, and all his resolution to be guided by this or that left him utterly. The look of his farmer forbears — dogged Forsytes down by the sea, from ‘Superior Dosset’ back — grinned out of his face.

“Very pretty!” he said.

He heard the fellow murmur:

“This is hardly the place — we’ll go to the study, if you don’t mind.” And they both passed him through the curtain opening. In the little room to which he followed them, Irene stood by the open window, and the ‘fellow’ close to her by a big chair. Soames pulled the door to behind him with a slam; the sound carried him back all those years to the day when he had shut out Jolyon — shut him out for meddling with his affairs.

“Well,” he said, “what have you to say for yourselves?”

The fellow had the effrontery to smile.

“What we have received to-day has taken away your right to ask. I should imagine you will be glad to have your neck out of chancery.”

“Oh!” said Soames; “you think so! I came to tell you that I’ll divorce her with every circumstance of disgrace to you both, unless you swear to keep clear of each other from now on.”

He was astonished at his fluency, because his mind was stammering and his hands twitching. Neither of them answered; but their faces seemed to him as if contemptuous.

“Well,” he said; “you — Irene?”

Her lips moved, but Jolyon laid his hand on her arm.

“Let her alone!” said Soames furiously. “Irene, will you swear it?”

“No.”

“Oh! and you?”

“Still less.”

“So then you’re guilty, are you?”

“Yes, guilty.” It was Irene speaking in that serene voice, with that unreached air which had maddened him so often; and, carried beyond himself, he cried:

“You are a devil”

“Go out! Leave this house, or I’ll do you an injury.”

That fellow to talk of injuries! Did he know how near his throat was to being scragged?

“A trustee,” he said, “embezzling trust property! A thief, stealing his cousin’s wife.”

“Call me what you like. You have chosen your part, we have chosen ours. Go out!”

If he had brought a weapon Soames might have used it at that moment.

“I’ll make you pay!” he said.

“I shall be very happy.”

At that deadly turning of the meaning of his speech by the son of him who had nicknamed him ‘the man of property,’ Soames stood glaring. It was ridiculous!

There they were, kept from violence by some secret force. No blow possible, no words to meet the case. But he could not, did not know how to turn and go away. His eyes fastened on Irene’s face — the last time he would ever see that fatal face — the last time, no doubt!

“You,” he said suddenly, “I hope you’ll treat him as you treated me — that’s all.”

He saw her wince, and with a sensation not quite triumph, not quite relief, he wrenched open the door, passed out through the hall, and got into his cab. He lolled against the cushion with his eyes shut. Never in his life had he been so near to murderous violence, never so thrown away the restraint which was his second nature. He had a stripped and naked feeling, as if all virtue had gone out of him — life meaningless, mind-striking work. Sunlight streamed in on him, but he felt cold. The scene he had passed through had gone from him already, what was before him would not materialise, he could catch on to nothing; and he felt frightened, as if he had been hanging over the edge of a precipice, as if with another turn of the screw sanity would have failed him. ‘I’m not fit for it,’ he thought; ‘I mustn’t — I’m not fit for it.’ The cab sped on, and in mechanical procession trees, houses, people passed, but had no significance. ‘I feel very queer,’ he thought; ‘I’ll take a Turkish bath. — I’ve been very near to something. It won’t do.’ The cab whirred its way back over the bridge, up the Fulham Road, along the Park.

“To the Hammam,” said Soames.

Curious that on so warm a summer day, heat should be so comforting! Crossing into the hot room he met George Forsyte coming out, red and glistening.

“Hallo!” said George; “what are you training for? You’ve not got much superfluous.”

Buffoon! Soames passed him with his sideway smile. Lying back, rubbing his skin uneasily for the first signs of perspiration, he thought: ‘Let them laugh! I won’t feel anything! I can’t stand violence! It’s not good for me!’

CHAPTER 7

A SUMMER NIGHT

Soames left dead silence in the little study. “Thank you for that good lie,” said Jolyon suddenly. “Come out — the air in here is not what it was!”

In front of a long high southerly wall on which were trained peach-trees the two walked up and down in silence. Old Jolyon had planted some cupressus-trees, at intervals, between this grassy terrace and the dipping meadow full of buttercups and ox-eyed daisies; for twelve years they had flourished, till their dark spiral shapes had quite a look of Italy. Birds fluttered softly in the wet shrubbery; the swallows swooped past, with a steel-blue sheen on their swift little bodies; the grass felt springy beneath the feet, its green refreshed; butterflies chased each other. After that painful scene the quiet of Nature was wonderfully poignant. Under the sun-soaked wall ran a narrow strip of garden-bed full of mignonette and pansies, and from the bees came a low hum in which all other sounds were set — the mooing of a cow deprived of her calf, the calling of a cuckoo from an elm-tree at the bottom of the meadow. Who would have thought that behind them, within ten miles, London began — that London of the Forsytes, with its wealth, its misery; its dirt and noise; its jumbled stone isles of beauty, its grey sea of hideous brick and stucco? That London which had seen Irene’s early tragedy, and Jolyon’s own hard days; that web; that princely workhouse of the possessive instinct!

And while they walked Jolyon pondered those words: ‘I hope you’ll treat him as you treated me.’ That would depend on himself. Could he trust himself? Did Nature permit a Forsyte not to make a slave of what he adored? Could beauty be confided to him? Or should she not be just a visitor, coming when she would, possessed for moments which passed, to return only at her own choosing? ‘We are a breed of spoilers!’ thought Jolyon, ‘close and greedy; the bloom of life is not safe with us. Let her come to me as she will, when she will, not at all if she will not. Let me be just her stand-by, her perching-place; never-never her cage!’

She was the chink of beauty in his dream. Was he to pass through the curtains now and reach her? Was the rich stuff of many possessions, the close encircling fabric of the possessive instinct walling in that little black figure of himself, and Soames — was it to be rent so that he could pass through into his vision, find there something not of the senses only? ‘Let me,’ he thought, ‘ah! let me only know how not to grasp and destroy!’

But at dinner there were plans to be made. To-night she would go back to the hotel, but tomorrow he would take her up to London. He must instruct his solicitor — Jack Herring. Not a finger must be raised to hinder the process of the Law. Damages exemplary, judicial strictures, costs, what they liked — let it go through at the first moment, so that her neck might be out of chancery at last! To-morrow he would see Herring — they would go and see him together. And then — abroad, leaving no doubt, no difficulty about evidence, making the lie she had told into the truth. He looked round at her; and it seemed to his adoring eyes that more than a woman was sitting there. The spirit of universal beauty, deep, mysterious, which the old painters, Titian, Giorgione, Botticelli, had known how to capture and transfer to the faces of their women — this flying beauty seemed to him imprinted on her brow, her hair, her lips, and in her eyes.

‘And this is to be mine!’ he thought. ‘It frightens me!’

After dinner they went out on to the terrace to have coffee. They sat there long, the evening was so lovely, watching the summer night come very slowly on. It was still warm and the air smelled of lime blossom — early this summer. Two bats were flighting with the faint mysterious little noise they make. He had placed the chairs in front of the study window, and moths flew past to visit the discreet light in there. There was no wind, and not a whisper in the old oak-tree twenty yards away! The moon rose from behind the copse, nearly full; and the two lights struggled, till moonlight conquered, changing the colour and quality of all the garden, stealing along the flagstones, reaching their feet, climbing up, changing their faces.

“Well,” said Jolyon at last, “you’ll be tired, dear; we’d better start. The maid will show you Holly’s room,” and he rang the study bell. The maid who came handed him a telegram. Watching her take Irene away, he thought: ‘This must have come an hour or more ago, and she didn’t bring it out to us! That shows! Well, we’ll be hung for a sheep soon!’ And, opening the telegram, he read:

“JOLYON FORSYTE, Robin Hill. — Your son passed painlessly away on June 20th. Deep sympathy”— some name unknown to him.

He dropped it, spun round, stood motionless. The moon shone in on him; a moth flew in his face. The first day of all that he had not thought almost ceaselessly of Jolly. He went blindly towards the window, struck against the old armchair — his father's — and sank down on to the arm of it. He sat there huddled' forward, staring into the night. Gone out like a candle flame; far from home, from love, all by himself, in the dark! His boy! From a little chap always so good to him — so friendly! Twenty years old, and cut down like grass — to have no life at all! 'I didn't really know him,' he thought, 'and he didn't know me; but we loved each other. It's only love that matters.'

To die out there — lonely — wanting them — wanting home! This seemed to his Forsyte heart more painful, more pitiful than death itself. No shelter, no protection, no love at the last! And all the deeply rooted clanship in him, the family feeling and essential clinging to his own flesh and blood which had been so strong in old Jolyon was so strong in all the Forsytes — felt outraged, cut, and torn by his boy's lonely passing. Better far if he had died in battle, without time to long for them to come to him, to call out for them, perhaps, in his delirium!

The moon had passed behind the oak-tree now, endowing it with uncanny life, so that it seemed watching him — the oak-tree his boy had been so fond of climbing, out of which he had once fallen and hurt himself, and hadn't cried!

The door creaked. He saw Irene come in, pick up the telegram and read it. He heard the faint rustle of her dress. She sank on her knees close to him, and he forced himself to smile at her. She stretched up her arms and drew his head down on her shoulder. The perfume and warmth of her encircled him; her presence gained slowly his whole being.

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CHAPTER 8

JAMES IN WAITING

Sweated to serenity, Soames dined at the Remove and turned his face toward Park Lane. His father had been unwell lately. This would have to be kept from him! Never till that moment had he realised how much the dread of bringing James' grey hairs down with sorrow to the grave had counted with him; how intimately it was bound up with his own shrinking from scandal. His affection for his father, always deep, had increased of late years with the knowledge that James looked on him as the real prop of his decline. It seemed pitiful that one who had been so careful all his life and done so much for the family name — so that it was almost a byword for solid, wealthy respectability — should at his last gasp have to see it in all the newspapers. This was like lending a hand to Death, that final enemy of Forsytes. 'I must tell mother,' he thought, 'and when it comes on, we must keep the papers from him somehow. He sees hardly anyone.' Letting himself in with his latchkey, he was beginning to ascend he stairs when he became conscious of commotion on the second-floor landing. His mother's voice was saying:

"Now, James, you'll catch cold. Why can't you wait quietly?"

His father's answering

"Wait? I'm always waiting. Why doesn't he come in?"

"You can speak to him to-morrow morning, instead of making a guy of yourself on the landing."

"He'll go up to bed, I shouldn't wonder. I shan't sleep."

"Now come back to bed, James."

"Um! I might die before to-morrow morning for all you can tell."

"You shan't have to wait till to-morrow morning; I'll go down and bring him up. Don't fuss!"

"There you go — always so cock-a-hoop. He mayn't come in at all."

"Well, if he doesn't come in you won't catch him by standing out here in your dressing-gown."

Soames rounded the last bend and came in sight of his father's tall figure wrapped in a brown silk quilted gown, stooping over the balustrade above. Light fell on his silvery hair and whiskers, investing his head with, a sort of halo.

"Here he is!" he heard him say in a voice which sounded injured, and his mother's comfortable answer from the bedroom door:

"That's all right. Come in, and I'll brush your hair." James extended a thin, crooked finger, oddly like the beckoning of a skeleton, and passed through the doorway of his bedroom.

'What is it?' thought Soames. 'What has he got hold of now?'

His father was sitting before the dressing-table sideways to the mirror, while Emily slowly passed two silver-backed brushes through and through his hair. She would do this several times a day, for it had on him something of the effect produced on a cat by scratching between its ears.

"There you are!" he said. "I've been waiting."

Soames stroked his shoulder, and, taking up a silver button-hook, examined the mark on it.

"Well," he said, "you're looking better."

James shook his head.

"I want to say something. Your mother hasn't heard." He announced Emily's ignorance of what he hadn't told her, as if it were a grievance.

"Your father's been in a great state all the evening. I'm sure I don't know what about."

The faint 'whisk-whisk' of the brushes continued the soothing of her voice.

"No! you know nothing," said James. "Soames can tell me." And, fixing his grey eyes, in which there was a look of strain, uncomfortable to watch, on his son, he muttered:

"I'm getting on, Soames. At my age I can't tell. I might die any time. There'll be a lot of money. There's Rachel and

Cicely got no children; and Val's out there — that chap his father will get hold of all he can. And somebody'll pick up Imogen, I shouldn't wonder."

Soames listened vaguely — he had heard all this before. Whish-whish! went the brushes.

"If that's all!" said Emily.

"All!" cried James; "it's nothing. I'm coming to that." And again his eyes strained pitifully at Soames.

"It's you, my boy," he said suddenly; "you ought to get a divorce."

That word, from those of all lips, was almost too much for Soames' composure. His eyes reconcentrated themselves quickly on the buttonhook, and as if in apology James hurried on:

"I don't know what's become of her — they say she's abroad. Your Uncle Swithin used to admire her — he was a funny fellow." (So he always alluded to his dead twin-'The Stout and the Lean of it,' they had been called.) "She wouldn't be alone, I should say." And with that summing-up of the effect of beauty on human nature, he was silent, watching his son with eyes doubting as a bird's. Soames, too, was silent. Whish-whish went the brushes.

"Come, James! Soames knows best. It's his 'business."

"Ah!" said James, and the word came from deep down; "but there's all my money, and there's his — who's it to go to? And when he dies the name goes out."

Soames replaced the button-hook on the lace and pink silk of the dressing-table coverlet.

"The name?" said Emily, "there are all the other Forsytes."

"As if that helped me," muttered James. "I shall be in my grave, and there'll be nobody, unless he marries again."

"You're quite right," said Soames quietly; "I'm getting a divorce."

James' eyes almost started from his head.

"What?" he cried. "There! nobody tells me anything."

"Well," said Emily, "who would have imagined you wanted it? My dear boy, that is a surprise, after all these years."

"It'll be a scandal," muttered James, as if to himself; "but I can't help that. Don't brush so hard. When'll it come on?"

"Before the Long Vacation; it's not defended."

James' lips moved in secret calculation. "I shan't live to see my grandson," he muttered.

Emily ceased brushing. "Of course you will, James. Soames will be as quick as he can."

There was a long silence, till James reached out his arm.

"Here! let's have the eau-de-Cologne," and, putting it to his nose, he moved his forehead in the direction of his son. Soames bent over and kissed that brow just where the hair began. A relaxing quiver passed over James' face, as though the wheels of anxiety within were running down.

"I'll get to bed," he said; "I shan't want to see the papers when that comes. They're a morbid lot; I can't pay attention to them, I'm too old."

Queerly affected, Soames went to the door; he heard his father say:

"Here, I'm tired. I'll say a prayer in bed."

And his mother answering

"That's right, James; it'll be ever so much more comfy."

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Chapter 9

Out of the Web

On Forsyte 'Change the announcement of Jolly's death, among a batch of troopers, caused mixed sensation. Strange to read that Jolyon Forsyte (fifth of the name in direct descent) had died of disease in the service of his country, and not be able to feel it personally. It revived the old grudge against his father for having estranged himself. For such was still the prestige of old Jolyon that the other Forsytes could never quite feel, as might have been expected, that it was they who had cut off his descendants for irregularity. The news increased, of course, the interest and anxiety about Val; but then Val's name was Dartie, and even if he were killed in battle or got the Victoria Cross, it would not be at all the same as if his name were Forsyte. Not even casualty or glory to the Haymans would be really satisfactory. Family pride felt defrauded.

How the rumour arose, then, that 'something very dreadful, my dear,' was pending, no one, least of all Soames, could tell, secret as he kept everything. Possibly some eye had seen 'Forsyte v. Forsyte and Forsyte,' in the cause list; and had added it to 'Irene in Paris with a fair beard.' Possibly some wall at Park Lane had ears. The fact remained that it was known — whispered among the old, discussed among the young — that family pride must soon receive a blow.

Soames, paying one, of his Sunday visits to Timothy's — paying it with the feeling that after the suit came on he would be paying no more — felt knowledge in the air as he came in. Nobody, of course, dared speak of it before him, but each of the four other Forsytes present held their breath, aware that nothing could prevent Aunt Juley from making them all uncomfortable. She looked so piteously at Soames, she checked herself on the point of speech so often, that Aunt Hester excused herself and said she must go and bathe Timothy's eye — he had a sty coming. Soames, impassive, slightly supercilious, did not stay long. He went out with a curse stifled behind his pale, just smiling lips.

Fortunately for the peace of his mind, cruelly tortured by the coming scandal, he was kept busy day and night with plans for his retirement — for he had come to that grim conclusion. To go on seeing all those people who had known him as a 'long-headed chap,' an astute adviser — after that — no! The fastidiousness and pride which was so strangely, so inextricably blended in him with possessive obtuseness, revolted against the thought. He would retire, live privately, go on buying pictures, make a great name as a collector — after all, his heart was more in that than it had ever been in Law. In pursuance of this now fixed resolve, he had to get ready to amalgamate his business with another firm without letting people know, for that would excite curiosity and make humiliation cast its shadow before. He had pitched on the firm of Cuthcott, Holliday and Kingson, two of whom were dead. The full name after the amalgamation would therefore be Cuthcott, Holliday, Kingson, Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte. But after debate as to which of the dead still had any influence with the living, it was decided to reduce the title to Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte, of whom Kingson would be the active and Soames the sleeping partner. For leaving his name, prestige, and clients behind him, Soames would receive considerable value.

One night, as befitted a man who had arrived at so important a stage of his career, he made a calculation of what he was worth, and after writing off liberally for depreciation by the war, found his value to be some hundred and thirty thousand pounds. At his father's death, which could not, alas, be delayed much longer, he must come into at least another fifty thousand, and his yearly expenditure at present just reached two. Standing among his pictures, he saw before him a future full of bargains earned by the trained faculty of knowing better than other people. Selling what was about to decline, keeping what was still going up, and exercising judicious insight into future taste, he would make a unique collection, which at his death would pass to the nation under the title 'Forsyte Bequest.'

If the divorce went through, he had determined on his line with Madame Lamotte. She had, he knew, but one real ambition — to live on her 'renter' in Paris near her grandchildren. He would buy the goodwill of the Restaurant Bretagne at a fancy price. Madame would live like a Queen-Mother in Paris on the interest, invested as she would know how. (Incidentally Soames meant to put a capable manager in her place, and make the restaurant pay good interest on his money. There were great possibilities in Soho.) On Annette he would promise to settle fifteen thousand pounds (whether designedly or not), precisely the sum old Jolyon had settled on 'that woman.'

A letter from Jolyon's solicitor to his own had disclosed the fact that 'those two' were in Italy. And an opportunity had been duly given for noting that they had first stayed at an hotel in London. The matter was clear as daylight, and would be disposed of in half an hour or so; but during that half-hour he, Soames, would go down to hell; and after that half-hour all bearers of the Forsyte name would feel the bloom was off the rose. He had no illusions like Shakespeare that roses by any other name would smell as sweet. The name was a possession, a concrete, unstained piece of property, the value of which would be reduced some twenty per cent. at least. Unless it were Roger, who had once refused to stand for Parliament, and — oh, irony! — Jolyon, hung on the line, there had never been a distinguished Forsyte. But that very lack of distinction was the name's greatest asset. It was a private name, intensely individual, and his own property; it had never been exploited for good or evil by intrusive report. He and each member of his family owned it wholly, sanely, secretly, without any more interference from the public than had been necessitated by their births, their marriages, their deaths. And during these weeks of waiting and preparing to drop the Law, he conceived for that Law a bitter distaste, so deeply did he resent its coming violation of his name, forced on him by the need he felt to perpetuate that name in a lawful manner. The monstrous injustice of the whole thing excited in him a perpetual suppressed fury. He had asked no better than to live in spotless domesticity, and now he must go into the witness box, after all these futile, barren years, and proclaim his failure to keep his wife — incur the pity, the amusement, the contempt of his kind. It was all upside down. She and that fellow ought to be the sufferers, and they — were in Italy! In these weeks the Law he had served so faithfully, looked on so reverently as the guardian of all property, seemed to him quite pitiful. What could be more insane than to tell a man that he owned his wife, and punish him when someone unlawfully took her away from him? Did the Law not know that a man's name was to him the apple of his eye, that it was far harder to be regarded as cuckold than as seducer? He actually envied Jolyon the reputation of succeeding where he, Soames, had failed. The question of damages worried him, too. He wanted to make that fellow suffer, but he remembered his cousin's words, "I shall be very happy," with the uneasy feeling that to claim damages would make not Jolyon but himself suffer; he felt uncannily that Jolyon would rather like to pay them — the chap was so loose. Besides, to claim damages was not the thing to do. The claim, indeed, had been made almost mechanically; and as the hour drew near Soames saw in it just another dodge of this insensitive and topsy-turvy Law to make him ridiculous; so that people might sneer and say: "Oh, yes, he got quite a good price for her!" And he gave instructions that his Counsel should state that the money would be given to a Home for Fallen Women. He was a long time hitting off exactly the right charity; but, having pitched on it, he used to wake up in the night and think: 'It won't do, too lurid; it'll draw attention. Something quieter — better taste.' He did not care for dogs, or he would have named them; and it was in desperation at last — for his knowledge of charities was limited — that he decided on the blind. That could not be inappropriate, and it would make the Jury assess the damages high.

A good many suits were dropping out of the list, which happened to be exceptionally thin that summer, so that his case would be reached before August. As the day grew nearer, Winifred was his only comfort. She showed the fellow-feeling of one who had been through the mill, and was the 'femme-sole' in whom he confided, well knowing that she would not let Dartie into her confidence. That ruffian would be only too rejoiced! At the end of July, on the afternoon before the case, he went in to see her. They had not yet been able to leave town, because Dartie had already spent their summer holiday, and Winifred dared not go to her father for more money while he was waiting not to be told anything about this affair of Soames.

Soames found her with a letter in her hand.

"That from Val," he asked gloomily. "What does he say?"

"He says he's married," said Winifred.

"Whom to, for Goodness' sake?"

Winifred looked up at him.

"To Holly Forsyte, Jolyon's daughter."

"What?"

"He got leave and did it. I didn't even know he knew her. Awkward, isn't it?"

Soames uttered a short laugh at that characteristic minimisation.

"Awkward! Well, I don't suppose they'll hear about this till they come back. They'd better stay out there. That fellow will give her money."

“But I want Val back,” said Winifred almost piteously; “I miss him, he helps me to get on.”

“I know,” murmured Soames. “How’s Dartie behaving now?”

“It might be worse; but it’s always money. Would you like me to come down to the Court to-morrow, Soames?”

Soames stretched out his hand for hers. The gesture so betrayed the loneliness in him that she pressed it between her two.

“Never mind, old boy. You’ll feel ever so much better when it’s all over.”

“I don’t know what I’ve done,” said Soames huskily; “I never have. It’s all upside down. I was fond of her; I’ve always been.”

Winifred saw a drop of blood ooze out of his lip, and the sight stirred her profoundly.

“Of course,” she said, “it’s been too bad of her all along! But what shall I do about this marriage of Val’s, Soames? I don’t know how to write to him, with this coming on. You’ve seen that child. Is she pretty?”

“Yes, she’s pretty,” said Soames. “Dark — lady-like enough.”

‘That doesn’t sound so bad,’ thought Winifred. ‘Jolyon had style.’

“It is a coil,” she said. “What will father say?

“Mustn’t be told,” said Soames. “The war’ll soon be over now, you’d better let Val take to farming out there.”

It was tantamount to saying that his nephew was lost.

“I haven’t told Monty,” Winifred murmured desolately.

The case was reached before noon next day, and was over in little more than half an hour. Soames — pale, spruce, sad-eyed in the witness-box — had suffered so much beforehand that he took it all like one dead. The moment the decree nisi was pronounced he left the Courts of Justice.

Four hours until he became public property! ‘Solicitor’s divorce suit!’ A surly, dogged anger replaced that dead feeling within him. ‘Damn them all!’ he thought; ‘I won’t run away. I’ll act as if nothing had happened.’ And in the sweltering heat of Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill he walked all the way to his City Club, lunched, and went back to his office. He worked there stolidly throughout the afternoon.

On his way out he saw that his clerks knew, and answered their involuntary glances with a look so sardonic that they were immediately withdrawn. In front of St. Paul’s, he stopped to buy the most gentlemanly of the evening papers. Yes! there he was! ‘Well-known solicitor’s divorce. Cousin co-respondent. Damages given to the blind’— so, they had got that in! At every other face, he thought: ‘I wonder if you know!’ And suddenly he felt queer, as if something were racing round in his head.

What was this? He was letting it get hold of him! He mustn’t! He would be ill. He mustn’t think! He would get down to the river and row about, and fish. ‘I’m not going to be laid up,’ he thought.

It flashed across him that he had something of importance to do before he went out of town. Madame Lamotte! He must explain the Law. Another six months before he was really free! Only he did not want to see Annette! And he passed his hand over the top of his head — it was very hot.

He branched off through Covent Garden. On this sultry day of late July the garbage-tainted air of the old market offended him, and Soho seemed more than ever the disenchanted home of rapscallionism. Alone, the Restaurant Bretagne, neat, daintily painted, with its blue tubs and the dwarf trees therein, retained an aloof and Frenchified self-respect. It was the slack hour, and pale trim waitresses were preparing the little tables for dinner. Soames went through into the private part. To his discomfiture Annette answered his knock. She, too, looked pale and dragged down by the heat.

“You are quite a stranger,” she said languidly.

Soames smiled.

“I haven’t wished to be; I’ve been busy.”

“Where’s your mother, Annette? I’ve got some news for her.”

“Mother is not in.”

It seemed to Soames that she looked at him in a queer way. What did she know? How much had her mother told her? The worry of trying to make that out gave him an alarming feeling in the head. He gripped the edge of the table, and dizzily saw Annette come forward, her eyes clear with surprise. He shut his own and said:

"It's all right. I've had a touch of the sun, I think." The sun! What he had was a touch of 'darkness! Annette's voice, French and composed, said:

"Sit down, it will pass, then." Her hand pressed his shoulder, and Soames sank into a chair. When the dark feeling dispersed, and he opened his eyes, she was looking down at him. What an inscrutable and odd expression for a girl of twenty!

"Do you feel better?"

"It's nothing," said Soames. Instinct told him that to be feeble before her was not helping him — age was enough handicap without that. Will-power was his fortune with Annette, he had lost ground these latter months from indecision — he could not afford to lose any more. He got up, and said:

"I'll write to your mother. I'm going down to my river house for a long holiday. I want you both to come there presently and stay. It's just at its best. You will, won't you?"

"It will be veree nice." A pretty little roll of that 'r' but no enthusiasm. And rather sadly he added:

"You're feeling the heat; too, aren't you, Annette? It'll do you good to be on the river. Good-night." Annette swayed forward. There was a sort of compunction in the movement.

"Are you fit to go? Shall I give you some coffee?"

"No," said Soames firmly. "Give me your hand."

She held out her hand, and Soames raised it to his lips. When he looked up, her face wore again that strange expression. 'I can't tell,' he thought, as he went out; 'but I mustn't think — I mustn't worry:

But worry he did, walking toward Pall Mall. English, not of her religion, middle-aged, scarred as it were by domestic tragedy, what had he to give her? Only wealth, social position, leisure, admiration! It was much, but was it enough for a beautiful girl of twenty? He felt so ignorant about Annette. He had, too, a curious fear of the French nature of her mother and herself. They knew so well what they wanted. They were almost Forsytes. They would never grasp a shadow and miss a substance.

The tremendous effort it was to write a simple note to Madame Lamotte when he reached his Club warned him still further that he was at the end of his tether.

"MY DEAR MADAME (he said),

"You will see by the enclosed newspaper cutting that I obtained my decree of divorce to-day. By the English Law I shall not, however, be free to marry again till the decree is confirmed six months hence. In the meanwhile I have the honor to ask to be considered a formal suitor for the hand of your daughter. I shall write again in a few days and beg you both to come and stay at my river house. "I am, dear Madame, "Sincerely yours, "SOAMES FORSYTE."

Having sealed and posted this letter, he went into the dining-room. Three mouthfuls of soup convinced him that he could not eat; and, causing a cab to be summoned, he drove to Paddington Station and took the first train to Reading. He reached his house just as the sun went down, and wandered out on to the lawn. The air was drenched with the scent of pinks and picotees in his flower-borders. A stealing coolness came off the river.

Rest-peace! Let a poor fellow rest! Let not worry and shame and anger chase like evil night-birds in his head! Like those doves perched half-sleeping on their dovecot, like the furry creatures in the woods on the far side, and the simple folk in their cottages, like the trees and the river itself, whitening fast in twilight, like the darkening cornflower-blue sky where stars were coming up — let him cease from himself, and rest!

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CHAPTER 10

PASSING OF AN AGE

The marriage of Soames with Annette took place in Paris on the last day of January, 1901, with such privacy that not even Emily was told until it was accomplished.

The day after the wedding he brought her to one of those quiet hotels in London where greater expense can be incurred for less result than anywhere else under heaven. Her beauty in the best Parisian frocks was giving him more satisfaction than if he had collected a perfect bit of china, or a jewel of a picture; he looked forward to the moment when he would exhibit her in Park Lane, in Green Street, and at Timothy's.

If some one had asked him in those days, "In confidence — are you in love with this girl?" he would have replied: "In love? What is love? If you mean do I feel to her as I did towards Irene in those old days when I first met her and she would not have me; when I sighed and starved after her and couldn't rest a minute until she yielded — no! If you mean do I admire her youth and prettiness, do my senses ache a little when I see her moving about — yes! Do I think she will keep me straight, make me a creditable wife and a good mother for my children? — again, yes!"

"What more do I need? and what more do three-quarters of the women who are married get from the men who marry them?" And if the enquirer had pursued his query, "And do you think it was fair to have tempted this girl to give herself to you for life unless you have really touched her heart?" he would have answered: "The French see these things differently from us. They look at marriage from the point of view of establishments and children; and, from my own experience, I am not at all sure that theirs is not the sensible view. I shall not expect this time more than I can get, or she can give. Years hence I shouldn't be surprised if I have trouble with her; but I shall be getting old, I shall have children by then. I shall shut my eyes. I have had my great passion; hers is perhaps to come — I don't suppose it will be for me. I offer her a great deal, and I don't expect much in return, except children, or at least a son. But one thing I am sure of — she has very good sense!"

And if, insatiate, the enquirer had gone on, "You do not look, then, for spiritual union in this marriage?" Soames would have lifted his sideway smile, and rejoined: "That's as it may be. If I get satisfaction for my senses, perpetuation of myself; good taste and good humour in the house; it is all I can expect at my age. I am not likely to be going out of my way towards any far-fetched sentimentalism." Whereon, the enquirer must in good taste have ceased enquiry.

The Queen was dead, and the air of the greatest city upon earth grey with unshed tears. Fur-coated and top-hatted, with Annette beside him in dark furs, Soames crossed Park Lane on the morning of the funeral procession, to the rails in Hyde Park. Little moved though he ever was by public matters, this event, supremely symbolical, this summing-up of a long rich period, impressed his fancy. In '37, when she came to the throne, 'Superior Dosset' was still building houses to make London hideous; and James, a stripling of twenty-six, just laying the foundations of his practice in the Law. Coaches still ran; men wore stocks, shaved their upper lips, ate oysters out of barrels; 'tigers' swung behind cabriolets; women said, 'La!' and owned no property; there were manners in the land, and pigsties for the poor; unhappy devils were hanged for little crimes, and Dickens had but just begun to write. Well-nigh two generations had slipped by — of steamboats, railways, telegraphs, bicycles, electric light, telephones, and now these motorcars — of such accumulated wealth, that eight per cent. had become three, and Forsytes were numbered by the thousand! Morals had changed, manners had changed, men had become monkeys twice-removed, God had become Mammon — Mammon so respectable as to deceive himself: Sixty-four years that favoured property, and had made the upper middle class; buttressed, chiselled, polished it, till it was almost indistinguishable in manners, morals, speech, appearance, habit, and soul from the nobility. An epoch which had gilded individual liberty so that if a man had money, he was free in law and fact, and if he had not money he was free in law and not in fact. An era which had canonised hypocrisy, so that to seem to be respectable was to be. A great Age, whose transmuting influence nothing had escaped save the nature of man and the nature of the Universe.

And to witness the passing of this Age, London — its pet and fancy — was pouring forth her citizens through every gate into Hyde Park, hub of Victorianism, happy hunting-ground of Forsytes. Under the grey heavens, whose drizzle just kept off, the dark concourse gathered to see the show. The 'good old' Queen, full of years and virtue, had emerged from her seclusion for the last time to make a London holiday. From Houndsditch, Acton, Ealing, Hampstead, Islington, and

Bethnal Green; from Hackney, Hornsey, Leytonstone, Battersea, and Fulham; and from those green pastures where Forsytes flourish — Mayfair and Kensington, St. James' and Belgravia, Bayswater and Chelsea and the Regent's Park, the people swarmed down on to the roads where death would presently pass with dusky pomp and pageantry. Never again would a Queen reign so long, or people have a chance to see so much history buried for their money. A pity the war dragged on, and that the Wreath of Victory could not be laid upon her coffin! All else would be there to follow and commemorate — soldiers, sailors, foreign princes, half-masted bunting, tolling bells, and above all the surging, great, dark-coated crowd, with perhaps a simple sadness here and there deep in hearts beneath black clothes put on by regulation. After all, more than a Queen was going to her rest, a woman who had braved sorrow, lived well and wisely according to her lights.

Out in the crowd against the railings, with his arm hooked in Annette's, Soames waited. Yes! the Age was passing! What with this Trade Unionism, and Labour fellows in the House of Commons, with continental fiction, and something in the general feel of everything, not to be expressed in words, things were very different; he recalled the crowd on Mafeking night, and George Forsyte saying: "They're all socialists, they want our goods." Like James, Soames didn't know, he couldn't tell — with Edward on the throne! Things would never be as safe again as under good old Viccy! Convulsively he pressed his young wife's arm. There, at any rate, was something substantially his own, domestically certain again at last; something which made property worth while — a real thing once more. Pressed close against her and trying to ward others off, Soames was content. The crowd swayed round them, ate sandwiches and dropped crumbs; boys who had climbed the plane-trees chattered above like monkeys, threw twigs and orange-peel. It was past time; they should be coming soon! And, suddenly, a little behind them to the left, he saw a tallish man with a soft hat and short grizzling beard, and a tallish woman in a little round fur cap and veil. Jolyon and Irene talking, smiling at each other, close together like Annette and himself! They had not seen him; and stealthily, with a very queer feeling in his heart, Soames watched those two. They looked happy! What had they come here for — inherently illicit creatures, rebels from the Victorian ideal? What business had they in this crowd? Each of them twice exiled by morality — making a boast, as it were, of love and laxity! He watched them fascinated; admitting grudgingly even with his arm thrust through Annette's that — that she — Irene — No! he would not admit it; and he turned his eyes away. He would not see them, and let the old bitterness, the old longing rise up within him! And then Annette turned to him and said: "Those two people, Soames; they know you, I am sure. Who are they?"

Soames nosed sideways.

"What people?"

"There, you see them; just turning away. They know you."

"No," Soames answered; "a mistake, my dear."

"A lovely face! And how she walk! Elle est tres distinguee!"

Soames looked then. Into his life, out of his life she had walked like that swaying and erect, remote, unseizable; ever eluding the contact of his soul! He turned abruptly from that receding vision of the past.

"You'd better attend," he said, "they're coming now!"

But while he stood, grasping her arm, seemingly intent on the head of the procession, he was quivering with the sense of always missing something, with instinctive regret that he had not got them both.

Slow came the music and the march, till, in silence, the long line wound in through the Park gate. He heard Annette whisper, "How sad it is and beautiful!" felt the clutch of her hand as she stood up on tiptoe; and the crowd's emotion gripped him. There it was — the bier of the Queen, coffin of the Age slow passing! And as it went by there came a murmuring groan from all the long line of those who watched, a sound such as Soames had never heard, so unconscious, primitive, deep and wild, that neither he nor any knew whether they had joined in uttering it. Strange sound, indeed! Tribute of an Age to its own death. . . . Ah! Ah!. . . . The hold on life had slipped. That which had seemed eternal was gone! The Queen — God bless her!

It moved on with the bier, that travelling groan, as a fire moves on over grass in a thin line; it kept step, and marched alongside down the dense crowds mile after mile. It was a human sound, and yet inhuman, pushed out by animal subconsciousness, by intimate knowledge of universal death and change. None of us — none of us can hold on for ever!

It left silence for a little — a very little time, till tongues began, eager to retrieve interest in the show. Soames lingered just long enough to gratify Annette, then took her out of the Park to lunch at his father's in Park Lane. . . .

James had spent the morning gazing out of his bedroom window. The last show he would see, last of so many! So she was gone! Well, she was getting an old woman. Swithin and he had seen her crowned — slim slip of a girl, not so old as Imogen! She had got very stout of late. Jolyon and he had seen her married to that German chap, her husband — he had turned out all right before he died, and left her with that son of his. And he remembered the many evenings he and his brothers and their cronies had wagged their heads over their wine and walnuts and that fellow in his salad days. And now he had come to the throne. They said he had steadied down — he didn't know — couldn't tell! He'd make the money fly still, he shouldn't wonder. What a lot of people out there! It didn't seem so very long since he and Swithin stood in the crowd outside Westminster Abbey when she was crowned, and Swithin had taken him to Cremorne afterwards — racketty chap, Swithin; no, it didn't seem much longer ago than Jubilee Year, when he had joined with Roger in renting a balcony in Piccadilly.

Jolyon, Swithin, Roger all gone, and he would be ninety in August! And there was Soames married again to a French girl. The French were a queer lot, but they made good mothers, he had heard. Things changed! They said this German Emperor was here for the funeral, his telegram to old Kruger had been in shocking taste. He should not be surprised if that chap made trouble some day. Change! H'm! Well, they must look after themselves when he was gone: he didn't know where he'd be! And now Emily had asked Dartie to lunch, with Winifred and Imogen, to meet Soames' wife — she was always doing something. And there was Irene living with that fellow Jolyon, they said. He'd marry her now, he supposed.

'My brother Jolyon,' he thought, 'what would he have said to it all?' And somehow the utter impossibility of knowing what his elder brother, once so looked up to, would have said, so worried James that he got up from his chair by the window, and began slowly, feebly to pace the room.

'She was a pretty thing, too,' he thought; 'I was fond of her. Perhaps Soames didn't suit her — I don't know — I can't tell. We never had any trouble with our wives.' Women had changed everything had changed! And now the Queen was dead — well, there it was! A movement in the crowd brought him to a standstill at the window, his nose touching the pane and whitening from the chill of it. They had got her as far as Hyde Park Corner — they were passing now! Why didn't Emily come up here where she could see, instead of fussing about lunch. He missed her at that moment — missed her! Through the bare branches of the plane-trees he could just see the procession, could see the hats coming off the people's heads — a lot of them would catch colds, he shouldn't wonder! A voice behind him said:

"You've got a capital view here, James!"

"There you are!" muttered James; "why didn't you come before? You might have missed it!"

And he was silent, staring with all his might.

"What's the noise?" he asked suddenly.

"There's no noise," returned Emily; "what are you thinking of? — they wouldn't cheer."

"I can hear it."

"Nonsense, James!"

No sound came through those double panes; what James heard was the groaning in his own heart at sight of his Age passing.

"Don't you ever tell me where I'm buried," he said suddenly. "I shan't want to know." And he turned from the window. There she went, the old Queen; she'd had a lot of anxiety — she'd be glad to be out of it, he should think!

Emily took up the hair-brushes.

"There'll be just time to brush your head," she said, "before they come. You must look your best, James."

"Ah!" muttered James; "they say she's pretty."

The meeting with his new daughter-in-law took place in the dining-room. James was seated by the fire when she was brought in. He placed, his hands on the arms of the chair and slowly raised himself. Stooping and immaculate in his frock-coat, thin as a line in Euclid, he received Annette's hand in his; and the anxious eyes of his furrowed face, which had lost its colour now, doubted above her. A little warmth came into them and into his cheeks, refracted from her bloom.

"How are you?" he said. "You've been to see the Queen, I suppose? Did you have a good crossing?"

In this way he greeted her from whom he hoped for a grandson of his name.

Gazing at him, so old, thin, white, and spotless, Annette murmured something in French which James did not understand.

“Yes, yes,” he said, “you want your lunch, I expect. Soames, ring the bell; we won’t wait for that chap Dartie.” But just then they arrived. Dartie had refused to go out of his way to see ‘the old girl.’ With an early cocktail beside him, he had taken a ‘squint’ from the smoking-room of the Iseeum, so that Winifred and Imogen had been obliged to come back from the Park to fetch him thence. His brown eyes rested on Annette with a stare of almost startled satisfaction. The second beauty that fellow Soames had picked up! What women could see in him! Well, she would play him the same trick as the other, no doubt; but in the meantime he was a lucky devil! And he brushed up his moustache, having in nine months of Green Street domesticity regained almost all his flesh and his assurance. Despite the comfortable efforts of Emily, Winifred’s composure, Imogen’s enquiring friendliness, Dartie’s showing-off, and James’ solicitude about her food, it was not, Soames felt, a successful lunch for his bride. He took her away very soon.

“That Monsieur Dartie,” said Annette in the cab, “je n’aime pas ce type-la!”

“No, by George!” said Soames.

“Your sister is veree amiable, and the girl is pretty. Your father is veree old. I think your mother has trouble with him; I should not like to be her.”

Soames nodded at the shrewdness, the clear hard judgment in his young wife; but it disquieted him a little. The thought may have just flashed through him, too: ‘When I’m eighty she’ll be fifty-five, having trouble with me!’

“There’s just one other house of my relations I must take you to,” he said; “you’ll find it funny, but we must get it over; and then we’ll dine and go to the theatre.”

In this way he prepared her for Timothy’s. But Timothy’s was different. They were delighted to see dear Soames after this long long time; and so this was Annette!

“You are so pretty, my dear; almost too young and pretty for dear Soames, aren’t you? But he’s very attentive and careful — such a good hush. . . . ” Aunt Juley checked herself, and placed her lips just under each of Annette’s eyes — she afterwards described them to Francie, who dropped in, as: “Cornflower-blue, so pretty, I quite wanted to kiss them. I must say dear Soames is a perfect connoisseur. In her French way, and not so very French either, I think she’s as pretty — though not so distinguished, not so alluring — as Irene. Because she was alluring, wasn’t she? with that white skin and those dark eyes, and that hair, couleur de — what was it? I always forget.”

“Feuille morte,” Francie prompted.

“Of course, dead leaves — so strange. I remember when I was a girl, before we came to London, we had a foxhound puppy — to ‘walk’ it was called then; it had a tan top to its head and a white chest, and beautiful dark brown eyes, and it was a lady.”

“Yes, auntie,” said Francie, “but I don’t see the connection.”

“Oh!” replied Aunt Juley, rather flustered, “it was so alluring, and her eyes and hair, you know. . . . ” She was silent, as if surprised in some indelicacy. “Feuille morte,” she added suddenly; “Hester — do remember that!”. . . .

Considerable debate took place between the two sisters whether Timothy should or should not be summoned to see Annette.

“Oh, don’t bother!” said Soames.

“But it’s no trouble, only of course Annette’s being French might upset him a little. He was so scared about Fashoda. I think perhaps we had better not run the risk, Hester. It’s nice to have her all to ourselves, isn’t it? And how are you, Soames? Have you quite got over your. . . . ”

Hester interposed hurriedly:

“What do you think of London, Annette?”

Soames, disquieted, awaited the reply. It came, sensible, composed: “Oh! I know London. I have visited before.”

He had never ventured to speak to her on the subject of the restaurant. The French had different notions about gentility, and to shrink from connection with it might seem to her ridiculous; he had waited to be married before mentioning it; and now he wished he hadn’t.

“And what part do you know best?” said Aunt Juley.

“Soho,” said Annette simply.

Soames snapped his jaw.

“Soho?” repeated Aunt Juley; “Soho?”

‘That’ll go round the family,’ thought Soames.

“It’s very French, and interesting,” he said.

“Yes,” murmured Aunt Juley, “your Uncle Roger had some houses there once; he was always having to turn the tenants out, I remember.”

Soames changed the subject to Mapledurham.

“Of course,” said Aunt Juley, “you will be going down there soon to settle in. We are all so looking forward to the time when Annette has a dear little. . . . ”

“Juley!” cried Aunt Hester desperately, “ring tea!”

Soames dared not wait for tea, and took Annette away.

“I shouldn’t mention Soho if I were you,” he said in the cab. “It’s rather a shady part of London; and you’re altogether above that restaurant business now; I mean,” he added, “I want you to know nice people, and the English are fearful snobs.”

Annette’s clear eyes opened; a little smile came on her lips.

“Yes?” she said.

‘H’m!’ thought Soames, ‘that’s meant for me!’ and he looked at her hard. ‘She’s got good business instincts,’ he thought. ‘I must make her grasp it once for all!’

“Look here, Annette! it’s very simple, only it wants understanding. Our professional and leisured classes still think themselves a cut above our business classes, except of course the very rich. It may be stupid, but there it is, you see. It isn’t advisable in England to let people know that you ran a restaurant or kept a shop or were in any kind of trade. It may have been extremely creditable, but it puts a sort of label on you; you don’t have such a good time, or meet such nice people — that’s all.”

“I see,” said Annette; “it is the same in France.”

“Oh!” murmured Soames, at once relieved and taken aback. “Of course, class is everything, really.”

“Yes,” said Annette; “comme vous etes sage.”

‘That’s all right,’ thought Soames, watching her lips, ‘only she’s pretty cynical.’ His knowledge of French was not yet such as to make him grieve that she had not said ‘tu.’ He slipped his arm round her, and murmured with an effort:

“Et vous etes ma belle femme.”

Annette went off into a little fit of laughter.

“Oh, non!” she said. “Oh, non! ne parlez pas Francais, Soames. What is that old lady, your aunt, looking forward to?”

Soames bit his lip. “God knows!” he said; “she’s always saying something;” but he knew better than God.

❦

CHAPTER 11

SUSPENDED ANIMATION

The war dragged on. Nicholas had been heard to say that it would cost three hundred millions if it cost a penny before they'd done with it! The income-tax was seriously threatened. Still, there would be South Africa for their money, once for all. And though the possessive instinct felt badly shaken at three o'clock in the morning, it recovered by breakfast-time with the recollection that one gets nothing in this world without paying for it. So, on the whole, people went about their business much as if there were no war, no concentration camps, no slippery de Wet, no feeling on the Continent, no anything unpleasant. Indeed, the attitude of the nation was typified by Timothy's map, whose animation was suspended — for Timothy no longer moved the flags, and they could not move themselves, not even backwards and forwards as they should have done.

Suspended animation went further; it invaded Forsyte 'Change, and produced a general uncertainty as to what was going to happen next. The announcement in the marriage column of The Times, 'Jolyon Forsyte to Irene, only daughter of the late Professor Heron,' had occasioned doubt whether Irene had been justly described. And yet, on the whole, relief was felt that she had not been entered as 'Irene, late the wife,' or 'the divorced wife,' 'of Soames Forsyte.' Altogether, there had been a kind of sublimity from the first about the way the family had taken that 'affair.' As James had phrased it, 'There it was!' No use to fuss! Nothing to be had out of admitting that it had been a 'nasty jar'— in the phraseology of the day.

But what would happen now that both Soames and Jolyon were married again? That was very intriguing. George was known to have laid Eustace six to four on a little Jolyon before a little Soames. George was so droll! It was rumoured, too, that he and Dartie had a bet as to whether James would attain the age of ninety, though which of them had backed James no one knew.

Early in May, Winifred came round to say that Val had been wounded in the leg by a spent bullet, and was to be discharged. His wife was nursing him. He would have a little limp — nothing to speak of. He wanted his grandfather to buy him a farm out there where he could breed horses. Her father was giving Holly eight hundred a year, so they could be quite comfortable, because his grandfather would give Val five, he had said; but as to the farm, he didn't know — couldn't tell: he didn't want Val to go throwing away his money.

"But you know," said Winifred, "he must do something."

Aunt Hester thought that perhaps his dear grandfather was wise, because if he didn't buy a farm it couldn't turn out badly.

"But Val loves horses," said Winifred. "It'd be such an occupation for him."

Aunt Juley thought that horses were very uncertain, had not Montague found them so?

"Val's different," said Winifred; "he takes after me."

Aunt Juley was sure that dear Val was very clever. "I always remember," she added, "how he gave his bad penny to a beggar. His dear grandfather was so pleased. He thought it showed such presence of mind. I remember his saying that he ought to go into the Navy."

Aunt Hester chimed in: Did not Winifred think that it was much better for the young people to be secure and not run any risk at their age?

"Well," said Winifred, "if they were in London, perhaps; in London it's amusing to do nothing. But out there, of course, he'll simply get bored to death."

Aunt Hester thought that it would be nice for him to work, if he were quite sure not to lose by it. It was not as if they had no money. Timothy, of course, had done so well by retiring. Aunt Juley wanted to know what Montague had said.

Winifred did not tell her, for Montague had merely remarked: "Wait till the old man dies."

At this moment Francie was announced. Her eyes were brimming with a smile.

"Well," she said, "what do you think of it?"

"Of what, dear?"

"In The Times this morning."

"We haven't seen it, we always read it after dinner; Timothy has it till then."

Francie rolled her eyes.

"Do you think you ought to tell us?" said Aunt Juley. "What was it?"

"Irene's had a son at Robin Hill."

Aunt Juley drew in her breath. "But," she said, "they were only married in March!"

"Yes, Auntie; isn't it interesting?"

"Well," said Winifred, "I'm glad. I was sorry for Jolyon losing his boy. It might have been Val."

Aunt Juley seemed to go into a sort of dream. "I wonder," she murmured, "what dear Soames will think? He has so wanted to have a son himself. A little bird has always told me that."

"Well," said Winifred, "he's going to — bar accidents."

Gladness trickled out of Aunt Juley's eyes.

"How delightful!" she said. "When?"

"November."

Such a lucky month! But she did wish it could be sooner. It was a long time for James to wait, at his age!

To wait! They dreaded it for James, but they were used to it themselves. Indeed, it was their great distraction. To wait! For The Times to read; for one or other of their nieces or nephews to come in and cheer them up; for news of Nicholas' health; for that decision of Christopher's about going on the stage; for information concerning the mine of Mrs. MacAnder's nephew; for the doctor to come about Hester's inclination to wake up early in the morning; for books from the library which were always out; for Timothy to have a cold; for a nice quiet warm day, not too hot, when they could take a turn in Kensington Gardens. To wait, one on each side of the hearth in the drawing-room, for the clock between them to strike; their thin, veined, knuckled hands plying knitting-needles and crochet-hooks, their hair ordered to stop — like Canute's waves — from any further advance in colour. To wait in their black silks or satins for the Court to say that Hester might wear her dark green, and Juley her darker maroon. To wait, slowly turning over and over, in their old minds the little joys and sorrows, events and expectancies, of their little family world, as cows chew patient cuds in a familiar field. And this new event was so well worth waiting for. Soames had always been their pet, with his tendency to give them pictures, and his almost weekly visits which they missed so much, and his need for their sympathy evoked by the wreck of his first marriage. This new event — the birth of an heir to Soames — was so important for him, and for his dear father, too, that James might not have to die without some certainty about things. James did so dislike uncertainty; and with Montague, of course, he could not feel really satisfied to leave no grand-children but the young Darties. After all, one's own name did count! And as James' ninetieth birthday neared they wondered what precautions he was taking. He would be the first of the Forsytes to reach that age, and set, as it were, a new standard in holding on to life. That was so important, they felt, at their ages eighty-seven and eighty-five; though they did not want to think of themselves when they had Timothy, who was not yet eighty-two, to think of. There was, of course, a better world. 'In my Father's house are many mansions' was one of Aunt Juley's favourite sayings — it always comforted her, with its suggestion of house property, which had made the fortune of dear Roger. The Bible was, indeed, a great resource, and on very fine Sundays there was church in the morning; and sometimes Juley would steal into Timothy's study when she was sure he was out, and just put an open New Testament casually among the books on his little table — he was a great reader, of course, having been a publisher. But she had noticed that Timothy was always cross at dinner afterwards. And Smither had told her more than once that she had picked books off the floor in doing the room. Still, with all that, they did feel that heaven could not be quite so cosy as the rooms in which they and Timothy had been waiting so long. Aunt Hester, especially, could not bear the thought of the exertion. Any change, or rather the thought of a change — for there never was any — always upset her very much. Aunt Juley, who had more spirit, sometimes thought it would be quite exciting; she had so enjoyed that visit to Brighton the year dear Susan died. But then Brighton one knew was nice, and it was so difficult to tell what heaven would be like, so on the whole she was more than content to wait.

On the morning of James' birthday, August the 5th, they felt extraordinary animation, and little notes passed between them by the hand of Smither while they were having breakfast in their beds. Smither must go round and take their love and little presents and find out how Mr. James was, and whether he had passed a good night with all the excitement. And on the way back would Smither call in at Green Street — it was a little out of her way, but she could take the bus up Bond Street afterwards; it would be a nice little change for her — and ask dear Mrs. Dartie to be sure and look in before she went out of town.

All this Smither did — an undeniable servant trained many years ago under Aunt Ann to a perfection not now procurable. Mr. James, so Mrs. James said, had passed an excellent night, he sent his love; Mrs. James had said he was very funny and had complained that he didn't know what all the fuss was about. Oh! and Mrs. Dartie sent her love, and she would come to tea.

Aunts Juley and Hester, rather hurt that their presents had not received special mention — they forgot every year that James could not bear to receive presents, 'throwing away their money on him,' as he always called it — were 'delighted'; it showed that James was in good spirits, and that was so important for him. And they began to wait for Winifred. She came at four, bringing Imogen, and Maud, just back from school, and 'getting such a pretty girl, too,' so that it was extremely difficult to ask for news about Annette. Aunt Juley, however, summoned courage to enquire whether Winifred had heard anything, and if Soames was anxious.

"Uncle Soames is always anxious, Auntie," interrupted Imogen; "he can't be happy now he's got it."

The words struck familiarly on Aunt Juley's ears. Ah! yes; that funny drawing of George's, which had not been shown them! But what did Imogen mean? That her uncle always wanted more than he could have? It was not at all nice to think like that.

Imogen's voice rose clear and clipped:

"Imagine! Annette's only two years older than me; it must be awful for her, married to Uncle Soames."

Aunt Juley lifted her hands in horror.

"My dear," she said, "you don't know what you're talking about. Your Uncle Soames is a match for anybody. He's a very clever man, and good-looking and wealthy, and most considerate and careful, and not at all old, considering everything."

Imogen, turning her luscious glance from one to the other of the 'old dears,' only smiled.

"I hope," said Aunt Juley quite severely, "that you will marry as good a man."

"I shan't marry a good man, Auntie," murmured Imogen; "they're dull."

"If you go on like this," replied Aunt Juley, still very much upset, "you won't marry anybody. We'd better not pursue the subject;" and turning to Winifred, she said: "How is Montague?"

That evening, while they were waiting for dinner, she murmured:

"I've told Smither to get up half a bottle of the sweet champagne, Hester. I think we ought to drink dear James' health, and — and the health of Soames' wife; only, let's keep that quite secret. I'll Just say like this, 'And you know, Hester!' and then we'll drink. It might upset Timothy."

"It's more likely to upset us," said Aunt Nester. "But we must, I suppose; for such an occasion."

"Yes," said Aunt Juley rapturously, "it is an occasion! Only fancy if he has a dear little boy, to carry the family on! I do feel it so important, now that Irene has had a son. Winifred says George is calling Jolyon 'The Three-Decker,' because of his three families, you know! George is droll. And fancy! Irene is living after all in the house Soames had built for them both. It does seem hard on dear Soames; and he's always been so regular."

That night in bed, excited and a little flushed still by her glass of wine and the secrecy of the second toast, she lay with her prayer-book opened flat, and her eyes fixed on a ceiling yellowed by the light from her reading-lamp. Young things! It was so nice for them all! And she would be so happy if she could see dear Soames happy. But, of course, he must be now, in spite of what Imogen had said. He would have all that he wanted: property, and wife, and children! And he would live to a green old age, like his dear father, and forget all about Irene and that dreadful case. If only she herself could be here to buy his children their first rocking-horse! Smither should choose it for her at the stores, nice and dappled. Ah! how Roger used to rock her until she fell off! Oh dear! that was a long time ago! It was! 'In my Father's house are many mansions —'A little scrattling noise caught her ear —'but no mice!' she thought mechanically. The noise increased. There! it was a mouse! How naughty of Smither to say there wasn't! It would be eating through the wainscot before they knew where they were, and they would have to have the builders in. They were such destructive things! And she lay, with her eyes just moving, following in her mind that little scrattling sound, and waiting for sleep to release her from it.

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Chapter 12

Birth of a Forsyte

Soames walked out of the garden door, crossed the lawn, stood on the path above the river, turned round and walked back to the garden door, without having realised that he had moved. The sound of wheels crunching the drive convinced him that time had passed, and the doctor gone. What, exactly, had he said?

"This is the position, Mr. Forsyte. I can make pretty certain of her life if I operate, but the baby will be born dead. If I don't operate, the baby will most probably be born alive, but it's a great risk for the mother — a great risk. In either case I don't think she can ever have another child. In her state she obviously can't decide for herself, and we can't wait for her mother. It's for you to make the decision, while I'm getting what's necessary. I shall be back within the hour."

The decision! What a decision! No time to get a specialist down! No time for anything!

The sound of wheels died away, but Soames still stood intent; then, suddenly covering his ears, he walked back to the river. To come before its time like this, with no chance to foresee anything, not even to get her mother here! It was for her mother to make that decision, and she couldn't arrive from Paris till to-night! If only he could have understood the doctor's jargon, the medical niceties, so as to be sure he was weighing the chances properly; but they were Greek to him — like a legal problem to a layman. And yet he must decide! He brought his hand away from his brow wet, though the air was chilly. These sounds which came from her room! To go back there would only make it more difficult. He must be calm, clear. On the one hand life, nearly certain, of his young wife, death quite certain, of his child; and — no more children afterwards! On the other, death perhaps of his wife, nearly certain life for the child; and — no more children afterwards! Which to choose?. . . . It had rained this last fortnight — the river was very full, and in the water, collected round the little house-boat moored by his landing-stage, were many leaves from the woods above, brought off by a frost. Leaves fell, lives drifted down — Death! To decide about death! And no one to give him a hand. Life lost was lost for good. Let nothing go that you could keep; for, if it went, you couldn't get it back. It left you bare, like those trees when they lost their leaves; barer and barer until you, too, withered and came down. And, by a queer somersault of thought, he seemed to see not Annette lying up there behind that window-pane on which the sun was shining, but Irene lying in their bedroom in Montpellier Square, as it might conceivably have been her fate to lie, sixteen years ago. Would he have hesitated then? Not a moment! Operate, operate! Make certain of her life! No decision — a mere instinctive cry for help, in spite of his knowledge, even then, that she did not love him! But this! Ah! there was nothing overmastering in his feeling for Annette! Many times these last months, especially since she had been growing frightened, he had wondered. She had a will of her own, was selfish in her French way. And yet — so pretty! What would she wish — to take the risk. 'I know she wants the child,' he thought. 'If it's born dead, and no more chance afterwards — it'll upset her terribly. No more chance! All for nothing! Married life with her for years and years without a child. Nothing to steady her! She's too young. Nothing to look forward to, for her — for me! For me!' He struck his hands against his chest! Why couldn't he think without bringing himself in — get out of himself and see what he ought to do? The thought hurt him, then lost edge, as if it had come in contact with a breastplate. Out of oneself! Impossible! Out into soundless, scentless, touchless, sightless space! The very idea was ghastly, futile! And touching there the bedrock of reality, the bottom of his Forsyte spirit, Soames rested for a moment. When one ceased, all ceased; it might go on, but there'd be nothing in it!

He looked at his watch. In half an hour the doctor would be back. He must decide! If against the operation and she died, how face her mother and the doctor afterwards? How face his own conscience? It was his child that she was having. If for the operation — then he condemned them both to childlessness. And for what else had he married her but to have a lawful heir? And his father — at death's door, waiting for the news! 'It's cruel!' he thought; 'I ought never to have such a thing to settle! It's cruel!' He turned towards the house. Some deep, simple way of deciding! He took out a coin, and put it back. If he spun it, he knew he would not abide by what came up! He went into the dining-room, furthest away from that room whence the sounds issued. The doctor had said there was a chance. In here that chance seemed greater; the river did not flow, nor the leaves fall. A fire was burning. Soames unlocked the tantalus. He hardly ever touched spirits, but now — he poured himself out some whisky and drank it neat, craving a faster flow of blood. 'That fellow Jolyon,' he thought; 'he had children already. He has the woman I really loved; and now a son by her! And I— I'm asked to destroy my only child!

Annette can't die; it's not possible. She's strong!'

He was still standing sullenly at the sideboard when he heard the doctor's carriage, and went out to him. He had to wait for him to come downstairs.

"Well, doctor?"

"The situation's the same. Have you decided?"

"Yes," said Soames; "don't operate!"

"Not? You understand — the risk's great?"

In Soames' set face nothing moved but the lips.

"You said there was a chance?"

"A chance, yes; not much of one."

"You say the baby must be born dead if you do?"

"Yes."

"Do you still think that in any case she can't have another?"

"One can't be absolutely sure, but it's most unlikely."

"She's strong," said Soames; "we'll take the risk."

The doctor looked at him very gravely. "It's on your shoulders," he said; "with my own wife, I couldn't."

Soames' chin jerked up as if someone had hit him.

"Am I of any use up there?" he asked.

"No; keep away."

"I shall be in my picture-gallery, then; you know where."

The doctor nodded, and went upstairs.

Soames continued to stand, listening. 'By this time to-morrow,' he thought, 'I may have her death on my hands.' No! it was unfair — monstrous, to put it that way! Sullenness dropped on him again, and he went up to the gallery. He stood at the window. The wind was in the north; it was cold, clear; very blue sky, heavy ragged white clouds chasing across; the river blue, too, through the screen of goldening trees; the woods all rich with colour, glowing, burnished-an early autumn. If it were his own life, would he be taking that risk? 'But she'd take the risk of losing me,' he thought, 'sooner than lose her child! She doesn't really love me!' What could one expect — a girl and French? The one thing really vital to them both, vital to their marriage and their futures, was a child! 'I've been through a lot for this,' he thought, 'I'll hold on — hold on. There's a chance of keeping both — a chance!' One kept till things were taken — one naturally kept! He began walking round the gallery. He had made one purchase lately which he knew was a fortune in itself, and he halted before it — a girl with dull gold hair which looked like filaments of metal gazing at a little golden monster she was holding in her hand. Even at this tortured moment he could just feel the extraordinary nature of the bargain he had made — admire the quality of the table, the floor, the chair, the girl's figure, the absorbed expression on her face, the dull gold filaments of her hair, the bright gold of the little monster. Collecting pictures; growing richer, richer! What use, if. . . .! He turned his back abruptly on the picture, and went to the window. Some of his doves had flown up from their perches round the dovecot, and were stretching their wings in the wind. In the clear sharp sunlight their whiteness almost flashed. They flew far, making a flung-up hieroglyphic against the sky. Annette fed the doves; it was pretty to see her. They took it out of her hand; they knew she was matter-of-fact. A choking sensation came into his throat. She would not — could nod die! She was too — too sensible; and she was strong, really strong, like her mother, in spite of her fair prettiness.

It was already growing dark when at last he opened the door, and stood listening. Not a sound! A milky twilight crept about the stairway and the landings below. He had turned back when a sound caught his ear. Peering down, he saw a black shape moving, and his heart stood still. What was it? Death? The shape of Death coming from her door? No! only a maid without cap or apron. She came to the foot of his flight of stairs and said breathlessly:

"The doctor wants to see you, sir."

He ran down. She stood flat against the wall to let him pass, and said:

"Oh, Sir! it's over."

"Over?" said Soames, with a sort of menace; "what d'you mean?"

"It's born, sir."

He dashed up the four steps in front of him, and came suddenly on the doctor in the dim passage. The man was wiping his brow.

"Well?" he said; "quick!"

"Both living; it's all right, I think."

Soames stood quite still, covering his eyes.

"I congratulate you," he heard the doctor say; "it was touch and go."

Soames let fall the hand which was covering his face.

"Thanks," he said; "thanks very much. What is it?"

"Daughter — luckily; a son would have killed her — the head."

A daughter!

"The utmost care of both," he hearts the doctor say, "and we shall do. When does the mother come?"

"To-night, between nine and ten, I hope."

"I'll stay till then. Do you want to see them?"

"Not now," said Soames; "before you go. I'll have dinner sent up to you." And he went downstairs.

Relief unspeakable, and yet — a daughter! It seemed to him unfair. To have taken that risk — to have been through this agony — and what agony! — for a daughter! He stood before the blazing fire of wood logs in the hall, touching it with his toe and trying to readjust himself. 'My father!' he thought. A bitter disappointment, no disguising it! One never got all one wanted in this life! And there was no other — at least, if there was, it was no use!

While he was standing there, a telegram was brought him.

"Come up at once, your father sinking fast. — MOTHER."

He read it with a choking sensation. One would have thought he couldn't feel anything after these last hours, but he felt this. Half-past seven, a train from Reading at nine, and madame's train, if she had caught it, came in at eight-forty — he would meet that, and go on. He ordered the carriage, ate some dinner mechanically, and went upstairs. The doctor came out to him.

"They're sleeping."

"I won't go in," said Soames with relief. "My father's dying; I have to — go up. Is it all right?"

The doctor's face expressed a kind of doubting admiration. 'If they were all as unemotional' he might have been saying.

"Yes, I think you may go with an easy mind. You'll be down soon?"

"To-morrow," said Soames. "Here's the address."

The doctor seemed to hover on the verge of sympathy.

"Good-night!" said Soames abruptly, and turned away. He put on his fur coat. Death! It was a chilly business. He smoked a cigarette in the carriage — one of his rare cigarettes. The night was windy and flew on black wings; the carriage lights had to search out the way. His father! That old, old man! A comfortless night — to die!

The London train came in just as he reached the station, and Madame Lamotte, substantial, dark-clothed, very yellow in the lamplight, came towards the exit with a dressing-bag.

"This all you have?" asked Soames.

"But yes; I had not the time. How is my little one?"

"Doing well — both. A girl!"

"A girl! What joy! I had a frightful crossing!"

Her black bulk, solid, unreduced by the frightful crossing, climbed into the brougham.

"And you, mon cher?"

"My father's dying," said Soames between his teeth. "I'm going up. Give my love to Annette."

"Tiens!" murmured Madame Lamotte; "quel malheur!"

Soames took his hat off, and moved towards his train. ‘The French!’ he thought.

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CHAPTER 13

JAMES IS TOLD

A simple cold, caught in the room with double windows, where the air and the people who saw him were filtered, as it were, the room he had not left since the middle of September — and James was in deep waters. A little cold, passing his little strength and flying quickly to his lungs. “He mustn’t catch cold,” the doctor had declared, and he had gone and caught it. When he first felt it in his throat he had said to his nurse — for he had one now —“There, I knew how it would be, airing the room like that!” For a whole day he was highly nervous about himself and went in advance of all precautions and remedies; drawing every breath with extreme care and having his temperature taken every hour. Emily was not alarmed.

But next morning when she went in the nurse whispered: “He won’t have his temperature taken.”

Emily crossed to the side of the bed where he was lying, and said softly, “How do you feel, James?” holding the thermometer to his lips. James looked up at her.

“What’s the good of that?” he murmured huskily; “I don’t want to know.”

Then she was alarmed. He breathed with difficulty, he looked terribly frail, white, with faint red discolorations. She had ‘had trouble’ with him, Goodness knew; but he was James, had been James for nearly fifty years; she couldn’t remember or imagine life without James — James, behind all his fussiness, his pessimism, his crusty shell, deeply affectionate, really kind and generous to them all!

All that day and the next he hardly uttered a word, but there was in his eyes a noticing of everything done for him, a look on his face which told her he was fighting; and she did not lose hope. His very stillness, the way he conserved every little scrap of energy, showed the tenacity with which he was fighting. It touched her deeply; and though her face was composed and comfortable in the sick-room, tears ran down her cheeks when she was out of it.

About tea-time on the third day — she had just changed her dress, keeping her appearance so as not to alarm him, because he noticed everything — she saw a difference. ‘It’s no use; I’m tired,’ was written plainly across that white face, and when she went up to him, he muttered: “Send for Soames.”

“Yes, James,” she said comfortably; “all right — at once.” And she kissed his forehead. A tear dropped there, and as she wiped it off she saw that his eyes looked grateful. Much upset, and without hope now, she sent Soames the telegram.

When he entered out of the black windy night, the big house was still as a grave. Warmson’s broad face looked almost narrow; he took the fur coat with a sort of added care, saying:

“Will you have a glass of wine, sir?”

Soames shook his head, and his eyebrows made enquiry.

Warmson’s lips twitched. “He’s asking for you, sir;” and suddenly he blew his nose. “It’s a long time, sir,” he said, “that I’ve been with Mr. Forsyte — a long time.”

Soames left him folding the coat, and began to mount the stairs. This house, where he had been born and sheltered, had never seemed to him so warm, and rich, and cosy, as during this last pilgrimage to his father’s room. It was not his taste; but in its own substantial, lincrusta way it was the acme of comfort and security. And the night was so dark and windy; the grave so cold and lonely!

He paused outside the door. No sound came from within. He turned the handle softly and was in the room before he was perceived. The light was shaded. His mother and Winifred were sitting on the far side of the bed; the nurse was moving away from the near side where was an empty chair. ‘For me!’ thought Soames. As he moved from the door his mother and sister rose, but he signed with his hand and they sat down again. He went up to the chair and stood looking at his father. James’ breathing was as if strangled; his eyes were closed. And in Soames, looking on his father so worn and white and wasted, listening to his strangled breathing, there rose a passionate vehemence of anger against Nature, cruel, inexorable Nature, kneeling on the chest of that wisp of a body, slowly pressing out the breath, pressing out the life of the being who was dearest to him in the world. His father, of all men, had lived a careful life, moderate, abstemious, and this was his reward — to have life slowly, painfully squeezed out of him! And, without knowing that he spoke, he said: “It’s cruel!"

He saw his mother cover her eyes and Winifred bow her face towards the bed. Women! They put up with things so much better than men. He took a step nearer to his father. For three days James had not been shaved, and his lips and chin were covered with hair, hardly more snowy than his forehead. It softened his face, gave it a queer look already not of this world. His eyes opened. Soames went quite close and bent over. The lips moved.

"Here I am, Father:"

"Um — what — what news? They never tell. . . . " the voice died, and a flood of emotion made Soames' face work so that he could not speak. Tell him? — yes. But what? He made a great effort, got his lips together, and said:

"Good news, dear, good — Annette, a son."

"Ah!" It was the queerest sound, ugly, relieved, pitiful, triumphant — like the noise a baby makes getting what it wants. The eyes closed, and that strangled sound of breathing began again. Soames recoiled to the chair and stonily sat down. The lie he had told, based, as it were, on some deep, temperamental instinct that after death James would not know the truth, had taken away all power of feeling for the moment. His arm brushed against something. It was his father's naked foot. In the struggle to breathe he had pushed it out from under the clothes. Soames took it in his hand, a cold foot, light and thin, white, very cold. What use to put it back, to wrap up that which must be colder soon! He warmed it mechanically with his hand, listening to his father's laboured breathing; while the power of feeling rose again within him. A little sob, quickly smothered, came from Winifred, but his mother sat unmoving with her eyes fixed on James. Soames signed to the nurse.

"Where's the doctor?" he whispered.

"He's been sent for."

"Can't you do anything to ease his breathing?"

"Only an injection; and he can't stand it. The doctor said, while he was fighting. . . . "

"He's not fighting," whispered Soames, "he's being slowly smothered. It's awful."

James stirred uneasily, as if he knew what they were saying. Soames rose and bent over him. James feebly moved his two hands, and Soames took them.

"He wants to be pulled up," whispered the nurse.

Soames pulled. He thought he pulled gently, but a look almost of anger passed over James' face. The nurse plumped the pillows. Soames laid the hands down, and bending over kissed his father's forehead. As he was raising himself again, James' eyes bent on him a look which seemed to come from the very depths of what was left within. 'I'm done, my boy,' it seemed to say, 'take care of them, take care of yourself; take care — I leave it all to you.'

"Yes, Yes," Soames whispered, "yes, yes."

Behind him the nurse did he knew, not what, for his father made a tiny movement of repulsion as if resenting that interference; and almost at once his breathing eased away, became quiet; he lay very still. The strained expression on his face passed, a curious white tranquillity took its place. His eyelids quivered, rested; the whole face rested; at ease. Only by the faint puffing of his lips could they tell that he was breathing. Soames sank back on his chair, and fell to cherishing the foot again. He heard the nurse quietly crying over there by the fire; curious that she, a stranger, should be the only one of them who cried! He heard the quiet lick and flutter of the fire flames. One more old Forsyte going to his long rest — wonderful, they were! — wonderful how he had held on! His mother and Winifred were leaning forward, hanging on the sight of James' lips. But Soames bent sideways over the feet, warming them both; they gave him comfort, colder and colder though they grew. Suddenly he started up; a sound, a dreadful sound such as he had never heard, was coming from his father's lips, as if an outraged heart had broken with a long moan. What a strong heart, to have uttered that farewell! It ceased. Soames looked into the face. No motion; no breath! Dead! He kissed the brow, turned round and went out of the room. He ran upstairs to the bedroom, his old bedroom, still kept for him; flung himself face down on the bed, and broke into sobs which he stilled with the pillow. . . .

A little later he went downstairs and passed into the room. James lay alone, wonderfully calm, free from shadow and anxiety, with the gravity on his ravaged face which underlies great age, the worn fine gravity of old coins.

Soames looked steadily at that face, at the fire, at all the room with windows thrown open to the London night.

"Good-bye!" he whispered, and went out.

Chapter 14

His

He had much to see to, that night and all next day. A telegram at breakfast reassured him about Annette, and he only caught the last train back to Reading, with Emily's kiss on his forehead and in his ears her words:

"I don't know what I should have done without you, my dear boy."

He reached his house at midnight. The weather had changed, was mild again, as though, having finished its work and sent a Forsyte to his last account, it could relax. A second telegram, received at dinner-time, had confirmed the good news of Annette, and, instead of going in, Soames passed down through the garden in the moonlight to his houseboat. He could sleep there quite well. Bitterly tired, he lay down on the sofa in his fur coat and fell asleep. He woke soon after dawn and went on deck. He stood against the rail, looking west where the river swept round in a wide curve under the woods. In Soames, appreciation of natural beauty was curiously like that of his farmer ancestors, a sense of grievance if it wasn't there, sharpened, no doubt, and civilised, by his researches among landscape painting. But dawn has power to fertilise the most matter-of-fact vision, and he was stirred. It was another world from the river he knew, under that remote cool light; a world into which man had not entered, an unreal world, like some strange shore sighted by discovery. Its colour was not the colour of convention, was hardly colour at all; its shapes were brooding yet distinct; its silence stunning; it had no scent. Why it should move him he could not tell, unless it were that he felt so alone in it, bare of all relationship and all possessions. Into such a world his father might be voyaging, for all resemblance it had to the world he had left. And Soames took refuge from it in wondering what painter could have done it justice. The white-grey water was like — like the belly of a fish! Was it possible that this world on which he looked was all private property, except the water — and even that was tapped! No tree, no shrub, not a blade of grass, not a bird or beast, not even a fish that was not owned. And once on a time all this was jungle and marsh and water, and weird creatures roamed and sported without human cognizance to give them names; rotting luxuriance had rioted where those tall, carefully planted woods came down to the water, and marsh-misted reeds on that far side had covered all the pasture. Well! they had got it under, kennelled it all up, labelled it, and stowed it in lawyers' offices. And a good thing too! But once in a way, as now, the ghost of the past came out to haunt and brood and whisper to any human who chanced to be awake: 'Out of my unowned loneliness you all came, into it some day you will all return.'

And Soames, who felt the chill and the eeriness of that world-new to him and so very old: the world, unowned, visiting the scene of its past — went down and made himself tea on a spirit-lamp. When he had drunk it, he took out writing materials and wrote two paragraphs:

"On the 20th instant at his residence in Park Lane, James Forsyte, in his ninety-first year. Funeral at noon on the 24th at Highgate. No flowers by request."

"On the 20th instant at The Shelter; Mapledurham, Annette, wife of Soames Forsyte, of a daughter." And underneath on the blottingpaper he traced the word "son."

It was eight o'clock in an ordinary autumn world when he went across to the house. Bushes across the river stood round and bright-coloured out of a milky haze; the wood-smoke went up blue and straight; and his doves cooed, preening their feathers in the sunlight.

He stole up to his dressing-room, bathed, shaved, put on fresh linen and dark clothes.

Madame Lamotte was beginning her breakfast when he went down.

She looked at his clothes, said, "Don't tell me!" and pressed his hand. "Annette is prettee well. But the doctor say she can never have no more children. You knew that?" Soames nodded. "It's a pity. Mais la petite est adorable. Du cafe?"

Soames got away from her as soon as he could. She offended him — solid, matter-of-fact, quick, clear — French. He could not bear her vowels, her 'r's'; he resented the way she had looked at him, as if it were his fault that Annette could never bear him a son! His fault! He even resented her cheap adoration of the daughter he had not yet seen.

Curious how he jibbed away from sight of his wife and child!

One would have thought he must have rushed up at the first moment. On the contrary, he had a sort of physical shrinking from it — fastidious possessor that he was. He was afraid of what Annette was thinking of him, author of her agonies, afraid of the look of the baby, afraid of showing his disappointment with the present and — the future.

He spent an hour walking up and down the drawing-room before he could screw his courage up to mount the stairs and knock on the door of their room.

Madame Lamotte opened it.

“Ah! At last you come! Elle vous attend!” She passed him, and Soames went in with his noiseless step, his jaw firmly set, his eyes furtive.

Annette was very pale and very pretty lying there. The baby was hidden away somewhere; he could not see it. He went up to the bed, and with sudden emotion bent and kissed her forehead.

“Here you are then, Soames,” she said. “I am not so bad now. But I suffered terribly, terribly. I am glad I cannot have any more. Oh! how I suffered!”

Soames stood silent, stroking her hand; words of endearment, of sympathy, absolutely would not come; the thought passed through him: ‘An English girl wouldn’t have said that!’ At this moment he knew with certainty that he would never be near to her in spirit and in truth, nor she to him. He had collected her — that was all! And Jolyon’s words came rushing into his mind: “I should imagine you will be glad to have your neck out of chancery.” Well, he had got it out! Had he got it in again?

“We must feed you up,” he said, “you’ll soon be strong.”

“Don’t you want to see baby, Soames? She is asleep.”

“Of course,” said Soames, “very much.”

He passed round the foot of the bed to the other side and stood staring. For the first moment what he saw was much what he had expected to see — a baby. But as he stared and the baby breathed and made little sleeping movements with its tiny features, it seemed to assume an individual shape, grew to be like a picture, a thing he would know again; not repulsive, strangely bud-like and touching. It had dark hair. He touched it with his finger, he wanted to see its eyes. They opened, they were dark — whether blue or brown he could not tell. The eyes winked, stared, they had a sort of sleepy depth in them. And suddenly his heart felt queer, warm, as if elated.

“Ma petite fleur!” Annette said softly.

“Fleur,” repeated Soames: “Fleur! we’ll call her that.”

The sense of triumph and renewed possession swelled within him.

By God! this — this thing was his! By God! this — this thing was his!

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AWAKENING

Through the massive skylight illuminating the hall at Robin Hill, the July sunlight at five o'clock fell just where the broad stairway turned; and in that radiant streak little Jon Forsyte stood, blue-linen-suited. His hair was shining, and his eyes, from beneath a frown, for he was considering how to go downstairs, this last of innumerable times, before the car brought his father and mother home. Four at a time, and five at the bottom? Stale! Down the banisters? But in which fashion? On his face, feet foremost? Very stale. On his stomach, sideways? Paltry! On his back, with his arms stretched down on both sides? Forbidden! Or on his face, head foremost, in a manner unknown as yet to any but himself? Such was the cause of the frown on the illuminated face of little Jon. . . .

In that Summer of 1909 the simple souls who even then desired to simplify the English tongue, had, of course, no cognizance of little Jon, or they would have claimed him for a disciple. But one can be too simple in this life, for his real name was Jolyon, and his living father and dead half-brother had usurped of old the other shortenings, Jo and Jolly. As a fact little Jon had done his best to conform to convention and spell himself first Jhon, then John; not till his father had explained the sheer necessity, had he spelled his name Jon.

Up till now that father had possessed what was left of his heart by the groom, Bob, who played the concertina, and his nurse "Da," who wore the violet dress on Sundays, and enjoyed the name of Spraggins in that private life lived at odd moments even by domestic servants. His mother had only appeared to him, as it were in dreams, smelling delicious, smoothing his forehead just before he fell asleep, and sometimes docking his hair, of a golden brown colour. When he cut his head open against the nursery fender she was there to be bled over; and when he had nightmare she would sit on his bed and cuddle his head against her neck. She was precious but remote, because "Da" was so near, and there is hardly room for more than one woman at a time in a man's heart. With his father, too, of course, he had special bonds of union; for little Jon also meant to be a painter when he grew up — with the one small difference, that his father painted pictures, and little Jon intended to paint ceilings and walls, standing on a board between two step-ladders, in a dirty-white apron, and a lovely smell of whitewash. His father also took him riding in Richmond Park, on his pony, Mouse, so-called because it was so-coloured.

Little Jon had been born with a silver spoon in a mouth which was rather curly and large. He had never heard his father or his mother speak in an angry voice, either to each other, himself, or anybody else; the groom, Bob, Cook, Jane, Bella and the other servants, even "Da," who alone restrained him in his courses, had special voices when they talked to him. He was therefore of opinion that the world was a place of perfect and perpetual gentility and freedom.

A child of 1901, he had come to consciousness when his country, just over that bad attack of scarlet fever, the Boer War, was preparing for the Liberal revival of 1906. Coercion was unpopular, parents had exalted notions of giving their offspring a good time. They spoiled their rods, spared their children, and anticipated the results with enthusiasm. In choosing, moreover, for his father an amiable man of fifty-two, who had already lost an only son, and for his mother a woman of thirty-eight, whose first and only child he was, little Jon had done well and wisely. What had saved him from becoming a cross between a lap dog and a little prig, had been his father's adoration of his mother, for even little Jon could see that she was not merely just his mother, and that he played second fiddle to her in his father's heart: What he played in his mother's heart he knew not yet. As for "Auntie" June, his half-sister (but so old that she had grown out of the relationship) she loved him, of course, but was too sudden. His devoted "Da," too, had a Spartan touch. His bath was cold and his knees were bare; he was not encouraged to be sorry for himself. As to the vexed question of his education, little Jon shared the theory of those who considered that children should not be forced. He rather liked the Mademoiselle who came for two hours every morning to teach him her language, together with history, geography and sums; nor were the piano lessons which his mother gave him disagreeable, for she had a way of luring him from tune to tune, never making him practise one which did not give him pleasure, so that he remained eager to convert ten thumbs into eight fingers. Under his father he learned to draw pleasure-pigs and other animals. He was not a highly educated little boy. Yet, on the whole, the silver spoon stayed in his mouth without spoiling it, though "Da" sometimes said that other children would do him a "world of good."

It was a disillusionment, then, when at the age of nearly seven she held him down on his back, because he wanted to do something of which she did not approve. This first interference with the free individualism of a Forsyte drove him almost frantic. There was something appalling in the utter helplessness of that position, and the uncertainty as to whether it would ever come to an end. Suppose she never let him get up any more! He suffered torture at the top of his voice for fifty seconds. Worse than anything was his perception that "Da" had taken all that time to realise the agony of fear he was enduring. Thus, dreadfully, was revealed to him the lack of imagination in the human being.

When he was let up he remained convinced that "Da" had done a dreadful thing. Though he did not wish to bear witness against her, he had been compelled, by fear of repetition, to seek his mother and say: "Mum, don't let 'Da' hold me down on my back again."

His mother, her hands held up over her head, and in them two plaits of hair —"couleur de feuille morte," as little Jon had not yet learned to call it — had looked at him with eyes like little bits of his brown velvet tunic, and answered:

"No, darling, I won't."

She, being in the nature of a goddess, little Jon was satisfied; especially when, from under the dining-table at breakfast, where he happened to be waiting for a mushroom, he had overheard her say to his father:

"Then, will you tell 'Da,' dear, or shall I? She's so devoted to him"; and his father's answer:

"Well, she mustn't show it that way. I know exactly what it feels like to be held down on one's back. No Forsyte can stand it for a minute."

Conscious that they did not know him to be under the table, little Jon was visited by the quite new feeling of embarrassment, and stayed where he was, ravaged by desire for the mushroom.

Such had been his first dip into the dark abysses of existence. Nothing much had been revealed to him after that, till one day, having gone down to the cow-house for his drink of milk fresh from the cow, after Garratt had finished milking, he had seen Clover's calf, dead. Inconsolable, and followed by an upset Garratt, he had sought "Da"; but suddenly aware that she was not the person he wanted, had rushed away to find his father, and had run into the arms of his mother.

"Clover's calf's dead! Oh! Oh! It looked so soft!"

His mother's clasp, and her:

"Yes, darling, there, there!" had stayed his sobbing. But if Clover's calf could die, anything could — not only bees, flies, beetles and chickens — and look soft like that! This was appalling — and soon forgotten!

The next thing had been to sit on a bumble bee, a poignant experience, which his mother had understood much better than "Da"; and nothing of vital importance had happened after that till the year turned; when, following a day of utter wretchedness, he had enjoyed a disease composed of little spots, bed, honey in a spoon, and many Tangerine oranges. It was then that the world had flowered. To "Auntie" June he owed that flowering, for no sooner was he a little lame duck than she came rushing down from London, bringing with her the books which had nurtured her own Berserker spirit, born in the noted year of 1869. Aged, and of many colours, they were stored with the most formidable happenings. Of these she read to little Jon, till he was allowed to read to himself; whereupon she whisked back to London and left them with him in a heap. Those books cooked his fancy, till he thought and dreamed of nothing but midshipmen and dhows, pirates, rafts, sandal-wood traders, iron horses, sharks, battles, Tartars, Red Indians, balloons, North Poles and other extravagant delights. The moment he was suffered to get up, he rigged his bed fore and aft, and set out from it in a narrow bath across green seas of carpet, to a rock, which he climbed by means of its mahogany drawer knobs, to sweep the horizon with his drinking tumbler screwed to his eye, in search of rescuing sails. He made a daily raft out of the towel stand, the tea tray, and his pillows. He saved the juice from his French plums, bottled it in an empty medicine bottle, and provisioned the raft with the rum that it became; also with pemmican made out of little saved-up bits of chicken sat on and dried at the fire; and with lime juice against scurvy, extracted from the peel of his oranges and a little economised juice. He made a North Pole one morning from the whole of his bedclothes except the bolster, and reached it in a birch-bark canoe (in private life the fender), after a terrible encounter with a polar bear fashioned from the bolster and four skittles dressed up in "Da's" nightgown. After that, his father, seeking to steady his imagination, brought him Ivanboe, Bevis, a book about King Arthur, and Tom Brown's Schooldays. He read the first, and for three days built, defended and stormed Front de Boeuf's castle, taking every part in the piece except those of Rebecca and Rowena; with piercing cries of: "En avant, de Bracy!" and similar utterances. After reading the book about King Arthur he became almost exclusively Sir Lamorac de Galis, because, though there was very little about him, he preferred his name to that of any other knight; and he rode his old rocking-horse to death, armed with a long bamboo. Bevis he found tame; besides, it required woods and animals, of which he had none in his nursery, except his two cats, Fitz and Puck Forsyte, who permitted no liberties. For Tom Brown he was as yet too young. There was relief in the house when, after the fourth week, he was permitted to go down and out.

The month being March the trees were exceptionally like the masts of ships, and for little Jon that was a wonderful Spring, extremely hard on his knees, suits, and the patience of "Da," who had the washing and reparation of his clothes. Every morning the moment his breakfast was over, he could be viewed by his mother and father, whose windows looked out that way, coming from the study, crossing the terrace, climbing the old oak tree, his face resolute and his hair bright. He began the day thus because there was not time to go far afield before his lessons. The old tree's variety never staled; it had mainmast, foremast, top-gallant mast, and he could always come down by the halyards — or ropes of the swing. After his lessons, completed by eleven, he would go to the kitchen for a thin piece of cheese, a biscuit and two French plums — provision enough for a jolly-boat at least — and eat it in some imaginative way; then, armed to the teeth with gun, pistols, and sword, he would begin the serious climbing of the morning, encountering by the way innumerable slavers, Indians, pirates, leopards, and bears. He was seldom seen at that hour of the day without a cutlass in his teeth (like Dick Needham) amid the rapid explosion of copper caps. And many were the gardeners he brought down with yellow peas shot out of his little gun. He lived a life of the most violent action.

"Jon," said his father to his mother, under the oak tree, "is terrible. I'm afraid he's going to turn out a sailor, or something hopeless. Do you see any sign of his appreciating beauty?"

"Not the faintest."

"Well, thank heaven he's no turn for wheels or engines! I can bear anything but that. But I wish he'd take more interest in Nature."

"He's imaginative, Jolyon."

"Yes, in a sanguinary way. Does he love anyone just now?"

"No; only everyone. There never was anyone born more loving or more lovable than Jon."

"Being your boy, Irene."

At this moment little Jon, lying along a branch high above them, brought them down with two peas; but that fragment of talk lodged, thick, in his small gizzard. Loving, lovable, imaginative, sanguinary!

The leaves also were thick by now, and it was time for his birthday, which, occurring every year on the twelfth of May, was always memorable for his chosen dinner of sweetbread, mushrooms, macaroons, and ginger beer.

Between that eighth birthday, however, and the afternoon when he stood in the July radiance at the turning of the stairway, several important things had happened.

"Da," worn out by washing his knees, or moved by that mysterious instinct which forces even nurses to desert their nurslings, left the very day after his birthday in floods of tears "to be married"— of all things —"to a man." Little Jon, from whom it had been kept, was inconsolable for an afternoon. It ought not to have been kept from him! Two large boxes of soldiers and some artillery, together with The Young Buglers, which had been among his birthday presents, cooperated with his grief in a sort of conversion, and instead of seeking adventures in person and risking his own life, he began to play imaginative games, in which he risked the lives of countless tin soldiers, marbles, stones and beans. Of these forms of "chair a canon" he made collections, and, using them alternately, fought the Peninsular, the Seven Years, the Thirty Years, and other wars, about which he had been reading of late in a big History of Europe which had been his grandfather's. He altered them to suit his genius, and fought them all over the floor in his day nursery, so that nobody could come in, for fearing of disturbing Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, or treading on an army of Austrians. Because of the sound of the word he was passionately addicted to the Austrians, and finding there were so few battles in which they were successful he had to invent them in his games. His favourite generals were Prince Eugene, the Archduke Charles and Wallenstein. Tilly and Mack ("music-hall turns" he heard his father call them one day, whatever that might mean) one really could not love very much, Austrian though they were. For euphonic reasons, too, he doted on Turenne.

This phase, which caused his parents anxiety, because it kept him indoors when he ought to have been out, lasted through May and half of June, till his father killed it by bringing home to him Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. When he read those books something happened in him, and he went out of doors again in passionate quest of a river. There being none on the premises at Robin Hill, he had to make one out of the pond, which fortunately had water lilies, dragonflies, gnats, bullrushes, and three small willow trees. On this pond, after his father and Garratt had ascertained by sounding that it had a reliable bottom and was nowhere more than two feet deep, he was allowed a little collapsible canoe, in which he spent hours and hours paddling, and lying down out of sight of Indian Joe and other enemies. On the shore of the pond, too, he built himself a wigwam about four feet square, of old biscuit tins, roofed in by boughs. In this he would make little fires, and cook the birds he had not shot with his gun, hunting in the coppice and fields, or the fish he did not catch in the pond because there were none. This occupied the rest of June and that July, when his father and mother were away in Ireland. He led a lonely life of "make believe" during those five weeks of summer weather, with gun, wigwam, water and canoe; and, however hard his active little brain tried to keep the sense of beauty away, she did creep in on him for a second now and then, perching on the wing of a dragon-fly, glistening on the water lilies, or brushing his eyes with her blue as he Jay on his back in ambush.

"Auntie" June, who had been left in charge, had a "grown-up" in the house, with a cough and a large piece of putty which he was making into a face; so she hardly ever came down to see him in the pond. Once, however, she brought with her two other "grown-ups." Little Jon, who happened to have painted his naked self bright blue and yellow in stripes out of his father's water-colour box, and put some duck's feathers in his hair, saw them coming, and — ambushed himself among the willows. As he had foreseen, they came at once to his wigwam and knelt down to look inside, so that with a blood-curdling yell he was able to take the scalps of "Auntie" June and the woman "grown-up" in an almost complete manner before they kissed him. The names of the two grown-ups were "Auntie" Holly and "Uncle" Val, who had a brown face and a little limp, and laughed at him terribly. He took a fancy to "Auntie" Holly, who seemed to be a sister too; but they both went away the same afternoon and he did not see them again. Three days before his father and mother were to come home "Auntie" June also went off in a great hurry, taking the "grown-up" who coughed and his piece of putty; and Mademoiselle said: "Poor man, he was veree ill. I forbid you to go into his room, Jon." Little Jon, who rarely did things merely because he was told not to, refrained from going, though he was bored and lonely. In truth the day of the pond was past, and he was filled to the brim of his soul with restlessness and the want of something — not a tree, not a gun — something soft. Those last two days had seemed months in spite of Cast Up by the Sea, wherein he was reading about Mother Lee and her terrible wrecking bonfire. He had gone up and down the stairs perhaps a hundred times in those two days, and often from the day nursery, where he slept now, had stolen into his mother's room, looked at everything, without touching, and on into the dressing-room; and standing on one leg beside the bath, like Slingsby, had whispered:

"Ho, ho, ho! Dog my cats!" mysteriously, to bring luck. Then, stealing back, he had opened his mother's wardrobe, and taken a long sniff which seemed to bring him nearer to — he didn't know what.

He had done this just before he stood in the streak of sunlight, debating in which of the several ways he should slide down the banisters. They all seemed silly, and in a sudden languor he began descending the steps one by one. During that descent he could remember his father quite distinctly — the short grey beard, the deep eyes twinkling, the furrow between them, the funny smile, the thin figure which always seemed so tall to little Jon; but his mother he couldn't see. All that represented her was something swaying with two dark eyes looking back at him; and the scent of her wardrobe.

Bella was in the hall, drawing aside the big curtains, and opening the front door. Little Jon said, wheedling,

"Bella!"

"Yes, Master Jon."

"Do let's have tea under the oak tree when they come; I know they'd like it best."

"You mean you'd like it best."

Little Jon considered.

"No, they would, to please me."

Bella smiled. "Very well, I'll take it out if you'll stay quiet here and not get into mischief before they come."

Little Jon sat down on the bottom step, and nodded. Bella came close, and looked him over.

"Get up!" she said.

Little Jon got up. She scrutinized him behind; he was not green, and his knees seemed clean.

"All right!" she said. "My! Aren't you brown? Give me a kiss!"

And little Jon received a peck on his hair.

"What jam?" he asked. "I'm so tired of waiting."

"Gooseberry and strawberry."

Num! They were his favourites!

When she was gone he sat still for quite a minute. It was quiet in the big hall open to its East end so that he could see one of his trees, a brig sailing very slowly across the upper lawn. In the outer hall shadows were slanting from the pillars. Little Jon got up, jumped one of them, and walked round the clump of iris plants which filled the pool of grey-white marble in the centre. The flowers were pretty, but only smelled a very little. He stood in the open doorway and looked out. Suppose! — suppose they didn't come! He had waited so long that he felt he could not bear that, and his attention slid at once from such finality to the dust motes in the bluish sunlight coming in: Thrusting his hand up, he tried to catch some. Bella ought to have dusted that piece of air! But perhaps they weren't dust — only what sunlight was made of, and he looked to see whether the sunlight out of doors was the same. It was not. He had said he would stay quiet in the hall, but he simply couldn't any more; and crossing the gravel of the drive he lay down on the grass beyond. Pulling six daisies he named them carefully, Sir Lamorac, Sir Tristram, Sir Lancelot, Sir Palimedes, Sir Bors, Sir Gawain, and fought them in couples till only Sir Lamorac, whom he had selected for a specially stout stalk, had his head on, and even he, after three encounters, looked worn and waggly. A beetle was moving slowly in the grass, which almost wanted cutting. Every blade was a small tree, round whose trunk the beetle had to glide. Little Jon stretched out Sir Lamorac, feet foremost, and stirred the creature up. It scuttled painfully. Little Jon laughed, lost interest, and sighed. His heart felt empty. He turned over and lay on his back. There was a scent of honey from the lime trees in flower, and in the sky the blue was beautiful, with a few white clouds which looked and perhaps tasted like lemon ice. He could hear Bob playing: "Way down upon de Suwannee ribber" on his concertina, and it made him nice and sad. He turned over again and put his ear to the ground — Indians could hear things coming ever so far — but he could hear nothing — only the concertina! And almost instantly he did hear a grinding sound, a faint toot. Yes! it was a car — coming — coming! Up he jumped. Should he wait in the porch, or rush upstairs, and as they came in, shout: "Look!" and slide slowly down the banisters, head foremost? Should he? The car turned in at the drive. It was too late! And he only waited, jumping up and down in his excitement. The car came quickly, whirred, and stopped. His father got out, exactly like life. He bent down and little Jon bobbed up — they bumped. His father said,

"Bless us! Well, old man, you are brown!" Just as he would; and the sense of expectation — of something wanted — bubbled unextinguished in little Jon. Then, with a long, shy look he saw his mother, in a blue dress, with a blue motor scarf over her cap and hair, smiling. He jumped as high as ever he could, twined his legs behind her back, and hugged. He heard her gasp, and felt her hugging back. His eyes, very dark blue just then, looked into hers, very dark brown, till her lips closed on his eyebrow, and, squeezing with all his might, he heard her creak and laugh, and say:

"You are strong, Jon!"

He slid down at that, and rushed into the hall, dragging her by the hand.

While he was eating his jam beneath the oak tree, he noticed things about his mother that he had never seemed to see before, her cheeks for instance were creamy, there were silver threads in her dark goldy hair, her throat had no knob in it like Bella's, and she went in and out softly. He noticed, too, some little lines running away from the corners of her eyes, and a nice darkness under them. She was ever so beautiful, more beautiful than "Da" or Mademoiselle, or "Auntie" June or even "Auntie" Holly, to whom he had taken a fancy; even more beautiful than Bella, who had pink cheeks and came out too suddenly in places. This new beautifulness of his mother had a kind of particular importance, and he ate less than he had expected to.

When tea was over his father wanted him to walk round the gardens. He had a long conversation with his father about things in general, avoiding his private life — Sir Lamorac, the Austrians, and the emptiness he had felt these last three days, now so suddenly filled up. His father told him of a place called Glensofantrim, where he and his mother had been; and of the little people who came out of the ground there when it was very quiet. Little Jon came to a halt, with his heels apart.

"Do you really believe they do, Daddy?" "No, Jon, but I thought you might."

"Why?"

"You're younger than I; and they're fairies." Little Jon squared the dimple in his chin.

"I don't believe in fairies. I never see any." "Ha!" said his father.

"Does Mum?"

His father smiled his funny smile.

"No; she only sees Pan."

"What's Pan?"

"The Goaty God who skips about in wild and beautiful places."

"Was he in Glensofantrim?"

"Mum said so."

Little Jon took his heels up, and led on.

"Did you see him?"

"No; I only saw Venus Anadyomene."

Little Jon reflected; Venus was in his book about the Greeks and Trojans. Then Anna was her Christian and Dyomene her surname?

But it appeared, on inquiry, that it was one word, which meant rising from the foam.

"Did she rise from the foam in Glensofantrim?"

"Yes; every day."

"What is she like, Daddy?"

"Like Mum."

"Oh! Then she must be . . . " but he stopped at that, rushed at a wall, scrambled up, and promptly scrambled down again. The discovery that his mother was beautiful was one which he felt must absolutely be kept to himself. His father's cigar, however, took so long to smoke, that at last he was compelled to say:

"I want to see what Mum's brought home. Do you mind, Daddy?"

He pitched the motive low, to absolve him from unmanliness, and was a little disconcerted when his father looked at him right through, heaved an important sigh, and answered:

"All right, old man, you go and love her."

He went, with a pretence of slowness, and then rushed, to make up. He entered her bedroom from his own, the door being open. She was still kneeling before a trunk, and he stood close to her, quite still.

She knelt up straight, and said:

"Well, Jon?"

"I thought I'd just come and see."

Having given and received another hug, he mounted the window-seat, and tucking his legs up under him watched her unpack. He derived a pleasure from the operation such as he had not yet known, partly because she was taking out things which looked suspicious, and partly because he liked to look at her. She moved differently from anybody else, especially from Bella; she was certainly the refinedest-looking person he had ever seen. She finished the trunk at last, and knelt down in front of him.

"Have you missed us, Jon?"

Little Jon nodded, and having thus admitted his feelings, continued to nod.

"But you had 'Auntie' June?"

"Oh! she had a man with a cough."

His mother's face changed, and looked almost angry. He added hastily:

"He was a poor man, Mum; he coughed awfully; I— I liked him."

His mother put her hands behind his waist.

"You like everybody, Jon?"

Little Jon considered.

"Up to a point," he said: "Auntie June took me to church one Sunday."

"To church? Oh!"

“She wanted to see how it would affect me.” “And did it?”

“Yes. I came over all funny, so she took me home again very quick. I wasn’t sick after all. I went to bed and had hot brandy and water, and read The Boys of Beechwood. It was scrumptious.”

His mother bit her lip.

“When was that?”

“Oh! about — a long time ago — I wanted her to take me again, but she wouldn’t. You and Daddy never go to church, do you?”

“No, we don’t.”

“Why don’t you?”

His mother smiled.

“Well, dear, we both of us went when we were little. Perhaps we went when we were too little.”

“I see,” said little Jon, “it’s dangerous.”

“You shall judge for yourself about all those things as you grow up.”

Little Jon replied in a calculating manner:

“I don’t want to grow up, much. I don’t want to go to school.” A sudden overwhelming desire to say something more, to say what he really felt, turned him red. “I— I want to stay with you, and be your lover, Mum.”

Then with an instinct to improve the situation, he added quickly “I don’t want to go to bed to-night, either. I’m simply tired of going to bed, every night.”

“Have you had any more nightmares?”

“Only about one. May I leave the door open into your room to-night, Mum?”

“Yes, just a little.” Little Jon heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

“What did you see in Glensofantrim?”

“Nothing but beauty, darling.”

“What exactly is beauty?”

“What exactly is — Oh! Jon, that’s a poser.”

“Can I see it, for instance?” His mother got up, and sat beside him. “You do, every day. The sky is beautiful, the stars, and moonlit nights, and then the birds, the flowers, the trees — they’re all beautiful. Look out of the window — there’s beauty for you, Jon.”

“Oh! yes, that’s the view. Is that all?”

“All? no. The sea is wonderfully beautiful, and the waves, with their foam flying back.”

“Did you rise from it every day, Mum?”

His mother smiled. “Well, we bathed.”

Little Jon suddenly reached out and caught her neck in his hands.

“I know,” he said mysteriously, “you’re it, really, and all the rest is make-believe.”

She sighed, laughed, said: “Oh! Jon!”

Little Jon said critically:

“Do you think Bella beautiful, for instance? I hardly do.”

“Bella is young; that’s something.”

“But you look younger, Mum. If you bump against Bella she hurts.”

“I don’t believe ‘Da’ was beautiful, when I come to think of it; and Mademoiselle’s almost ugly.”

“Mademoiselle has a very nice face.” “Oh! yes; nice. I love your little rays, Mum.”

“Rays?”

Little Jon put his finger to the outer corner of her eye.

“Oh! Those? But they’re a sign of age.”

“They come when you smile.”

"But they usen't to."

"Oh! well, I like them. Do you love me, Mum?"

"I do — I do love you, darling."

"Ever so?"

"Ever so!"

"More than I thought you did?"

"Much — much more."

"Well, so do I; so that makes it even."

Conscious that he had never in his life so given himself away, he felt a sudden reaction to the manliness of Sir Lamorac, Dick Needham, Huck Finn, and other heroes.

"Shall I show you a thing or two?" he said; and slipping out of her arms, he stood on his head. Then, fired by her obvious admiration, he mounted the bed, and threw himself head foremost from his feet on to his back, without touching anything with his hands. He did this several times.

That evening, having inspected what they had brought, he stayed up to dinner, sitting between them at the little round table they used when they were alone. He was extremely excited. His mother wore a French-grey dress, with creamy lace made out of little scriggly roses, round her neck, which was browner than the lace. He kept looking at her, till at last his father's funny smile made him suddenly attentive to his slice of pineapple. It was later than he had ever stayed up, when he went to bed. His mother went up with him, and he undressed very slowly so as to keep her there. When at last he had nothing on but his pyjamas, he said:

"Promise you won't go while I say my prayers!"

"I promise."

Kneeling down and plunging his face into the bed, little Jon hurried up, under his breath, opening one eye now and then, to see her standing perfectly still with a smile on her face. "Our Father"— so went his last prayer, "which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Mum, thy Kingdom Mum — on Earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily Mum and forgive us our trespasses on earth as it is in heaven and trespass against us, for thine is the evil the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amum! Look out!" He sprang, and for a long minute remained in her arms. Once in bed, he continued to hold her hand.

"You won't shut the door any more than that, will you? Are you going to be long, Mum?"

"I must go down and play to Daddy."

"Oh! well, I shall hear you."

"I hope not; you must go to sleep."

"I can sleep any night."

"Well, this is just a night like any other."

"Oh! no — it's extra special."

"On extra special nights one always sleeps soundest."

"But if I go to sleep, Mum, I shan't hear you come up."

"Well, when I do, I'll come in and give you a kiss, then if you're awake you'll know, and if you're not you'll still know you've had one."

Little Jon sighed, "All right!" he said: "I suppose I must put up with that. Mum?"

"Yes?"

"What was her name that Daddy believes in? Venus Anna Diomedes?"

"Oh! my angel! Anadyomene."

"Yes! but I like my name for you much better."

"What is yours, Jon?"

Little Jon answered shyly:

"Guinevere! it's out of the Round Table — I've only just thought of it, only of course her hair was down."

His mother's eyes, looking past him, seemed to float.

"You won't forget to come, Mum?"

"Not if you'll go to sleep."

"That's a bargain, then." And little Jon screwed up his eyes.

He felt her lips on his forehead, heard her footsteps; opened his eyes to see her gliding through the doorway, and, sighing, screwed them up again.

Then Time began.

For some ten minutes of it he tried loyally to sleep, counting a great number of thistles in a row, "Da's" old recipe for bringing slumber. He seemed to have been hours counting. It must, he thought, be nearly time for her to come up now. He threw the bedclothes back. "I'm hot!" he said, and his voice sounded funny in the darkness, like someone else's. Why didn't she come? He sat up. He must look! He got out of bed, went to the window and pulled the curtain a slice aside. It wasn't dark, but he couldn't tell whether because of daylight or the moon, which was very big. It had a funny, wicked face, as if laughing at him, and he did not want to look at it. Then, remembering that his mother had said moonlit nights were beautiful, he continued to stare out in a general way. The trees threw thick shadows, the lawn looked like spilt milk, and a long, long way he could see; oh! very far; right over the world, and it all looked different and swimmy. There was a lovely smell, too, in his open window.

'I wish I had a dove like Noah!' he thought.

"The moony moon was round and bright, It shone and shone and made it light."

After that rhyme, which came into his head all at once, he became conscious of music, very soft-lovely! Mum playing! He bethought himself of a macaroon he had, laid up in his chest of drawers, and, getting it, came back to the window. He leaned out, now munching, now holding his jaws to hear the music better. "Da" used to say that angels played on harps in heaven; but it wasn't half so lovely as Mum playing in the moony night, with him eating a macaroon. A cockchafer buzzed by, a moth flew in his face, the music stopped, and little Jon drew his head in. She must be coming! He didn't want to be found awake. He got back into bed and pulled the clothes nearly over his head; but he had left a streak of moonlight coming in. It fell across the floor, near the foot of the bed, and he watched it moving ever so slowly towards him, as if it were alive. The music began again, but he could only just hear it now; sleepy music, pretty — sleepy — music — sleepy — slee. . . . .

And time slipped by, the music rose, fell, ceased; the moonbeam crept towards his face. Little Jon turned in his sleep till he lay on his back, with one brown fist still grasping the bedclothes. The corners of his eyes twitched — he had begun to dream. He dreamed he was drinking milk out of a pan that was the moon, opposite a great black cat which watched him with a funny smile like his father's. He heard it whisper: "Don't drink too much!" It was the cat's milk, of course, and he put out his hand amicably to stroke the creature; but it was no longer there; the pan had become a bed, in which he was lying, and when he tried to get out he couldn't find the edge; he couldn't find it — he — he — couldn't get out! It was dreadful!

He whimpered in his sleep. The bed had begun to go round too; it was outside him and inside him; going round and round, and getting fiery, and Mother Lee out of Cast up by the Sea was stirring it! Oh! so horrible she looked! Faster and faster! — till he and the bed and Mother Lee and the moon and the cat were all one wheel going round and round and up and up — awful — awful — awful!

He shrieked.

A voice saying: "Darling, darling!" got through the wheel, and he awoke, standing on his bed, with his eyes wide open.

There was his mother, with her hair like Guinevere's, and, clutching her, he buried his face in it.

"Oh! oh!"

"It's all right, treasure. You're awake now. There! There! It's nothing!"

But little Jon continued to say: "Oh! oh!"

Her voice went on, velvety in his ear:

"It was the moonlight, sweetheart, coming on your face."

Little Jon burbled into her nightgown

"You said it was beautiful. Oh!"

"Not to sleep in, Jon. Who let it in? Did you draw the curtains?"

"I wanted to see the time; I— I looked out, I— I heard you playing, Mum; I— I ate my macaroon." But he was growing slowly comforted; and the instinct to excuse his fear revived within him.

"Mother Lee went round in me and got all fiery," he mumbled.

"Well, Jon, what can you expect if you eat macaroons after you've gone to bed?"

"Only one, Mum; it made the music ever so more beautiful. I was waiting for you — I nearly thought it was to-morrow."

"My ducky, it's only just eleven now."

Little Jon was silent, rubbing his nose on her neck.

"Mum, is Daddy in your room?"

"Not to-night."

"Can I come?"

"If you wish, my precious."

Half himself again, little Jon drew back.

"You look different, Mum; ever so younger."

"It's my hair, darling."

Little Jon laid hold of it, thick, dark gold, with a few silver threads.

"I like it," he said: "I like you best of all like this."

Taking her hand, he had begun dragging her towards the door. He shut it as they passed, with a sigh of relief.

"Which side of the bed do you like, Mum?"

"The left side."

"All right."

Wasting no time, giving her no chance to change her mind, little Jon got into the bed, which seemed much softer than his own. He heaved another sigh, screwed his head into the pillow and lay examining the battle of chariots and swords and spears which always went on outside blankets, where the little hairs stood up against the light.

"It wasn't anything, really, was it?" he said.

From before her glass his mother answered:

"Nothing but the moon and your imagination heated up. You mustn't get so excited, Jon."

But, still not quite in possession of his nerves, little Jon answered boastfully:

"I wasn't afraid, really, of course!" And again he lay watching the spears and chariots. It all seemed very long.

"Oh! Mum, do hurry up!"

"Darling, I have to plait my hair."

"Oh! not to-night. You'll only have to unplait it again to-morrow. I'm sleepy now; if you don't come, I shan't be sleepy soon."

His mother stood up white and flowey before the winged mirror: he could see three of her, with her neck turned and her hair bright under the light, and her dark eyes smiling. It was unnecessary, and he said:

"Do come, Mum; I'm waiting."

"Very well, my love, I'll come."

Little Jon closed his eyes. Everything was turning out most satisfactory, only she must hurry up! He felt the bed shake, she was getting in. And, still with his eyes closed, he said sleepily: "It's nice, isn't it?"

He heard her voice say something, felt her lips touching his nose, and, snuggling up beside her who lay awake and loved him with her thoughts, he fell into the dreamless sleep, which rounded off his past.

TO-LET
PART I

I

ENCOUNTER

Soames Forsyte emerged from the Knightsbridge Hotel, where he was staying, in the afternoon of the 12th of May, 1920, with the intention of visiting a collection of pictures in a Gallery off Cork Street, and looking into the Future. He walked. Since the War he never took a cab if he could help it. Their drivers were, in his view, an uncivil lot, though, now that the War was over and supply beginning to exceed demand again, getting more civil in accordance with the custom of human nature. Still, he had not forgiven them, deeply identifying them with gloomy memories and, now dimly, like all members of their class, with revolution. The considerable anxiety he had passed through during the War, and the more considerable anxiety he had since undergone in the Peace, had produced psychological consequences in a tenacious nature. He had, mentally, so frequently experienced ruin, that he had ceased to believe in its material probability. Paying away four thousand a year in income and super-tax, one could not very well be worse off! A fortune of a quarter of a million, encumbered only by a wife and one daughter, and very diversely invested, afforded substantial guarantee even against that "wildcat notion"— a levy on capital. And as to confiscation of war profits, he was entirely in favor of it, for he had none, and "serve the beggars right!" The price of pictures, moreover, had, if anything, gone up, and he had done better with his collection since the War began than ever before. Air-raids, also, had acted beneficially on a spirit congenitally cautious, and hardened a character already dogged. To be in danger of being entirely dispersed inclined one to be less apprehensive of the more partial dispersions involved in levies and taxation, while the habit of condemning the impudence of the Germans had led naturally to condemning that of Labor, if not openly at least in the sanctuary of his soul.

He walked. There was, moreover, time to spare, for Fleur was to meet him at the Gallery at four o'clock, and it was as yet but half past two. It was good for him to walk — his liver was a little constricted and his nerves rather on edge. His wife was always out when she was in Town, and his daughter WOULD flibberty-gibbet all over the place like most young women since the War. Still, he must be thankful that she had been too young to do anything in that War itself. Not, of course, that he had not supported the War from its inception, with all his soul, but between that and supporting it with the bodies of his wife and daughter, there had been a gap fixed by something old-fashioned within him which abhorred emotional extravagance. He had, for instance, strongly objected to Annette, so attractive, and in 1914 only thirty-five, going to her native France, her "chere patrie" as, under the stimulus of war, she had begun to call it, to nurse her "braves poilus," forsooth! Ruining her health and her looks! As if she were really a nurse! He had put a stopper on it. Let her do needlework for them at home, or knit! She had not gone, therefore, and had never been quite the same woman since. A bad tendency of hers to mock at him, not openly, but in continual little ways, had grown. As for Fleur, the War had resolved the vexed problem whether or not she should go to school. She was better away from her mother in her war mood, from the chance of air-raids, and the impetus to do extravagant things; so he had placed her in a seminary as far West as had seemed to him compatible with excellence, and had missed her horribly. Fleur! He had never regretted the somewhat outlandish name by which at her birth he had decided so suddenly to call her — marked concession though it had been to the French. Fleur! A pretty name — a pretty child! But restless — too restless; and wilful! Knowing her power too over her father! Soames often reflected on the mistake it was to dote on his daughter. To get old and dote! Sixty-five! He was getting on; but he didn't feel it, for, fortunately perhaps, considering Annette's youth and good looks, his second marriage had turned out a cool affair. He had known but one real passion in his life — for that first wife of his — Irene. Yes, and that fellow, his Cousin Jolyon, who had gone off with her, was looking very shaky, they said. No wonder, at seventy-two, after twenty years of a third marriage!

Soames paused a moment in his march to lean over the railings of the Row. A suitable spot for reminiscence, half-way between that house in Park Lane which had seen his birth and his parents' deaths, and the little house in Montpellier Square where thirty-five years ago he had enjoyed his first edition of matrimony. Now, after twenty years of his second edition, that old tragedy seemed to him like a previous existence — which had ended when Fleur was born in place of the son he had hoped for. For many years he had ceased regretting, even vaguely, the son who had not been born; Fleur filled the bill in his heart. After all, she bore his name; and he was not looking forward at all to the time when she would change it. Indeed, if he ever thought of such a calamity, it was seasoned by the vague feeling that he could make her rich enough to purchase perhaps and extinguish the name of the fellow who married her — why not, since, as it seemed, women were equal to men nowadays? And Soames, secretly convinced that they were not, passed his curved hand over his face vigorously, till it reached the comfort of his chin. Thanks to abstemious habits, he had not grown fat and flabby; his nose was pale and thin, his grey moustache close-clipped, his eyesight unimpaired. A slight stoop closened and corrected the expansion given to his face by the heightening of his forehead in the recession of his grey hair. Little change had Time wrought in the "warmest" of the young Forsytes, as the last of the old Forsytes — Timothy — now in his hundred and first year, would have phrased it.

The shade from the plane-trees fell on his neat Homburg hat; he had given up top hats — it was no use attracting attention to wealth in days like these. Plane-trees! His thoughts travelled sharply to Madrid — the Easter before the War, when, having to make up his mind about that Goya picture, he had taken a voyage of discovery to study the painter on his spot. The fellow had impressed him — great range, real genius! Highly as the chap ranked, he would rank even higher before they had finished with him. The second Goya craze would be greater even than the first; oh, yes! And he had bought. On that visit he had — as never before — commissioned a copy of a fresco painting called "La Vendimia," wherein was the figure of a girl with an arm akimbo, who had reminded him of his daughter. He had it now in the Gallery at Mapledurham, and rather poor it was — you couldn't copy Goya. He would still look at it, however, if his daughter were not there, for the sake of something irresistibly reminiscent in the light, erect balance of the figure, the width between the arching eyebrows, the eager dreaming of the dark eyes. Curious that Fleur should have dark eyes, when his own were grey — no pure Forsyte had brown eyes — and her mother's blue! But of course her grandmother Lamotte's eyes were dark as treacle!

He began to walk on again towards Hyde Park Corner. No greater change in all England than in the Row! Born almost within hail of it, he could remember it from 1860 on. Brought there as a child between the crinolines to stare at tight-trousered dandies in whiskers, riding with a cavalry seat; to watch the doffing of curly-brimmed and white top hats; the leisurely air of it all, and the little bow-legged man in a long red waistcoat who used to come among the fashion with dogs on several strings, and try to sell one to his mother: King Charles spaniels, Italian greyhounds, affectionate to her crinoline — you never saw them now. You saw no quality of any sort, indeed, just working people sitting in dull rows with nothing to stare at but a few young bouncing females in pot hats, riding astride, or desultory Colonials charging up and down on dismal-looking hacks; with, here and there, little girls on ponies, or old gentlemen jogging their livers, or an orderly trying a great galumphing cavalry horse; no thoroughbreds, no grooms, no bowing, no scraping, no gossip — nothing; only the trees the same — the trees indifferent to the generations and declensions of mankind. A democratic England — dishevelled, hurried, noisy, and seemingly without an apex. And that something fastidious in the soul of Soames turned over within him. Gone for ever, the close borough of rank and polish! Wealth there was — oh, yes! wealth — he himself was a richer man than his father had ever been; but manners, flavour, quality, all gone, engulfed in one vast, ugly, shoulder-rubbing, petrol-smelling Cheerio. Little half-beaten pockets of gentility and caste lurking here and there, dispersed and chetif, as Annette would say; but nothing ever again firm and coherent to look up to. And into this new hurly-burly of bad manners and loose morals his daughter — flower of his life — was flung! And when those Labour chaps got power — if they ever did — the worst was yet to come!

He passed out under the archway, at last no longer — thank goodness! — disfigured by the gun-grey of its search-light. 'They'd better put a search-light on to where they're all going,' he thought, 'and light up their precious democracy!' And he directed his steps along the Club fronts of Piccadilly. George Forsyte, of course, would be sitting in the bay window of the Iseeum. The chap was so big now that he was there nearly all his time, like some immovable, sardonic, humorous eye noting the decline of men and things. And Soames hurried, ever constitutionally uneasy beneath his cousin's glance. George, who, as he had heard, had written a letter signed "Patriot" in the middle of the War, complaining of the Government's hysteria in docking the oats of race-horses. Yes, there he was, tall, ponderous, neat, clean-shaven, with his smooth hair, hardly thinned, smelling, no doubt, of the best hair-wash, and a pink paper in his hand. Well, he didn't change! And for perhaps the first time in his life Soames felt a kind of sympathy tapping in his waistcoat for that sardonic kinsman. With his weight, his perfectly parted hair, and bull-like gaze, he was a guarantee that the old order would take some shifting yet. He saw George move the pink paper as if inviting him to ascend — the chap must want to ask something about his property. It was still under Soames's control; for in the adoption of a sleeping partnership at that painful period twenty years back when he had divorced Irene, Soames had found himself almost insensibly retaining control of all purely Forsyte affairs.

Hesitating for just a moment, he nodded and went in. Since the death of his brother-inlaw Montague Dartie, in Paris, which no one had quite known what to make of, except that it was certainly not suicide — the Iseeum Club had seemed more respectable to Soames. George, too, he knew, had sown the last of his wild oats, and was committed definitely to the joys of the table, eating only of the very best so as to keep his weight down, and owning, as he said, "just one or two old screws to give me an interest in life." He joined his cousin, therefore, in the bay window without the embarrassing sense of indiscretion he had been used to feel up there. George put out a well-kept hand.

"Haven't seen you since the War," he said. "How's your wife?"

"Thanks," said Soames coldly, "well enough."

Some hidden jest curved, for a moment, George's fleshy face, and gloated from his eye.

"That Belgian chap, Profond," he said, "is a member here now. He's a rum customer."

"Quite!" muttered Soames. "What did you want to see me about?"

"Old Timothy; he might go off the hooks at any moment. I suppose he's made his Will."

"Yes."

"Well, you or somebody ought to give him a look up — last of the old lot; he's a hundred, you know. They say he's like a mummy. Where are you goin' to put him? He ought to have a pyramid by rights."

Soames shook his head. "Highgate, the family vault."

"Well, I suppose the old girls would miss him, if he was anywhere else. They say he still takes an interest in food. He might last on, you know. Don't we GET anything for the old Forsytes? Ten of them — average age eighty-eight — I worked it out. That ought to be equal to triplets."

"Is that all?" said Soames. "I must be getting on."

'You unsociable devil,' George's eyes seemed to answer.

"Yes, that's all: Look him up in his mausoleum — the old chap might want to prophesy." The grin died on the rich curves of his face, and he added: "Haven't you attorneys invented a way yet of dodging this damned income tax? It hits the fixed inherited income like the very deuce. I used to have two thousand five hundred a year; now I've got a beggarly fifteen hundred, and the price of living doubled."

"Ah!" murmured Soames, "the turf's in danger."

Over George's face moved a gleam of sardonic self-defence.

"Well," he said, "they brought me up to do nothing, and here I am in the sere and yellow, getting poorer every day. These Labour chaps mean to have the lot before they've done. What are you going to do for a living when it comes? I shall work a six-hour day teaching politicians how to see a joke. Take my tip, Soames; go into Parliament, make sure of your four hundred — and employ me."

And, as Soames retired, he resumed his seat in the bay window.

Soames moved along Piccadilly deep in reflections excited by his cousin's words. He himself had always been a worker and a saver, George always a drone and a spender; and yet, if confiscation once began, it was he — the worker and the saver — who would be looted! That was the negation of all virtue, the overturning of all Forsyte principles. Could civilisation be built on any other? He did not think so. Well, they wouldn't confiscate his pictures, for they wouldn't know their worth. But what would they be worth, if these maniacs once began to milk capital? A drug on the market. 'I don't care about myself,' he thought; 'I could live on five hundred a year, and never know the difference, at my age.' But Fleur! This fortune, so wisely invested, these treasures so carefully chosen and amassed, were all for her. And if it should turn out that he couldn't give or leave them to her — well, life had no meaning, and what was the use of going in to look at this crazy, futuristic stuff with the view of seeing whether it had any future?

Arriving at the Gallery off Cork Street, however, he paid his shilling, picked up a catalogue, and entered. Some ten persons were prowling round. Soames took steps and came on what looked to him like a lamp-post bent by collision with a motor omnibus. It was advanced some three paces from the wall, and was described in his catalogue as "Jupiter." He examined it with curiosity, having recently turned some of his attention to sculpture. ‘If that’s Jupiter,’ he thought, ‘I wonder what Juno’s like.’ And suddenly he saw her, opposite. She appeared to him like nothing so much as a pump with two handles, lightly clad in snow. He was still gazing at her, when two of the prowlers halted on his left. “Epatant!” he heard one say.

“Jargon!” growled Soames to himself.

The other’s boyish voice replied:

“Missed it, old bean; he’s pulling your leg. When Jove and Juno created he them, he was saying: ‘I’ll see how much these fools will swallow.’ And they’ve lapped up the lot.”

“You young duffer! Vospovitch is an innovator. Don’t you see that he’s brought satire into sculpture? The future of plastic art, of music, painting, and even architecture, has set in satiric. It was bound to. People are tired — the bottom’s tumbled out of sentiment.”

“Well, I’m quite equal to taking a little interest in beauty. I was through the War. You’ve dropped your handkerchief, sir.”

Soames saw a handkerchief held out in front of him. He took it with some natural suspicion, and approached it to his nose. It had the right scent — of distant Eau de Cologne — and his initials in a corner. Slightly reassured, he raised his eyes to the young man’s face. It had rather fawn-like ears, a laughing mouth, with half a toothbrush growing out of it on each side, and small lively eyes, above a normally dressed appearance.

“Thank you,” he said; and moved by a sort of irritation, added: “Glad to hear you like beauty; that’s rare, nowadays.”

“I dote on it,” said the young man; “but you and I are the last of the old guard, sir.”

Soames smiled.

“If you really care for pictures,” he said, “here’s my card. I can show you some quite good ones any Sunday, if you’re down the river and care to look in.”

“Awfully nice of you, sir. I’ll drop in like a bird. My name’s Mont-Michael.” And he took off his hat.

Soames, already regretting his impulse, raised his own slightly in response, with a downward look at the young man’s companion, who had a purple tie, dreadful little slug-like whiskers, and a scornful look — as if he were a poet!

It was the first indiscretion he had committed for so long that he went and sat down in an alcove. What had possessed him to give his card to a rackety young fellow, who went about with a thing like that? And Fleur, always at the back of his thoughts, started out like a filagree figure from a clock when the hour strikes. On the screen opposite the alcove was a large canvas with a great many square tomato-colored blobs on it, and nothing else, so far as Soames could see from where he sat. He looked at his catalogue: “No. 32 —‘The Future Town’— Paul Post.” ‘I suppose that’s satiric too,’ he thought. ‘What a thing!’ But his second impulse was more cautious. It did not do to condemn hurriedly. There had been those stripey, streaky creations of Monet’s, which had turned out such trumps; and then the stippled school; and Gauguin. Why, even since the Post-Impressionists there had been one or two painters not to be sneezed at. During the thirty-eight years of his connoisseur’s life, indeed, he had marked so many “movements,” seen the tides of taste and technique so ebb and flow, that there was really no telling anything except that there was money to be made out of every change of fashion. This too might quite well be a case where one must subdue primordial instinct, or lose the market. He got up and stood before the picture, trying hard to see it with the eyes of other people. Above the tomato blobs was what he took to be a sunset, till some one passing said: “He’s got the airplanes wonderfully, don’t you think!” Below the tomato blobs was a band of white with vertical black stripes, to which he could assign no meaning whatever, till some one else came by, murmuring: “What expression he gets with his foreground!” Expression? Of what? Soames went back to his seat. The thing was “rich,” as his father would have said, and he wouldn’t give a damn for it. Expression! Ah! they were all Expressionists now, he had heard, on the Continent. So it was coming here too, was it? He remembered the first wave of influenza in 1887 — or 8 — hatched in China, so they said. He wondered where this — this Expressionism — had been hatched. The thing was a regular disease!

He had become conscious of a woman and a youth standing between him and the “Future Town.” Their backs were turned; but very suddenly Soames put his catalogue before his face, and drawing his hat forward, gazed through the slit between. No mistaking that back, elegant as ever though the hair above had gone grey. Irene! His divorced wife — Irene! And this, no doubt, was her son — by that fellow Jolyon Forsyte — their boy, six months older than his own girl! And mumbling over in his mind the bitter days of his divorce, he rose to get out of sight, but quickly sat down again. She had turned her head to speak to her boy; her profile was still so youthful that it made her grey hair seem powdery, as if fancy-dressed; and her lips were smiling as Soames, first possessor of them, had never seen them smile. Grudgingly he admitted her still beautiful, and in figure almost as young as ever. And how that boy smiled back at her! Emotion squeezed Soames' heart. The sight infringed his sense of justice. He grudged her that boy's smile — it went beyond what Fleur gave him, and it was undeserved. Their son might have been his son; Fleur might have been her daughter, if she had kept straight! He lowered his catalogue. If she saw him, all the better! A reminder of her conduct in the presence of her son, who probably knew nothing of it, would be a salutary touch from the finger of that Nemesis which surely must soon or late visit her! Then, half-conscious that such a thought was extravagant for a Forsyte of his age, Soames took out his watch. Past four! Fleur was late. She had gone to his niece Imogen Cardigan's, and there they would keep her smoking cigarettes and gossiping, and that. He heard the boy laugh, and say eagerly: "I say, Mum, is this one of Auntie June's lame ducks?"

"Paul Post — I believe it is, darling."

The word produced a little shock in Soames; he had never heard her use it. And then she saw him. His eyes must have had in them something of George Forsyte's sardonic look; for her gloved hand crisped the folds of her frock, her eyebrows rose, her face went stony. She moved on.

"It IS a caution," said the boy, catching her arm again.

Soames stared after them. That boy was good-looking, with a Forsyte chin, and eyes deep-grey, deep in; but with something sunny, like a glass of old sherry spilled over him; his smile perhaps, his hair. Better than they deserved — those two! They passed from his view into the next room, and Soames continued to regard the Future Town, but saw it not. A little smile snarled up his lips. He was despising the vehemence of his own feelings after all these years. Ghosts! And yet as one grew old — was there anything but what was ghost-like left? Yes, there was Fleur! He fixed his eyes on the entrance. She was due; but she would keep him waiting, of course! And suddenly he became aware of a sort of human breeze — a short, slight form clad in a sea-green djibbah with a metal belt and a fillet binding unruly red-gold hair all streaked with grey. She was talking to the Gallery attendants, and something familiar riveted his gaze — in her eyes, her chin, her hair, her spirit — something which suggested a thin Skye terrier just before its dinner. Surely June Forsyte! His cousin June — and coming straight to his recess! She sat down beside him, deep in thought, took out a tablet, and made a pencil note. Soames sat unmoving. A confounded thing cousinship! "Disgusting!" he heard her murmur; then, as if resenting the presence of an overhearing stranger, she looked at him. The worst had happened.

"Soames!"

Soames turned his head a very little.

"How are YOU?" he said. "Haven't seen you for twenty years."

"No. Whatever made YOU come here?"

"My sins," said Soames. "What stuff!"

"Stuff? Oh, yes — of course; it hasn't ARRIVED yet."

"It never will," said Soames; "it must be making a dead loss."

"Of course it is."

"How d'you know?"

"It's my Gallery."

Soames sniffed from sheer surprise.

"Yours? What on earth makes you run a show like this?"

"_I_ don't treat Art as if it were grocery."

Soames pointed to the Future Town. "Look at that! Who's going to live in a town like that, or with it on his walls?"

June contemplated the picture for a moment. "It's a vision," she said.

"The deuce!"

There was silence, then June rose. 'Crazy-looking creature!' he thought.

"Well," he said, "you'll find your young stepbrother here with a woman I used to know. If you take my advice, you'll close this exhibition."

June looked back at him. "Oh! You Forsyte!" she said, and moved on. About her light, fly-away figure, passing so suddenly away, was a look of dangerous decisions. Forsyte! Of course, he was a Forsyte! And so was she! But from the time when, as a mere girl, she brought Bosinney into his life to wreck it, he had never hit it off with June — and never would! And here she was, unmarried to this day, owning a Gallery! . . . And suddenly it came to Soames how little he knew now of his own family. The old aunts at Timothy's had been dead so many years; there was no clearing-house for news. What had they all done in the War? Young Roger's boy had been wounded, St. John Hayman's second son killed; young Nicholas' eldest had got an O. B. E., or whatever they gave them. They had all joined up somehow, he believed. That boy of Jolyon's and Irene's, he supposed, had been too young; his own generation, of course, too old, though Giles Hayman had driven a car for the Red Cross — and Jesse Hayman been a special constable — those "Dromios" had always been of a sporting type! As for himself, he had given a motor ambulance, read the papers till he was sick of them, passed through much anxiety, invested in War Bonds, bought no clothes, lost seven pounds in weight; he didn't know what more he could have done at his age. Indeed, it struck him that he and his family had taken this war very differently to that affair with the Boers, which had been supposed to tax all the resources of the Empire. In that old war, of course, his nephew Val Dartie had been wounded, that fellow Jolyon's first son had died of enteric, "the Dromios" had gone out on horses, and June had been a nurse; but all that had seemed in the nature of a portent, while in THIS war everybody had done "their bit," so far as he could make out, as a matter of course. It seemed to show the growth of something or other — or perhaps the decline of something else. Had the Forsytes become less individual, or more Imperial, or less provincial? Or was it simply that one hated Germans? . . . Why didn't Fleur come, so that he could get away? He saw those three return together from the other room and pass back along the far side of the screen. The boy was standing before the Juno now. And, suddenly, on the other side of her, Soames saw — his daughter with eyebrows raised, as well they might be. He could see her eyes glint sideways at the boy, and the boy look back at her. Then Irene slipped her hand through his arm, and drew him on. Soames saw him glancing round, and Fleur looking after them as the three went out.

A voice said cheerfully: "Bit thick, isn't it, sir?"

The young man who had handed him his handkerchief was again passing. Soames nodded.

"I don't know what we're coming to."

"Oh! That's all right, sir," answered the young man cheerfully; "they don't either."

Fleur's voice said, precisely as if he had been keeping her waiting:

"Hallo, Father! There you are!"

The young man, snatching off his hat, passed on.

"Well," said Soames, looking her up and down, "you're a punctual sort of young woman!"

This treasured possession of his life was of medium height and color, with short, dark-chestnut hair; her wide-apart brown eyes were set in whites so clear that they glinted when they moved, and yet in repose were almost dreamy under very white, black-lashed lids, held over them in a sort of suspense. She had a charming profile, and nothing of her father in her face save a decided chin. Aware that his expression was softening as he looked at her, Soames frowned to preserve the unemotionalism proper to a Forsyte. He knew she was only too inclined to take advantage of his weakness.

Slipping her hand under his arm, she said:

"Who was that?"

"He picked up my handkerchief. We talked about the pictures."

"You're not going to buy THAT, Father?"

"No," said Soames grimly; "nor that Juno you've been looking at."

Fleur dragged at his arm. "Oh! Let's go! It's a ghastly show."

In the doorway they passed the young man called Mont and his partner. But Soames had hung out a board marked "Trespassers will be prosecuted," and he barely acknowledged the young fellow's salute.

"Well," he said in the street, "whom did you meet at Imogen's?"

"Aunt Winifred, and that Monsieur Profond."

"Oh!" muttered Soames; "that chap! What does your aunt see in him?"

"I don't know. He looks pretty deep — mother says she likes him."

Soames grunted.

“Cousin Val and his wife were there, too.”

“What!” said Soames. “I thought they were back in South Africa.”

“Oh, no! They’ve sold their farm. Cousin Val is going to train race-horses on the Sussex Downs. They’ve got a jolly old manor-house; they asked me down there.”

Soames coughed: the news was distasteful to him. “What’s his wife like now?”

“Very quiet, but nice, I think.”

Soames coughed again. “He’s a rackety chap, your cousin Val.”

“Oh! no, Father; they’re awfully devoted. I promised to go — Saturday to Wednesday next.”

“Training race-horses!” said Soames. It was bad enough, but not the reason for his distaste. Why the deuce couldn’t his nephew have stayed out in South Africa? His own divorce had been bad enough, without his nephew’s marriage to the daughter of the co-respondent; a half-sister too of June, and of that boy whom Fleur had just been looking at from under the pump-handle. If he didn’t look out, Fleur would come to know all about that old disgrace! Unpleasant things! They were round him this afternoon like a swarm of bees!

“I don’t like it!” he said.

“I want to see the race-horses,” murmured Fleur; “and they’ve promised I shall ride. Cousin Val can’t walk much, you know; but he can ride perfectly. He’s going to show me their gallops.”

“Racing!” said Soames. “It’s a pity the War didn’t knock that on the head. He’s taking after his father, I’m afraid.”

“I don’t know anything about his father.”

“No,” said Soames grimly. “He took an interest in horses and broke his neck in Paris, walking down-stairs. Good riddance for your aunt.” He frowned, recollecting the inquiry into those stairs which he had attended in Paris six years ago, because Montague Dartie could not attend it himself — perfectly normal stairs in a house where they played baccarat. Either his winnings or the way he had celebrated them had gone to his brother-inlaw’s head. The French procedure had been very loose; he had had a lot of trouble with it.

A sound from Fleur distracted his attention. “Look! The people who were in the Gallery with us.”

“What people?” muttered Soames, who knew perfectly well.

“I think that woman’s beautiful.”

“Come into this pastry-cook’s,” said Soames abruptly, and tightening his grip on her arm, he turned into a confectioner’s. It was — for him — a surprising thing to do, and he said rather anxiously: “What will you have?”

“Oh! I don’t want anything. I had a cocktail and a tremendous lunch.”

“We MUST have something now we’re here,” muttered Soames, keeping hold of her arm.

“Two teas,” he said; “and two of those nougat things.”

But no sooner was his body seated than his soul sprang up. Those three — those three were coming in! He heard Irene say something to her boy, and his answer:

“Oh! no, Mum; this place is all right. My stunt.” And the three sat down.

At that moment, most awkward of his existence, crowded with ghosts and shadows from his past, in presence of the only two women he had ever loved — his divorced wife and his daughter by her successor — Soames was not so much afraid of THEM as of his cousin June. She might make a scene — she might introduce those two children — she was capable of anything. He bit too hastily at the nougat, and it stuck to his plate. Working at it with his finger, he glanced at Fleur. She was masticating dreamily, but her eyes were on the boy. The Forsyte in him said: “Think, feel, and you’re done for!” And he wiggled his finger desperately. Plate! Did Jolyon wear a plate? Did that woman wear a plate? Time had been when he had seen her wearing nothing! That was something, anyway, which had never been stolen from him. And she knew it, though she might sit there calm and self-possessed, as if she had never been his wife. An acid humor stirred in his Forsyte blood; a subtle pain divided by hair’s-breadth from pleasure. If only June did not suddenly bring her hornets about his ears! The boy was talking.

“Of course, Auntie June,”— so he called his half-sister “Auntie,” did he? — well, she must be fifty, if she was a day! —“it’s jolly good of you to encourage them. Only — hang it all!” Soames stole a glance. Irene’s startled eyes were bent watchfully on her boy. She — she had these devotions — for Bosinney — for that boy’s father — for this boy! He touched

Fleur’s arm, and said:

“Well, have you had enough?”

“One more, Father, please.”

She would be sick! He went to the counter to pay. When he turned round again he saw Fleur standing near the door, holding a handkerchief which the boy had evidently just handed to her.

“F.F.,” he heard her say. “Fleur Forsyte — it’s mine all right. Thank you ever so.”

Good God! She had caught the trick from what he’d told her in the Gallery — monkey!

“Forsyte? Why — that’s my name too. Perhaps we’re cousins.”

“Really! We must be. There aren’t any others. I live at Mapledurham; where do you?”

“Robin Hill.”

Question and answer had been so rapid that all was over before he could lift a finger. He saw Irene’s face alive with startled feeling, gave the slightest shake of his head, and slipped his arm through Fleur’s.

“Come along!” he said.

She did not move.

“Didn’t you hear, Father? Isn’t it queer — our name’s the same. Are we cousins?”

“What’s that?” he said. “Forsyte? Distant, perhaps.”

“My name’s Jolyon, sir. Jon, for short.”

“Oh! Ah!” said Soames. “Yes. Distant. How are you? Very good of you. Good-bye!”

He moved on.

“Thanks awfully,” Fleur was saying. “Au revoir!”

“Au revoir!” he heard the boy reply.

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II

Fine Fleur Forsyte

Emerging from the "pastry-cook's," Soames' first impulse was to vent his nerves by saying to his daughter: "Dropping your handkerchief!" to which her reply might well be: "I picked that up from you!" His second impulse therefore was to let sleeping dogs lie. But she would surely question him. He gave her a sidelong look, and found she was giving him the same. She said softly:

"Why don't you like those cousins, Father?"

Soames lifted the corner of his lip.

"What made you think that?"

"Cela se voit."

'That sees itself!' What a way of putting it!

After twenty years of a French wife Soames had still little sympathy with her language; a theatrical affair and connected in his mind with all the refinements of domestic irony.

"How?" he asked.

"You MUST know them; and you didn't make a sign. I saw them looking at you."

"I've never seen the boy in my life," replied Soames with perfect truth.

"No; but you've seen the others, dear."

Soames gave her another look. What had she picked up? Had her Aunt Winifred, or Imogen, or Val Dartie and his wife, been talking? Every breath of the old scandal had been carefully kept from her at home, and Winifred warned many times that he wouldn't have a whisper of it reach her for the world. So far as she ought to know, he had never been married before. But her dark eyes, whose southern glint and clearness often almost frightened him, met his with perfect innocence.

"Well," he said, "your grandfather and his brother had a quarrel. The two families don't know each other."

"How romantic!"

'Now, what does she mean by that?' he thought. The word was to him extravagant and dangerous — it was as if she had said: "How jolly!"

"And they'll continue not to know each other," he added, but instantly regretted the challenge in those words. Fleur was smiling. In this age, when young people prided themselves on going their own ways and paying no attention to any sort of decent prejudice, he had said the very thing to excite her wilfulness. Then, recollecting the expression on Irene's face, he breathed again.

"What sort of a quarrel?" he heard Fleur say.

"About a house. It's ancient history for you. Your grandfather died the day you were born. He was ninety."

"Ninety? Are there many Forsytes besides those in the Red Book?"

"I don't know," said Soames. "They're all dispersed now. The old ones are dead, except Timothy."

Fleur clasped her hands.

"Timothy? Isn't that delicious?"

"Not at all," said Soames. It offended him that she should think "Timothy" delicious — a kind of insult to his breed. This new generation mocked at anything solid and tenacious. "You go and see the old boy. He might want to prophesy." Ah! If Timothy could see the disquiet England of his greatnephews and greatnieces, he would certainly give tongue. And involuntarily he glanced up at the Iseeum; yes — George was still in the window, with the same pink paper in his hand.

"Where is Robin Hill, Father?"

Robin Hill! Robin Hill, round which all that tragedy had centred! What did she want to know for?

"In Surrey," he muttered; "not far from Richmond, Why?"

"Is the house there?"

“What house?”

“That they quarrelled about.”

“Yes. But what’s all that to do with you? We’re going home tomorrow — you’d better be thinking about your frocks.”

“Bless you! They’re all thought about. A family feud? It’s like the Bible, or Mark Twain — awfully exciting. What did YOU do in the feud, Father?”

“Never you mind.”

“Oh! But if I’m to keep it up?”

“Who said you were to keep it up?”

“You, darling.”

“I? I said it had nothing to do with you.”

“Just what _I_ think, you know; so that’s all right.”

She was too sharp for him; FINE, as Annette sometimes called her. Nothing for it but to distract her attention.

“There’s a bit of rosaline point in here,” he said, stopping before a shop, “that I thought you might like.”

When he had paid for it and they had resumed their progress, Fleur said:

“Don’t you think that boy’s mother is the most beautiful woman of her age you’ve ever seen?”

Soames shivered. Uncanny, the way she stuck to it!

“I don’t know that I noticed her.”

“Dear, I saw the corner of your eye.”

“You see everything — and a great deal more, it seems to me!”

“What’s her husband like? He must be your first cousin, if your fathers were brothers.”

“Dead, for all I know,” said Soames, with sudden vehemence. “I haven’t seen him for twenty years.”

“What was he?”

“A painter.”

“That’s quite jolly.”

The words: “If you want to please me you’ll put those people out of your head,” sprang to Soames’s lips, but he choked them back — he must NOT let her see his feelings.

“He once insulted me,” he said.

Her quick eyes rested on his face.

“I see! You didn’t avenge it, and it rankles. Poor Father! You let me have a go!”

It was really like lying in the dark with a mosquito hovering above his face. Such pertinacity in Fleur was new to him, and, as they reached the hotel, he said grimly:

“I did my best. And that’s enough about these people. I’m going up till dinner.”

“I shall sit here.”

With a parting look at her extended in a chair — a look half-resentful, half-adoring — Soames moved into the lift and was transported to their suite on the fourth floor. He stood by the window of the sitting-room which gave view over Hyde Park, and drummed a finger on its pane. His feelings were confused, tetchy, troubled. The throb of that old wound, scarred over by Time and new interests, was mingled with displeasure and anxiety, and a slight pain in his chest where that nougat stuff had disagreed. Had Annette come in? Not that she was any good to him in such a difficulty. Whenever she had questioned him about his first marriage, he had always shut her up; she knew nothing of it, save that it had been the great passion of his life, and his marriage with herself but domestic makeshift. She had always kept the grudge of that up her sleeve, as it were, and used it commercially. He listened. A sound — the vague murmur of a woman’s movements — was coming through the door. She was in. He tapped.

“Who?”

“I,” said Soames.

She had been changing her frock, and was still imperfectly clothed; a striking figure before her glass. There was a certain magnificence about her arms, shoulders, hair, which had darkened since he first knew her, about the turn of her neck, the silkiness of her garments, her dark-lashed, grey-blue eyes — she was certainly as handsome at forty as she had ever been. A fine possession, an excellent housekeeper, a sensible and affectionate enough mother. If only she weren't always so frankly cynical about the relations between them! Soames, who had no more real affection for her than she had for him, suffered from a kind of English grievance, in that she had never dropped even the thinnest veil of sentiment over their partnership. Like most of his countrymen and women, he held the view that marriage should be based on mutual love, but that when from a marriage love had disappeared, or been found never to have really existed — so that it was manifestly not based on love — you must not admit it. There it was, and the love was not — but there you were, and must continue to be! Thus you had it both ways, and were not tarred with cynicism, realism, and immorality, like the French. Moreover, it was necessary in the interests of propriety. He knew that she knew that they both knew there was no love between them, but he still expected her not to admit in words or conduct such a thing, and he could never understand what she meant when she talked of the hypocrisy of the English. He said:

"Whom have you got at 'The Shelter' next week?"

Annette went on touching her lips delicately with salve — he always wished she wouldn't do that.

"Your sister Winifred, and the Car-r-digans"— she took up a tiny stick of black —"and Prosper Profond."

"That Belgian chap? Why him?"

Annette turned her neck lazily, touched one eyelash, and said:

"He amuses Winifred."

"I want some one to amuse Fleur; she's restive."

"R-restive?" repeated Annette. "Is it the first time you see that, my friend? She was born r-restive, as you call it."

Would she never get that affected roll out of her r's?

He touched the dress she had taken off, and asked:

"What have you been doing?"

Annette looked at him, reflected in her glass. Her just-brightened lips smiled, rather full, rather ironical.

"Enjoying myself," she said.

"Oh!" answered Soames glumly. "Ribbandry, I suppose."

It was his word for all that incomprehensible running in and out of shops that women went in for. "Has Fleur got her summer dresses?"

"You don't ask if I have mine."

"You don't care whether I do or not."

"Quite right. Well, she has; and I have mine — terribly expensive."

"H'm!" said Soames. "What does that chap Profond do in England?"

Annette raised the eyebrows she had just finished.

"He yachts."

"Ah!" said Soames; "he's a sleepy chap."

"Sometimes," answered Annette, and her face had a sort of quiet enjoyment. "But sometimes very amusing."

"He's got a touch of the tar-brush about him."

Annette stretched herself.

"Tar-brush?" she said; "what is that? His mother was Armenienne."

"That's it, then," muttered Soames. "Does he know anything about pictures?"

"He knows about everything — a man of the world."

"Well, get some one for Fleur. I want to distract her. She's going off on Saturday to Val Dartie and his wife; I don't like it."

"Why not?"

Since the reason could not be explained without going into family history, Soames merely answered:

"Racketing about. There's too much of it."

"I like that little Mrs. Val; she is very quiet and clever."

"I know nothing of her except — This thing's new." And Soames took up a creation from the bed.

Annette received it from him.

"Would you hook me?" she said.

Soames hooked. Glancing once over her shoulder into the glass, he saw the expression on her face, faintly amused, faintly contemptuous, as much as to say: 'Thanks! You will never learn!' No, thank God, he wasn't a Frenchman! He finished with a jerk, and the words:

"It's too low here." And he went to the door, with the wish to get away from her and go down to Fleur again.

Annette stayed a powder-puff, and said with startling suddenness:

"Que tu es grossier!"

He knew the expression — he had reason to. The first time she had used it he had thought it meant "What a grocer you are!" and had not known whether to be relieved or not when better informed. He resented the word — he was NOT coarse! If he was coarse, what was that chap in the room beyond his, who made those horrible noises in the morning when he cleared his throat, or those people in the Lounge who thought it well-bred to say nothing but what the whole world could hear at the top of their voices — quacking inanity! Coarse, because he had said her dress was low! Well, so it was! He went out without reply.

Coming into the Lounge from the far end, he at once saw Fleur where he had left her. She sat with crossed knees, slowly balancing a foot in silk stocking and grey shoe, sure sign that she was dreaming. Her eyes showed it too — they went off like that sometimes. And then, in a moment, she would come to life, and be as quick and restless as a monkey. And she knew so much, so self-assured, and not yet nineteen. What was that odious word? Flapper! Dreadful young creatures — squealing and squawking and showing their legs! The worst of them bad dreams, the best of them powdered angels! Fleur was NOT a flapper, NOT one of those slangy, ill-bred young females. And yet she was frighteningly self-willed, and full of life, and determined to enjoy it. Enjoy! The word brought no puritan terror to Soames; but it brought the terror suited to his temperament. He had always been afraid to enjoy today for fear he might not enjoy tomorrow so much. And it was terrifying to feel that his daughter was divested of that safeguard. The very way she sat in that chair showed it — lost in her dream. He had never been lost in a dream himself — there was nothing to be had out of it; and where she got it from he did not know! Certainly not from Annette! And yet Annette, as a young girl, when he was hanging about her, had once had a flowery look. Well, she had lost it now!

Fleur rose from her chair — swiftly, restlessly, and flung herself down at a writing-table. Seizing ink and writing-paper, she began to write as if she had not time to breathe before she got her letter written. And suddenly she saw him. The air of desperate absorption vanished, she smiled, waved a kiss, made a pretty face as if she were a little puzzled and a little bored.

Ah! She was "fine"—"fine!"

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III

AT ROBIN HILL

Jolyon Forsyte had spent his boy's nineteenth birthday at Robin Hill, quietly going into his affairs. He did everything quietly now, because his heart was in a poor way, and, like all his family, he disliked the idea of dying. He had never realised how much till one day, two years ago, he had gone to his doctor about certain symptoms, and been told:

"At any moment, on any overstrain."

He had taken it with a smile — the natural Forsyte reaction against an unpleasant truth. But with an increase of symptoms in the train on the way home, he had realised to the full the sentence hanging over him. To leave Irene, his boy, his home, his work — though he did little enough work now! To leave them for unknown darkness, for the unimaginable state, for such nothingness that he would not even be conscious of wind stirring leaves above his grave, nor of the scent of earth and grass. Of such nothingness that, however hard he might try to conceive it, he never could, and must still hover on the hope that he might see again those he loved! To realise this was to endure very poignant spiritual anguish. Before he reached home that day, he had determined to keep it from Irene. He would have to be more careful than man had ever been, for the least thing would give it away and make her as wretched as himself, almost. His doctor had passed him sound in other respects, and seventy was nothing of an age — he would last a long time yet, IF HE COULD!

Such a conclusion, followed out for nearly two years, develops to the full the subtler side of character. Naturally not abrupt, except when nervously excited, Jolyon had become control incarnate. The sad patience of old people who cannot exert themselves was masked by a smile which his lips preserved even in private. He devised continually all manner of cover to conceal his enforced lack of exertion. Mocking himself for so doing, he counterfeited conversion to the Simple Life; gave up wine and cigars, drank a special kind of coffee with no coffee in it. In short, he made himself as safe as a Forsyte in his condition could, under the rose of his mild irony. Secure from discovery, since his wife and son had gone up to Town, he had spent the fine May day quietly arranging his papers, that he might die tomorrow without inconveniencing any one, giving in fact a final polish to his terrestrial state. Having docketed and enclosed it in his father's old Chinese cabinet, he put the key into an envelope, wrote the words outside: "Key of the Chinese cabinet, wherein will be found the exact state of me. J.F.," and put it in his breast-pocket, where it would be, always about him, in case of accident. Then, ringing for tea, he went out to have it under the old oak-tree.

All are under sentence of death; Jolyon, whose sentence was but a little more precise and pressing, had become so used to it, that he thought habitually, like other people, of other things. He thought of his son now.

Jon was nineteen that day, and Jon had come of late to a decision. Educated neither at Eton like his father, nor at Harrow, like his dead half-brother, but at one of those establishments which, designed to avoid the evil and contain the good of the Public School system, may or may not contain the evil and avoid the good, Jon had left in April perfectly ignorant of what he wanted to become. The War, which had promised to go on for ever, had ended just as he was about to join the army, six months before his time. It had taken him ever since to get used to the idea that he could now choose for himself. He had held with his father several discussions, from which, under a cheery show of being ready for anything — except, of course, the Church, Army, Law, Stage, Stock Exchange, Medicine, Business, and Engineering — Jolyon had gathered rather clearly that Jon wanted to go in for nothing. He himself had felt exactly like that at the same age. With him that pleasant vacuity had soon been ended by an early marriage, and its unhappy consequences. Forced to become an underwriter at Lloyd's he had regained prosperity before his artistic talent had outcropped. But having — as the simple say —"learned" his boy to draw pigs and other animals, he knew that Jon would never be a painter, and inclined to the conclusion that his aversion from everything else meant that he was going to be a writer. Holding, however, the view that experience was necessary even for that profession, there seemed to Jolyon nothing in the meantime, for Jon, but University, travel, and perhaps the eating of dinners for the Bar. After that one would see, or more probably one would not. In face of these proffered allurements, however, Jon had remained undecided.

Such discussions with his son had confirmed in Jolyon a doubt whether the world had really changed. People said that it was a new age. With the profundity of one not too long for any age, Jolyon perceived that under slightly different surfaces, the era was precisely what it had been. Mankind was still divided into two species: The few who had “speculation” in their souls, and the many who had none, with a belt of hybrids like himself in the middle. Jon appeared to have speculation; it seemed to his father a bad lookout.

With something deeper, therefore, than his usual smile, he had heard the boy say, a fortnight ago: “I should like to try farming, Dad; if it won’t cost you too much. It seems to be about the only sort of life that doesn’t hurt anybody; except art, and of course that’s out of the question for me.”

Jolyon subdued his smile, and answered:

“All right; you shall skip back to where we were under the first Jolyon in 1760. It’ll prove the cycle theory, and incidentally, no doubt, you may grow a better turnip than he did.”

A little dashed, Jon had answered:

“But don’t you think it’s a good scheme, Dad?”

“Twill serve, my dear; and if you should really take to it, you’ll do more good than most men, which is little enough.”

To himself, however, he had said: “But he won’t take to it. I give him four years. Still, it’s healthy, and harmless.”

After turning the matter over and consulting with Irene, he wrote to his daughter Mrs. Val Dortie, asking if they knew of a farmer near them on the Downs who would take Jon as an apprentice. Holly’s answer had been enthusiastic. There was an excellent man quite close; she and Val would love Jon to live with them.

The boy was due to go tomorrow.

Sipping weak tea with lemon in it, Jolyon gazed through the leaves of the old oak-tree at that view which had appeared to him desirable for thirty-two years. The tree beneath which he sat seemed not a day older! So young, the little leaves of brownish gold; so old, the whitey-grey-green of its thick rough trunk, A tree of memories, which would live on hundreds of years yet, unless some barbarian cut it down — would see old England out at the pace things were going! He remembered a night three years before, when, looking from his window, with his arm close round Irene, he had watched a German aeroplane hovering, it seemed, right over the old tree. Next day they had found a bomb hole in a field on Gage’s farm. That was before he knew that he was under sentence of death. He could almost have wished the bomb had finished him. It would have saved a lot of hanging about, many hours of cold fear in the pit of his stomach. He had counted on living to the normal Forsyte age of eighty-five or more, when Irene would be seventy. As it was, she would miss him. Still there was Jon, more important in her life than himself; Jon, who adored his mother.

Under that tree, where old Jolyon — waiting for Irene to come to him across the lawn — had breathed his last, Jolyon wondered, whimsically, whether, having put everything in such perfect order, he had not better close his own eyes and drift away. There was something undignified in parasitically clinging on to the effortless close of a life wherein he regretted two things only — the long division between his father and himself when he was young, and the lateness of his union with Irene.

From where he sat he could see a cluster of apple-trees in blossom. Nothing in Nature moved him so much as fruit-trees in blossom; and his heart ached suddenly because he might never see them flower again. Spring! Decidedly no man ought to have to die while his heart was still young enough to love beauty! Blackbirds sang recklessly in the shrubbery, swallows were flying high, the leaves above him glistened; and over the fields was every imaginable tint of early foliage, burnished by the level sunlight, away to where the distant ‘smoke-bush’ blue was trailed along the horizon. Irene’s flowers in their narrow beds had startling individuality that evening, little deep assertions of gay life. Only Chinese and Japanese painters, and perhaps Leonardo, had known how to get that startling little ego into each painted flower, and bird, and beast — the ego, yet the sense of species, the universality of life as well. They were the fellows! ‘I’ve made nothing that will live!’ thought Jolyon; ‘I’ve been an amateur — a mere lover, not a creator. Still, I shall leave Jon behind me when I go.’ What luck that the boy had not been caught by that ghastly war! He might so easily have been killed, like poor Jolly twenty years ago out in the Transvaal. Jon would do something some day — if the Age didn’t spoil him — an imaginative chap! His whim to take up farming was but a bit of sentiment, and about as likely to last. And just then he saw them coming up the field: Irene and the boy, walking from the station, with their arms linked. And, getting up, he strolled down through the new rose garden to meet them. . . .

Irene came into his room that night and sat down by the window. She sat there without speaking till he said:

“What is it, my love?”

"We had an encounter today."

"With whom?"

"Soames."

Soames! He had kept that name out of his thoughts these last two years; conscious that it was bad for him. And, now, his heart moved in a disconcerting manner, as if it had side-slipped within his chest.

Irene went on quietly:

"He and his daughter were in the Gallery, and afterwards at the confectioner's where we had tea."

Jolyon went over and put his hand on her shoulder.

"How did he look?"

"Grey; but otherwise much the same."

"And the daughter?"

"Pretty. At least, Jon thought so."

Jolyon's heart side-slipped again. His wife's face had a strained and puzzled look.

"You didn't —?" he began.

"No; but Jon knows their name. The girl dropped her handkerchief and he picked it up."

Jolyon sat down on his bed. An evil chance!

"June was with you. Did she put her foot into it?"

"No; but it was all very queer and strained, and Jon could see it was."

Jolyon drew a long breath, and said:

"I've often wondered whether we've been right to keep it from him. He'll find out some day."

"The later the better, Jolyon; the young have such cheap, hard judgment. When you were nineteen what would you have thought of YOUR mother if she had done what I have?" Yes! There it was! Jon worshipped his mother; and knew nothing of the tragedies, the inexorable necessities of life, nothing of the prisoned grief in an unhappy marriage, nothing of jealousy, or passion — knew nothing at all, as yet!

"What have you told him?" he said at last.

"That they were relations, but we didn't know them; that you had never cared much for your family, or they for you. I expect he will be asking YOU."

Jolyon smiled. "This promises to take the place of air-raids," he said. "After all, one misses them."

Irene looked up at him.

"We've known it would come some day."

He answered her with sudden energy:

"I could never stand seeing Jon blame you. He shan't do that, even in thought. He has imagination; and he'll understand if it's put to him properly. I think I had better tell him before he gets to know otherwise."

"Not yet, Jolyon."

That was like her — she had no foresight, and never went to meet trouble. Still — who knew? — she might be right. It was ill going against a mother's instinct. It might be well to let the boy go on, if possible, till experience had given him some touchstone by which he could judge the values of that old tragedy; till love, jealousy, longing, had deepened his charity. All the same, one must take precautions — every precaution possible! And, long after Irene had left him, he lay awake turning over those precautions. He must write to Holly, telling her that Jon knew nothing as yet of family history. Holly was discreet, she would make sure of her husband, she would see to it! Jon could take the letter with him when he went tomorrow.

And so the day on which he had put the polish on his material estate died out with the chiming of the stable clock; and another began for Jolyon in the shadow of a spiritual disorder which could not be so rounded off and polished. . . .

But Jon, whose room had once been his day nursery, lay awake too, the prey of a sensation disputed by those who have never known it, "love at first sight!" He had felt it beginning in him with the glint of those dark eyes gazing into his athwart the Juno — a conviction that this was his 'dream'; so that what followed had seemed to him at once natural and miraculous. Fleur! Her name alone was almost enough for one who was terribly susceptible to the charm of words. In a homoeopathic age, when boys and girls were coeducated, and mixed up in early life till sex was almost abolished, Jon was singularly old-fashioned. His modern school took boys only, and his holidays had been spent at Robin Hill with boy friends, or his parents alone. He had never, therefore, been inoculated against the germs of love by small doses of the poison. And now in the dark his temperature was mounting fast. He lay awake, featuring Fleur — as they called it — recalling her words, especially that "Au revoir!" so soft and sprightly.

He was still so wide-awake at dawn that he got up, slipped on tennis shoes, trousers, and a sweater, and in silence crept down-stairs and out through the study window. It was just light; there was a smell of grass. 'Fleur!' he thought; 'Fleur!' It was mysteriously white out-of-doors, with nothing awake except the birds just beginning to chirp. 'I'll go down into the coppice,' he thought. He ran down through the fields, reached the pond just as the sun rose, and passed into the coppice. Bluebells carpeted the ground there; among the larch-trees there was mystery — the air, as it were, composed of that romantic quality. Jon sniffed its freshness, and stared at the bluebells in the sharpening light. Fleur! It rhymed with her! And she lived at Mapledurham — a jolly name, too, on the river somewhere. He could find it in the atlas presently. He would write to her. But would she answer? Oh! She must. She had said "Au revoir!" Not good-bye! What luck that she had dropped her handkerchief. He would never have known her but for that. And the more he thought of that handkerchief, the more amazing his luck seemed. Fleur! It certainly rhymed with her! Rhythm thronged his head; words jostled to be joined together; he was on the verge of a poem.

Jon remained in this condition for more than half an hour, then returned to the house, and getting a ladder, climbed in at his bedroom window out of sheer exhilaration. Then, remembering that the study window was open, he went down and shut it, first removing the ladder, so as to obliterate all traces of his feeling. The thing was too deep to be revealed to mortal soul — even to his mother.

❦

IV

THE MAUSOLEUM

There are houses whose souls have passed into the limbo of Time, leaving their bodies in the limbo of London. Such was not quite the condition of “Timothy’s” on the Bayswater Road, for Timothy’s soul still had one foot in Timothy Forsyte’s body, and Smither kept the atmosphere unchanging, of camphor and port wine and house whose windows are only opened to air it twice a day.

To Forsyte imagination that house was now a sort of Chinese pill-box, a series of layers in the last of which was Timothy. One did not reach him, or so it was reported by members of the family who, out of old-time habit or absent-mindedness, would drive up once in a blue moon and ask after their surviving uncle. Such were Francie, now quite emancipated from God (she frankly avowed atheism), Euphemia, emancipated from old Nicholas, and Winifred Dartie from her “man of the world.” But, after all, everybody was emancipated now, or said they were — perhaps not quite the same thing!

When Soames, therefore, took it on his way to Paddington station on the morning after that encounter, it was hardly with the expectation of seeing Timothy in the flesh. His heart made a faint demonstration within him while he stood in full south sunlight on the newly whitened doorstep of that little house where four Forsytes had once lived, and now but one dwelt on like a winter fly; the house into which Soames had come and out of which he had gone times without number, divested of, or burdened with, fardels of family gossip; the house of the “old people” of another century, another age.

The sight of Smither — still corseted up to the armpits because the new fashion which came in as they were going out about 1903 had never been considered “nice” by Aunts Juley and Hester — brought a pale friendliness to Soames’s lips; Smither, still faithfully arranged to old pattern in every detail, an invaluable servant — none such left — smiling back at him, with the words: “Why! it’s Mr. Soames, after all this time! And how are YOU, sir? Mr. Timothy will be so pleased to know you’ve been.”

“How is he?”

“Oh! he keeps fairly bobbish for his age, sir; but of course he’s a wonderful man. As I said to Mrs. Dartie when she was here last: It WOULD please Miss Forsyte and Mrs. Juley and Miss Hester to see how he relishes a baked apple still. But he’s quite deaf. And a mercy, I always think. For what we should have done with him in the air-raids, I don’t know.”

“Ah!” said Soames. “What DID you do with him?”

“We just left him in his bed, and had the bell run down into the cellar, so that Cook and I could hear him if he rang. It would never have done to let him know there was a war on. As I said to Cook, ‘If Mr. Timothy rings, they may do what they like — I’m going up. My dear mistresses would have a fit if they could see him ringing and nobody going to him.’ But he slept through them all beautiful. And the one in the daytime he was having his bath. It WAS a mercy, because he might have noticed the people in the street all looking up — he often looks out of the window.”

“Quite!” murmured Soames. Smither was getting garrulous! “I just want to look round and see if there’s anything to be done.”

“Yes, sir. I don’t think there’s anything except a smell of mice in the dining-room that we don’t know how to get rid of. It’s funny they should be there, and not a crumb, since Mr. Timothy took to not coming down, just before the war. But they’re nasty little things; you never know where they’ll take you next.”

“Does he leave his bed?”

“Oh! yes, sir; he takes nice exercise between his bed and the window in the morning, not to risk a change of air. And he’s quite comfortable in himself; has his Will out every day regular. It’s a great consolation to him — that.”

“Well, Smither, I want to see him, if I can; in case he has anything to say to me.”

Smither coloured up above her corsets.

“It WILL be an occasion!” she said. “Shall I take you round the house, sir, while I send Cook to break it to him?”

“No, you go to him,” said Soames. “I can go round the house by myself.”

One could not confess to sentiment before another, and Soames felt that he was going to be sentimental nosing round those rooms so saturated with the past. When Smither, creaking with excitement, had left him, Soames entered the dining-room and sniffed. In his opinion it wasn't mice, but incipient wood-rot, and he examined the panelling. Whether it was worth a coat of paint, at Timothy's age, he was not sure. The room had always been the most modern in the house; and only a faint smile curled Soames's lips and nostrils. Walls of a rich green surmounted the oak dado; a heavy metal chandelier hung by a chain from a ceiling divided by imitation beams. The pictures had been bought by Timothy, a bargain, one day at Jobson's sixty years ago — three Snyder "still lifes," two faintly coloured drawings of a boy and a girl, rather charming, which bore the initials "J.R."— Timothy had always believed they might turn out to be Joshua Reynolds, but Soames, who admired them, had discovered that they were only John Robinson; and a doubtful Morland of a white pony being shod. Deep-red plush curtains, ten high-backed dark mahogany chairs with deep-red plush seats, a Turkey carpet, and a mahogany dining-table as large as the room was small, such was an apartment which Soames could remember unchanged in soul or body since he was four years old. He looked especially at the two drawings, and thought: 'I shall buy those at the sale.'

From the dining-room he passed into Timothy's study. He did not remember ever having been in that room. It was lined from floor to ceiling with volumes, and he looked at them with curiosity. One wall seemed devoted to educational books, which Timothy's firm had published two generations back — sometimes as many as twenty copies of one book. Soames read their titles and shuddered. The middle wall had precisely the same books as used to be in the library at his own father's in Park Lane, from which he deduced the fancy that James and his youngest brother had gone out together one day and bought a brace of small libraries. The third wall he approached with more excitement. Here, surely, Timothy's own taste would be found. It was. The books were dummies. The fourth wall was all heavily curtained window. And turned towards it was a large chair with a mahogany reading-stand attached, on which a yellowish and folded copy of The Times, dated July 6, 1914, the day Timothy first failed to come down, as if in preparation for the war, seemed waiting for him still. In a corner stood a large globe of that world never visited by Timothy, deeply convinced of the unreality of everything but England, and permanently upset by the sea, on which he had been very sick one Sunday afternoon in 1836, out of a pleasure boat off the pier at Brighton, with Juley and Hester, Swithin and Hatty Chessman; all due to Swithin, who was always taking things into his head, and who, thank goodness, had been sick too. Soames knew all about it, having heard the tale fifty times at least from one or other of them. He went up to the globe, and gave it a spin; it emitted a faint creak and moved about an inch, bringing into his purview a daddy-long-legs which had died on it in latitude 44.

'Mausoleum!' he thought. 'George was right!' And he went out and up the stairs. On the half landing he stopped before the case of stuffed humming-birds which had delighted his childhood. They looked not a day older, suspended on wires above pampas-grass. If the case were opened the birds would not begin to hum, but the whole thing would crumble, he suspected. It wouldn't be worth putting that into the sale! And suddenly he was caught by a memory of Aunt Ann — dear old Aunt Ann — holding him by the hand in front of that case and saying: "Look, Soamey! Aren't they bright and pretty, dear little humming-birds!" Soames remembered his own answer: "They don't hum, Auntie." He must have been six, in a black velveteen suit with a light-blue collar — he remembered that suit well! Aunt Ann with her ringlets, and her spidery kind hands, and her grave old aquiline smile — a fine old lady, Aunt Ann! He moved on up to the drawing-room door. There on each side of it were the groups of miniatures. Those he would certainly buy in! The miniatures of his four aunts, one of his uncle Swithin adolescent, and one of his uncle Nicholas as a boy. They had all been painted by a young lady friend of the family at a time, 1830, about, when miniatures were considered very genteel, and lasting too, painted as they were on ivory. Many a time had he heard the tale of that young lady: "Very talented, my dear; she had quite a weakness for Swithin, and very soon after she went into a consumption and died: so like Keats — we often spoke of it."

Well, there they were! Ann, Juley, Hester, Susan — quite a small child; Swithin, with sky-blue eyes, pink cheeks, yellow curls, white waistcoat — large as life; and Nicholas, like Cupid with an eye on heaven. Now he came to think of it, Uncle Nick had always been rather like that — a wonderful man to the last. Yes, she must have had talent, and miniatures had a certain back-watered cachet of their own, little subject to the currents of competition on aesthetic Change. Soames opened the drawing-room door. The room was dusted, the furniture uncovered, the curtains drawn back, precisely as if his aunts still dwelt there patiently waiting. And a thought came to him: When Timothy died — why not? Would it not be almost a duty to preserve this house — like Carlyle's — and put up a tablet, and show it? "Specimen of mid-Victorian abode — entrance, one shilling, with catalogue." After all, it was the completest thing, and perhaps the deadest in the London of today. Perfect in its special taste and culture, if, that is, he took down and carried over to his own collection the four Barbizon pictures he had given them. The still sky-blue walls, the green curtains patterned with red flowers and ferns; the crewel-worked fire-screen before the cast-iron grate; the mahogany cupboard with glass windows, full of little knick-knacks; the beaded footstools; Keats, Shelley, Southey, Cowper, Coleridge, Byron's "Corsair" (but nothing else), and the Victorian poets in a bookshelf row; the marqueterie cabinet lined with dim red plush, full of family relics; Hester's first fan; the buckles of their mother's father's shoes; three bottled scorpions; and one very yellow elephant's tusk, sent home from India by Great-uncle Edgar Forsyte, who had been in jute; a yellow bit of paper propped up, with spidery writing on it, recording God knew what! And the pictures crowding on the walls — all water-colours save those four Barbizons looking like the foreigners they were, and doubtful customers at that — pictures bright and illustrative, "Telling the Bees," "Hey for the Ferry!" and two in the style of Frith, all thimblerig and crinolines, given them by Swithin. Oh! many, many pictures at which Soames had gazed a thousand times in supercilious fascination; a marvellous collection of bright, smooth gilt frames.

And the boudoir-grand piano, beautifully dusted, hermetically sealed as ever; and Aunt Juley's album of pressed seaweed on it. And the gilt-legged chairs, stronger than they looked. And on one side of the fireplace the sofa of crimson silk, where Aunt Ann, and after her Aunt Juley, had been wont to sit, facing the light and bolt upright. And on the other side of the fire the one really easy chair, back to the light, for Aunt Hester. Soames screwed up his eyes; he seemed to see them sitting there. Ah! and the atmosphere — even now, of too many stuffs and washed lace curtains, lavender in bags, and dried bee's wings. 'No,' he thought, 'there's nothing like it left; it ought to be preserved.' And, by George, they might laugh at it, but for a standard of gentle life never departed from, for fastidiousness of skin and eye and nose and feeling, it beat today hollow — today with its Tubes and cars, its perpetual smoking, its cross-legged, bare-necked girls visible up to the knees and down to the waist if you took the trouble (agreeable to the satyr within each Forsyte but hardly his idea of a lady), with their feet, too, screwed round the legs of their chairs while they ate, and their "So longs," and their "Old Beans," and their laughter — girls who gave him the shudders whenever he thought of Fleur in contact with them; and the hard-eyed, capable, older women who managed life and gave him the shudders too. No! his old aunts, if they never opened their minds, their eyes, or very much their windows, at least had manners, and a standard, and reverence for past and future.

With rather a choky feeling he closed the door and went tiptoeing up-stairs. He looked in at a place on the way: H'm! in perfect order of the eighties, with a sort of yellow oilskin paper on the walls. At the top of the stairs he hesitated between four doors. Which of them was Timothy's? And he listened. A sound as of a child slowly dragging a hobby-horse about, came to his ears. That must be Timothy! He tapped, and a door was opened by Smither very red in the face.

Mr. Timothy was taking his walk, and she had not been able to get him to attend. If Mr. Soames would come into the back room, he could see him through the door.

Soames went into the back room and stood watching.

The last of the old Forsytes was on his feet, moving with the most impressive slowness, and an air of perfect concentration on his own affairs, backward and forward between the foot of his bed and the window, a distance of some twelve feet. The lower part of his square face, no longer clean-shaven, was covered with snowy beard clipped as short as it could be, and his chin looked as broad as his brow where the hair was also quite white, while nose and cheeks and brow were a good yellow. One hand held a stout stick, and the other grasped the skirt of his Jaeger dressing-gown, from under which could be seen his bed-socked ankles and feet thrust into Jaeger slippers. The expression on his face was that of a crossed child, intent on something that he has not got. Each time he turned he stumped the stick, and then dragged it, as if to show that he could do without it.

"He still looks strong," said Soames under his breath.

"Oh! yes, sir. You should see him take his bath — it's wonderful; he does enjoy it so."

Those quite loud words gave Soames an insight. Timothy had resumed his babyhood.

"Does he take any interest in things generally?" he said, also aloud.

"Oh! yes, sir; his food and his Will. It's quite a sight to see him turn it over and over, not to read it, of course; and every now and then he asks the price of Consols, and I write it on a slate for him — very large. Of course, I always write the same, what they were when he last took notice, in 1914. We got the doctor to forbid him to read the paper when the war broke out. Oh! he did take on about that at first. But he soon came round, because he knew it tired him; and he's a wonder to conserve energy as he used to call it when my dear mistresses were alive, bless their hearts! How he did go on at them about that; they were always so active, if you remember, Mr. Soames.”

“What would happen if I were to go in?” asked Soames. “Would he remember me? I made his Will, you know, after Miss Hester died in 1907.”

“Oh! that, sir,” replied Smither doubtfully, “I couldn’t take on me to say. I think he might; he really is a wonderful man for his age.”

Soames moved into the doorway, and, waiting for Timothy to turn, said in a loud voice: “Uncle Timothy!”

Timothy trailed back half-way, and halted.

“Eh?” he said.

“Soames,” cried Soames at the top of his voice, holding out his hand, “Soames Forsyte!”

“No!” said Timothy, and stumping his stick loudly on the floor, he continued his walk.

“It doesn’t seem to work,” said Soames.

“No, sir,” replied Smither, rather crestfallen; “you see, he hasn’t finished his walk. It always was one thing at a time with him. I expect he’ll ask me this afternoon if you came about the gas, and a pretty job I shall have to make him understand.”

“Do you think he ought to have a man about him?”

Smither held up her hands. “A man! Oh! no. Cook and me can manage perfectly. A strange man about would send him crazy in no time. And my mistresses wouldn’t like the idea of a man in the house. Besides, we’re so proud of him.”

“I suppose the doctor comes?”

“Every morning. He makes special terms for such a quantity, and Mr. Timothy’s so used, he doesn’t take a bit of notice, except to put out his tongue.”

“Well,” said Soames, turning away, “it’s rather sad and painful to me.”

“Oh! sir,” returned Smither anxiously, “you mustn’t think that. Now that he can’t worry about things, he quite enjoys his life, really he does. As I say to Cook, Mr. Timothy is more of a man than he ever was. You see, when he’s not walkin’, or takin’ his bath, he’s eatin’, and when he’s not eatin’, he’s sleeping and there it is. There isn’t an ache or a care about him anywhere.”

“Well,” said Soames, “there’s something in that. I’ll go down. By the way, let me see his Will.”

“I should have to take my time about that, sir; he keeps it under his pillow, and he’d see me, while he’s active.”

“I only want to know if it’s the one I made,” said Soames; “you take a look at its date some time, and let me know.”

“Yes, sir; but I’m sure it’s the same, because me and Cook witnessed, you remember, and there’s our names on it still, and we’ve only done it once.”

“Quite!” said Soames. He did remember. Smither and Jane had been proper witnesses, having been left nothing in the Will that they might have no interest in Timothy’s death. It had been — he fully admitted — an almost improper precaution, but Timothy had wished it, and, after all, Aunt Hester had provided for them amply.

“Very well,” he said; “good-bye, Smither. Look after him, and if he should say anything at any time, put it down, and let me know.”

“Oh! yes, Mr. Soames; I’ll be sure to do that. It’s been such a pleasant change to see you. Cook will be quite excited when I tell her.”

Soames shook her hand and went down-stairs. He stood for fully two minutes by the hat-stand whereon he had hung his hat so many times. ‘So it all passes,’ he was thinking; ‘passes and begins again. Poor old chap!’ And he listened, if perchance the sound of Timothy trailing his hobby-horse might come down the well of the stairs; or some ghost of an old face show over the banisters, and an old voice say: “Why, it’s dear Soames, and we were only saying that we hadn’t seen him for a week!”

Nothing — nothing! Just the scent of camphor, and dust-motes in a sunbeam through the fanlight over the door. The little old house! A mausoleum! And, turning on his heel, he went out, and caught his train.

V

The Native Heath

"His foot's upon his native heath,
His name's — Val Dartie."

With some such feeling did Val Dartie, in the fortieth year of his age, set out that same Thursday morning very early from the old manor-house he had taken on the north side of the Sussex Downs. His destination was Newmarket, and he had not been there since the autumn of 1899, when he stole over from Oxford for the Cambridgeshire. He paused at the door to give his wife a kiss, and put a flask of port into his pocket.

"Don't overtire your leg, Val, and don't bet too much."

With the pressure of her chest against his own, and her eyes looking into his, Val felt both leg and pocket safe. He should be moderate; Holly was always right — she had a natural aptitude. It did not seem so remarkable to him, perhaps, as it might to others, that — half Dartie as he was — he should have been perfectly faithful to his young first cousin during the twenty years since he married her romantically out in the Boer War; and faithful without any feeling of sacrifice or boredom — she was so quick, so slyly always a little in front of his mood. Being first cousins they had decided, or rather Holly had, to have no children; and, though a little sallower, she had kept her looks, her slimness, and the colour of her dark hair. Val particularly admired the life of her own she carried on, besides carrying on his, and riding better every year. She kept up her music, she read an awful lot — novels, poetry, all sorts of stuff. Out on their farm in Cape Colony she had looked after all the "nigger" babies and women in a miraculous manner. She was, in fact — clever; yet made no fuss about it, and had no "side." Though not remarkable for humility, Val had come to have the feeling that she was his superior, and he did not grudge it — a great tribute. It might be noted that he never looked at Holly without her knowing of it, but that she looked at him sometimes unawares.

He has kissed her in the porch because he should not be doing so on the platform, though she was going to the station with him, to drive the car back. Tanned and wrinkled by Colonial weather and the wiles inseparable from horses, and handicapped by the leg which, weakened in the Boer War, had probably saved his life in the war just past, Val was still much as he had been in the days of his courtship; his smile as wide and charming, his eyelashes, if anything, thicker and darker, his eyes screwed up under them, as bright a grey, his freckles rather deeper, his hair a little grizzled at the sides. He gave the impression of one who has lived actively WITH HORSES in a sunny climate.

Twisting the car sharp round at the gate, he said:

"When is young Jon coming?"

"To-day."

"Is there anything you want for him? I could bring it down on Saturday."

"No; but you might come by the same train as Fleur — one forty."

Val gave the Ford full rein; he still drove like a man in a new country on bad roads, who refuses to compromise, and expects heaven at every hole.

"That's a young woman who knows her way about," he said. "I say, has it struck you?"

"Yes," said Holly.

"Uncle Soames and your dad — bit awkward, isn't it?"

"She won't know, and he won't know, and nothing must be said, of course. It's only for five days, Val."

"Stable secret! Righto!" If Holly thought it safe, it was. Glancing slyly round at him, she said: "Did you notice how beautifully she asked herself?"

"No!"

"Well, she did. What do you think of her, Val?"

"Pretty, and clever; but she might run out at any corner if she got her monkey up, I should say."

"I'm wondering," Holly murmured, "whether she is the modern young woman. One feels at sea coming home into all this.”

“You? You get the hang of things so quick.”

Holly slid her hand into his coat-pocket.

“You keep one in the know,” said Val, encouraged. “What do you think of that Belgian fellow, Profond?”

“I think he’s rather ‘a good devil.’”

Val grinned.

“He seems to me a queer fish for a friend of our family. In fact, our family is in pretty queer waters, with Uncle Soames marrying a Frenchwoman, and your dad marrying Soames’s first. Our grandfathers would have had fits!”

“So would anybody’s, my dear.”

“This car,” said Val suddenly, “wants rousing; she doesn’t get her hind legs under her up-hill. I shall have to give her her head on the slope if I’m to catch that train.”

There was that about horses which had prevented him from ever really sympathising with a car, and the running of the Ford under his guidance, compared with its running under that of Holly, was always noticeable. He caught the train.

“Take care going home; she’ll throw you down if she can. Good-bye, darling.”

“Good-bye,” called Holly, and kissed her hand.

In the train, after quarter of an hour’s indecision between thoughts of Holly, his morning paper, the look of the bright day, and his dim memory of Newmarket, Val plunged into the recesses of a small square book, all names, pedigrees, tap-roots, and notes about the make and shape of horses. The Forsyte in him was bent on the acquisition of a certain strain of blood, and he was subduing resolutely as yet the Dartie hankering for a flutter. On getting back to England, after the profitable sale of his South African farm and stud, and observing that the sun seldom shone, Val had said to himself: “I’ve absolutely got to have an interest in life, or this country will give me the blues. Hunting’s not enough, I’ll breed and I’ll train.” With just that extra pinch of shrewdness and decision imparted by long residence in a new country, Val had seen the weak point of modern breeding. They were all hypnotised by fashion and high price. He should buy for looks, and let names go hang! And, here he was already, hypnotised by the prestige of a certain strain of blood! Half consciously, he thought: ‘There’s something in this damned climate which makes one go round in a ring. All the same, I must have a strain of Mayfly blood.’

In this mood he reached the Mecca of his hopes. It was one of those quiet meetings favorable to such as wish to look into horses, rather than into the mouths of bookmakers; and Val clung to the paddock. His twenty years of Colonial life, divesting him of the dandyism in which he had been bred, had left him the essential neatness of the horseman, and given him a queer and rather blighting eye over what he called “the silly haw-haw” of some Englishmen, the ‘flapping cockatoory’ of some Englishwomen — Holly had none of that and Holly was his model. Observant, quick, resourceful, Val went straight to the heart of a transaction, a horse, a drink; and he was on his way to the heart of a Mayfly filly, when a slow voice said at his elbow:

“Mr. Val Dartie? How’s Mrs. Val Dartie? She’s well, I hope.” And he saw beside him the Belgian he had met at his sister Imogen’s.

“Prosper Profond — I met you at lunch,” added the voice. “How are you?” murmured Val.

“I’m very well,” replied Monsieur Profond, smiling with a certain inimitable slowness. “A good devil” Holly had called him. Well! He looked a little like a devil, with his dark, clipped, pointed beard; a sleepy one though, and good-humoured, with fine eyes, unexpectedly intelligent.

“Here’s a gentleman wants to know you — cousin of yours — Mr. George Forsyde.”

Val saw a large form, and a face clean-shaven, bull-like, a little lowering, with sardonic humour bubbling behind a full grey eye; he remembered it dimly from old days when he used to dine with his father at the Iseeum Club.

“I was a racing pal of your father’s,” George was saying. “How’s the stud? Like to buy one of my screws?”

Val grinned, to hide the sudden feeling that the bottom had fallen out of breeding. They believed in nothing over here, not even in horses. George Forsyte, Prosper Profond! The devil himself was not more disillusioned than those two.

“Didn’t know you were a racing man,” he said to Monsieur Profond.

“I’m not. I don’ care for it. I’m a yachtin’ man. I don’ care for yachtin’ either, but I like to see my friends. I’ve got some lunch, Mr. Val Dartie, just a small lunch, if you'd like to 'ave some; not much — just a small one — in my car."

"Thanks," said Val; "very good of you. I'll come along in about quarter of an hour."

"Over there. Mr. Forsyde's comin'," and Monsieur Profond "poinded" with a yellow-gloved finger; "small car, with a small lunch"; he moved on, groomed, sleepy, and remote, George Forsyte following, neat, huge, and with his jesting air.

Val remained gazing at the Mayfly filly. George Forsyte, of course, was an old chap, but this Profond might be about his own age; Val felt extremely young, as if the Mayfly filly were a toy at which those two had laughed. The animal had lost reality.

"That 'small' mare"— he seemed to hear the voice of Monsieur Profond —"what do you see in her — we must all die!"

And George Forsyte, crony of his father, racing still! The Mayfly strain — was it any better than any other? He might just as well have a flutter with his money instead.

"No, by gum!" he muttered suddenly, "if it's no good breeding horses, it's no good doing anything. What did I come for? I'll buy her."

He stood back and watched the ebb of the paddock visitors towards the stand. Natty old chips, shrewd portly fellows, Jews, trainers looking as if they had never been guilty of seeing a horse in their lives; tall, flapping, languid women, or brisk, loud-voiced women; young men with an air as if trying to take it seriously — two or three of them with only one arm!

'Life over here's a game!' thought Val. 'Muffin bell rings, horses run, money changes hands; ring again, run again, money changes back.'

But, alarmed at his own philosophy, he went to the paddock gate to watch the Mayfly filly canter down. She moved well; and he made his way over to the "small" car. The "small" lunch was the sort a man dreams of but seldom gets; and when it was concluded Monsieur Profond walked back with him to the paddock.

"Your wife's a nice woman," was his surprising remark.

"Nicest woman I know," returned Val dryly.

"Yes," said Monsieur Profond; "she has a nice face. I admire nice women."

Val looked at him suspiciously, but something kindly and direct in the heavy diabolism of his companion disarmed him for the moment.

"Any time you like to come on my yacht, I'll give her a small cruise."

"Thanks," said Val, in arms again, "she hates the sea."

"So do I," said Monsieur Profond.

"Then why do you yacht?"

The Belgian's eyes smiled. "Oh! I don' know. I've done everything; it's the last thing I'm doin'."

"It must be d — d expensive. I should want more reason than that."

Monsieur Prosper Profond raised his eyebrows, and puffed out a heavy lower lip.

"I'm an easy-goin' man," he said.

"Were you in the war?" asked Val.

"Ye-es. I've done that too. I was gassed; it was a small bit unpleasant." He smiled with a deep and sleepy air of prosperity, as if he had caught it from his name. Whether his saying "small" when he ought to have said "little" was genuine mistake or affectation, Val could not decide; the fellow was evidently capable of anything. Among the ring of buyers round the Mayfly filly who had won her race, Monsieur Profond said: "You goin' to bid?"

Val nodded. With this sleepy Satan at his elbow, he felt in need of faith. Though placed above the ultimate blows of Providence by the forethought of a grandfather who had tied him up a thousand a year to which was added the thousand a year tied up for Holly by HER grand-father, Val was not flush of capital that he could touch, having spent most of what he had realised from his South African farm on his establishment in Sussex. And very soon he was thinking: 'Dash it! she's going beyond me!' His limit — six hundred — exceeded, he dropped out of the bidding. The Mayfly filly passed under the hammer at seven hundred and fifty guineas. He was turning away vexed when the slow voice of Monsieur Profond said in his ear:

"Well, I've bought that small filly, but I don't want her; you take her and give her to your wife."

Val looked at the fellow with renewed suspicion, but the good humour in his eyes was such that he really could not take offence.

"I made a small lot of money in the war," began Monsieur Profond in answer to that look. "I 'ad armament shares. I like to give it away. I'm always makin' money. I want very small lot myself. I like my friends to 'ave it."

"I'll buy her of you at the price you gave," said Val with sudden resolution.

"No," said Monsieur Profond. "You take her. I don' want her."

"Hang it! One doesn't —"

"Why not?" smiled Monsieur Profond. "I'm a friend of your family."

"Seven hundred and fifty guineas is not a box of cigars," said Val impatiently.

"All right; you keep her for me till I want her, and do what you like with her."

"So long as she's yours," said Val, "I don't mind that." "That's all right," murmured Monsieur Profond, and moved away.

Val watched; he might be "a good devil," but then again he might not. He saw him rejoin George Forsyte, and thereafter saw him no more.

He spent those nights after racing at his mother's house in Green Street.

Winifred Dartie at sixty-two was marvellously preserved, considering the three-and-thirty years during which she had put up with Montague Dartie, till almost happily released by a French staircase. It was to her a vehement satisfaction to have her favourite son back from South Africa after all this time, to feel him so little changed, and to have taken a fancy to his wife. Winifred, who in the late seventies, before her marriage, had been in the vanguard of freedom, pleasure, and fashion, confessed her youth outclassed by the donzellas of the day. They seemed, for instance, to regard marriage as an incident, and Winifred sometimes regretted that she had not done the same; a second, third, fourth incident might have secured her a partner of less dazzling inebriety; though, after all, he had left her Val, Imogen, Maud, Benedict (almost a colonel and unharmed by the war)— none of whom had been divorced as yet. The steadiness of her children often amazed one who remembered their father; but, as she was fond of believing, they were really all Forsytes, favouring herself, with the exception perhaps of Imogen. Her brother's "little girl" Fleur frankly puzzled Winifred. The child was as restless as any of these modern young women —"She's a small flame in a draught," Prosper Profond had said one day after dinner — but she did not flop, or talk at the top of her voice. The steady Forsyteism in Winifred's own character instinctively resented the feeling in the air, the modern girl's habits and her motto: "All's much of a muchness! Spend! To-morrow we shall be poor!" She found it a saving grace in Fleur that having set her heart on a thing, she had no change of heart until she got it — though what happened after, Fleur was, of course, too young to have made evident. The child was a "very pretty little thing," too. and quite a credit to take about, with her mother's French taste and gift for wearing clothes; everybody turned to look at Fleur — great consideration to Winifred, a lover of the style and distinction which had so cruelly deceived her in the case of Montague Dartie.

In discussing her with Val, at breakfast on Saturday morning, Winifred dwelt on the family skeleton.

"That little affair of your father-inlaw and your Aunt Irene, Val — it's old as the hills, of course, Fleur need know nothing about it — making a fuss. Your Uncle Soames is very particular about that. So you'll be careful."

"Yes! But it's dashed awkward — Holly's young half-brother is coming to live with us while he learns farming. He's there already."

"Oh!" said Winifred. "That is a gaff! What is he like?"

"Only saw him once — at Robin Hill, when we were home in 1909; he was naked and painted blue and yellow in stripes — a jolly little chap."

Winifred thought that "rather nice," and added comfortably: "Well, Holly's sensible; she'll know how to deal with it. I shan't tell your uncle. It'll only bother him. It's a great comfort to have you back, my dear boy, now that I'm getting on."

"Getting on! Why! you're as young as ever. By the way, that chap Profond, Mother, is he all right?"

"Prosper Profond! Oh! the most amusing man I know."

Val grunted, and recounted the story of the Mayfly filly.

"That's SO like him," murmured Winifred. "He does all sorts of things."

“Well,” said Val shrewdly, “our family haven’t been too lucky with that kind of cattle; they’re too light-hearted for us.”

It was true, and Winifred’s blue study lasted a full minute before she answered:

“Oh! well! He’s a foreigner, Val; one must make allowances.”

“All right, I’ll use his filly and make it up to him, somehow.”

And soon after he gave her his blessing, received a kiss, and left her for his bookmaker’s, the Iseeum Club, and Victoria station.

❦

VI

Jon

Mrs. Val Dartie, after twenty years of South Africa, had fallen deeply in love, fortunately with something of her own, for the object of her passion was the prospect in front of her windows, the cool clear light on the green Downs. It was England again, at last! England more beautiful than she had dreamed. Chance had, in fact, guided the Val Darties to a spot where the South Downs had real charm when the sun shone. Holly had enough of her father's eye to apprehend the rare quality of their outlines and chalky radiance; to go up there by the ravine-like lane and wander along towards Chanctonbury or Amberley, was still a delight which she hardly attempted to share with Val, whose admiration of Nature was confused by a Forsyte's instinct for getting something out of it, such as the condition of the turf for his horses' exercise.

Driving the Ford home with a certain humouring smoothness, she promised herself that the first use she would make of Jon would be to take him up there, and show him "the view" under this May-day sky.

She was looking forward to her young half-brother with a motherliness not exhausted by Val. A three-day visit to Robin Hill, soon after their arrival home, had yielded no sight of him — he was still at school; so that her recollection, like Val's, was of a little sunny-haired boy striped blue and yellow, down by the pond.

Those three days at Robin Hill had been exciting, sad, embarrassing. Memories of her dead brother, memories of Val's courtship; the aging of her father, not seen for twenty years, something funereal in his ironic gentleness which did not escape one who had much subtle instinct; above all, the presence of her stepmother, whom she could still vaguely remember as the "lady in grey" of days when she was little and grandfather alive and Mademoiselle Beauce so cross because that intruder gave her music lessons — all these confused and tantalised a spirit which had longed to find Robin Hill untroubled. But Holly was adept at keeping things to herself, and all had seemed to go quite well.

Her father had kissed her when she left him, with lips which she was sure had trembled.

"Well, my dear," he said, "the war hasn't changed Robin Hill, has it? If only you could have brought Jolly back with you! I say, can you stand this spiritualistic racket? When the oak-tree dies, it dies, I'm afraid."

From the warmth of her embrace he probably divined that he had let the cat out of his bag, for he rode off at once on irony.

"Spiritualism — queer word, when the more they manifest the more they prove that they've got hold of matter."

"How?" said Holly.

"Why! Look at their photographs of auric presences. You must have something material for light and shade to fall on before you can take a photograph. No, it'll end in our calling all matter spirit, or all spirit matter — I don't know which."

"But don't you believe in survival, Dad?"

Jolyon had looked at her, and the sad whimsicality of his face impressed her deeply.

"Well, my dear, I should like to get something out of death. I've been looking into it a bit. But for the life of me I can't find anything that telepathy, subconsciousness, and emanation from the storehouse of this world can't account for just as well. Wish I could! Wishes father thoughts but they don't breed evidence."

Holly had pressed her lips again to his forehead with a feeling that it confirmed his theory that all matter was becoming spirit — his brow felt somehow so insubstantial.

But the most poignant memory of that little visit had been watching, unobserved, her stepmother reading to herself a letter from Jon. It was — she decided — the prettiest sight she had ever seen. Irene, lost as it were in the letter of her boy, stood at a window where the light fell on her face and her fine grey hair; her lips were moving, smiling, her dark eyes laughing, dancing, and the hand which did not hold the letter was pressed against her breast. Holly withdrew as from a vision of perfect love, convinced that Jon must be nice.

When she saw him coming out of the station with a kit-bag in either hand, she was confirmed in her predisposition. He was a little like Jolly, that long-lost idol of her childhood, but eager-looking and less formal, with deeper eyes and brighter-coloured hair, for he wore no hat; altogether a very interesting "little" brother!

His tentative politeness charmed one who was accustomed to assurance in the youthful manner; he was disturbed because she was to drive him home, instead of his driving her. Shouldn't he have a shot? They hadn't a car at Robin Hill since the war, of course, and he had only driven once, and landed up a bank, so she oughtn't to mind his trying. His laugh, soft and infectious, was very attractive, though that word, she had heard, was now quite old-fashioned. When they reached the house he pulled out a crumpled letter which she read while he was washing — a quite short letter, which must have cost her father many a pang to write.

"MY DEAR,

"You and Val will not forget, I trust, that Jon knows nothing of family history. His mother and I think he is too young at present. The boy is very dear, and the apple of her eye. Verbum sapientibus.

Your loving father, J. F."

That was all; but it renewed in Holly an uneasy regret that Fleur was coming.

After tea she fulfilled that promise to herself and took Jon up the hill. They had a long talk, sitting above an old chalk-pit grown over with brambles and goosepenny. Milkwort and liverwort starred the green slope, the larks sang, and thrushes in the brake, and now and then a gull flighting inland would wheel very white against the paling sky, where the vague moon was coming up. Delicious fragrance came to them, as if little invisible creatures were running and treading scent out of the blades of grass.

Jon, who had fallen silent, said rather suddenly: "I say, this is wonderful! There's no fat on it at all. Gull's flight and sheep-bells —"

"Gull's flight and sheep-bells! You're a poet, my dear!"

Jon sighed.

"Oh, Golly! No go!"

"Try! I used to at your age."

"Did you? Mother says 'try' too; but I'm so rotten. Have you any of yours for me to see?"

"My dear," Holly murmured, "I've been married nineteen years. I only wrote verses when I wanted to be."

"Oh!" said Jon, and turned over on to his face: the one cheek she could see was a charming colour. Was Jon "touched in the wind," then, as Val would have called it? Already? But, if so, all the better, he would take no notice of young Fleur. Besides, on Monday he would begin his farming. And she smiled. Was it Burns who followed the plough, or only Piers Plowman? Nearly every young man and most young women seemed to be poets nowadays, from the number of their books she had read out in South Africa, importing them from Hatchus and Bumphards; and quite good — oh! quite; much better than she had been herself! But then poetry had only really come in since her day — with motor-cars. Another long talk after dinner over a wood fire in the low hall, and there seemed little left to know about Jon except anything of real importance. Holly parted from him at his bedroom door, having seen twice over that he had everything, with the conviction that she would love him, and Val would like him. He was eager, but did not gush; he was a splendid listener, sympathetic, reticent about himself. He evidently loved their father, and adored his mother. He liked riding, rowing, and fencing, better than games. He saved moths from candles, and couldn't bear spiders, but put them out of doors in screws of paper sooner than kill them. In a word, he was amiable. She went to sleep, thinking that he would suffer horribly if anybody hurt him; but who would hurt him?

Jon, on the other hand, sat awake at his window with a bit of paper and a pencil, writing his first "real poem" by the light of a candle because there was not enough moon to see by, only enough to make the night seem fluttery and as if engraved on silver. Just the night for Fleur to walk, and turn her eyes, and lead on — over the hills and far away. And Jon, deeply furrowed in his ingenuous brow, made marks on the paper and rubbed them out and wrote them in again, and did all that was necessary for the completion of a work of art; and he had a feeling such as the winds of Spring must have, trying their first songs among the coming blossom. Jon was one of those boys (not many) in whom a home-trained love of beauty had survived school life. He had had to keep it to himself, of course, so that not even the drawing-master knew of it; but it was there, fastidious and clear within him. And his poem seemed to him as lame and stilted as the night was winged. But he kept it all the same. It was a "beast," but better than nothing as an expression of the inexpressible. And he thought with a sort of discomfiture: 'I shan't be able to show it to Mother.' He slept terribly well, when he did sleep, overwhelmed by novelty.

VII

FLEUR

To avoid the awkwardness of questions which could not be answered, all that had been told Jon was: "There's a girl coming down with Val for the week-end."

For the same reason, all that had been told Fleur was: "We've got a youngster staying with us."

The two yearlings, as Val called them in his thoughts, met therefore in a manner which for unpreparedness left nothing to be desired. They were thus introduced by Holly:

"This is Jon, my little brother; Fleur's a cousin of ours, Jon."

Jon, who was coming in through a French window out of strong sunlight, was so confounded by the providential nature of this miracle, that he had time to hear Fleur say calmly: "Oh, how do you do?" as if he had never seen her, and to understand dimly from the quickest imaginable little movement of her head that he never HAD seen her. He bowed therefore over her hand in an intoxicated manner, and became more silent than the grave. He knew better than to speak. Once in his early life, surprised reading by a night-light, he had said fatuously "I was just turning over the leaves, Mum," and his mother had replied: "Jon, never tell stories, because of your face — nobody will ever believe them."

The saying had permanently undermined the confidence necessary to the success of spoken untruth. He listened therefore to Fleur's swift and rapt allusions to the jolliness of everything, plied her with scones and jam, and got away as soon as might be. They say that in delirium tremens you see a fixed object, preferably dark, which suddenly changes shape and position. Jon saw the fixed object; it had dark eyes and passably dark hair, and changed its position, but never its shape. The knowledge that between him and that object there was already a secret understanding (however impossible to understand) thrilled him so that he waited feverishly, and began to copy out his poem — which of course he would never dare to show her — till the sound of horses' hoofs roused him, and, leaning from his window, he saw her riding forth with Val. It was clear that she wasted no time; but the sight filled him with grief. He wasted his. If he had not bolted, in his fearful ecstasy, he might have been asked to go too. From his window he watched them disappear, appear again in the chine of the road, vanish, and emerge once more for a minute clear on the outline of the Down. 'Silly brute!' he thought; 'I always miss my chances.'

Why couldn't he be self-confident and ready? And, leaning his chin on his hands, he imagined the ride he might have had with her. A week-end was but a week-end, and he had missed three hours of it. Did he know any one except himself who would have been such a flat? He did not.

He dressed for dinner early, and was first down. He would miss no more. But he missed Fleur, who came down last. He sat opposite her at dinner, and it was terrible — impossible to say anything for fear of saying the wrong thing, impossible to keep his eyes fixed on her in the only natural way; in sum, impossible to treat normally one with whom in fancy he had already been over the hills and far away; conscious, too, all the time, that he must seem to her, to all of them, a dumb gawk. Yes, it was terrible! And she was talking so well — swooping with swift wing this way and that. Wonderful how she had learned an art which he found so disgustingly difficult. She must think him hopeless indeed!

His sister's eyes fixed on him with a certain astonishment, obliged him at last to look at Fleur; but instantly her eyes, very wide and eager, seeming to say: "Oh! for goodness' sake!" obliged him to look at Val; where a grin obliged him to look at his cutlet — that, at least, had no eyes, and no grin, and he ate it hastily.

"Jon is going to be a farmer," he heard Holly say; "a farmer and a poet."

He glanced up reproachfully, caught the comic lift of her eyebrow just like their father's, laughed, and felt better.

Val recounted the incident of Monsieur Prosper Profond; nothing could have been more favourable, for, in relating it, he regarded Holly, who in turn regarded him, while Fleur seemed to be regarding with a slight frown some thought of her own, and Jon was really free to look at her at last. She had on a white frock, very simple and well made; her arms were bare, and her hair had a white rose in it. In just that swift moment of free vision, after such intense discomfort, Jon saw her sublimated, as one sees in the dark a slender white fruit-tree; caught her like a verse of poetry flashed before the eyes of the mind, or a tune which floats out in the distance and dies.

He wondered giddily how old she was — she seemed so much more self-possessed and experienced than himself. Why mustn't he say they had met? He remembered suddenly his mother's face; puzzled, hurt-looking, when she answered: "Yes, they're relations, but we don't know them." Impossible that his mother, who loved beauty, should not admire Fleur if she did know her!

Alone with Val after dinner, he sipped port deferentially and answered the advances of this new-found brother-inlaw. As to riding (always the first consideration with Val) he could have the young chestnut, saddle and unsaddle it himself, and generally look after it when he brought it in. Jon said he was accustomed to all that at home, and saw that he had gone up one in his host's estimation.

"Fleur," said Val, "can't ride much yet, but she's keen. Of course, her father doesn't know a horse from a cartwheel. Does your dad ride?"

"He used to; but now he's — you know, he's —" He stopped, so hating the word old. His father was old, and yet not old; no — never!

"Quite!" muttered Val. "I used to know your brother up at Oxford, ages ago, the one who died in the Boer War. We had a fight in New College Gardens. That was a queer business," he added, musing; "a good deal came out of it."

Jon's eyes opened wide; all was pushing him towards historical research, when his sister's voice said gently from the doorway:

"Come along, you two," and he rose, his heart pushing him towards something far more modern.

Fleur having declared that it was "simply too wonderful to stay indoors," they all went out. Moonlight was frosting the dew, and an old sun-dial threw a long shadow. Two box hedges at right angles, dark and square, barred off the orchard. Fleur turned through that angled opening.

"Come on!" she called. Jon glanced at the others, and followed. She was running among the trees like a ghost. All was lovely and foamlike above her, and there was a scent of old trunks, and of nettles. She vanished. He thought he had lost her, then almost ran into her standing quite still.

"Isn't it jolly?" she cried, and Jon answered:

"Rather!"

She reached up, twisted off a blossom, and, twirling it in her fingers, said:

"I suppose I can call you Jon?"

"I should think so just."

"All right! But you know there's a feud between our families?"

Jon stammered: "Feud? Why?"

"It's ever so romantic and silly? That's why I pretended we hadn't met. Shall we get up early tomorrow morning and go for a walk before breakfast and have it out? I hate being slow about things, don't you?"

Jon murmured a rapturous assent.

"Six o'clock, then. I think your mother's beautiful."

Jon said fervently: "Yes, she is."

"I love all kinds of beauty," went on Fleur, "when it's exciting. I don't like Greek things a bit."

"What! Not Euripides?"

"Euripides? Oh! no, I can't bear Greek plays; they're so long. I think beauty's always swift. I like to look at ONE picture, for instance, and then run off. I can't bear a lot of things together. Look!" She held up her blossom in the moonlight. "That's better than all the orchard, I think."

And, suddenly, with her other hand she caught Jon's. "Of all things in the world, don't you think caution's the most awful? Smell the moonlight!"

She thrust the blossom against his face; Jon agreed giddily that of all things in the world caution was the worst, and bending over, kissed the hand which held his.

"That's nice and old-fashioned," said Fleur calmly. "You're frightfully silent, Jon. Still I like silence when it's swift." She let go his hand. "Did you think I dropped my handkerchief on purpose?"

“No!” cried Jon, intensely shocked.

“Well, I did, of course. Let’s get back, or they’ll think we’re doing this on purpose too.” And again she ran like a ghost among the trees. Jon followed, with love in his heart, Spring in his heart, and over all the moonlit white unearthly blossom. They came out where they had gone in, Fleur walking demurely.

“It’s quite wonderful in there,” she said dreamily to Holly.

Jon preserved silence, hoping against hope that she might be thinking it swift.

She bade him a casual and demure good-night, which made him think he had been dreaming. . . .

In her bedroom Fleur had flung off her gown, and, wrapped in a shapeless garment, with the white flower still in her hair, she looked like a mousme, sitting cross-legged on her bed, writing by candlelight.

“DEAREST CHERRY: “I believe I’m in love. I’ve got it in the neck, only the feeling is really lower down. He’s a second cousin — such a child, about six months older and ten years younger than I am. Boys always fall in love with their seniors, and girls with their juniors or with old men of forty. Don’t laugh, but his eyes are the truest things I ever saw; and he’s quite divinely silent! We had a most romantic first meeting in London under the Vospovitch ‘Juno.’ And now he’s sleeping in the next room and the moonlight’s on the blossom; and tomorrow morning, before anybody’s awake, we’re going to walk off into Down fairyland. There’s a feud between our families, which makes it really exciting. Yes! and I may have to use subterfuge and come on you for invitations — if so, you’ll know why! My father doesn’t want us to know each other, but I can’t help that. Life’s too short. He’s got the most beautiful mother, with lovely silvery hair and a young face with dark eyes. I’m staying with his sister — who married my cousin; it’s all mixed up, but I mean to pump her tomorrow. We’ve often talked about love being a spoil-sport; well, that’s all tosh, it’s the beginning of sport, and the sooner you feel it, my dear, the better for you.

“Jon (not simplified spelling, but short for Jolyon, which is a name in my family, they say) is the sort that lights up and goes out; about five feet ten, still growing, and I believe he’s going to be a poet. If you laugh at me I’ve done with you for ever. I perceive all sorts of difficulties, but you know when I really want a thing I get it. One of the chief effects of love is that you see the air sort of inhabited, like seeing a face in the moon; and you feel — you feel dancey and soft at the same time, with a funny sensation — like a continual first sniff of orange blossom — just above your stays. This is my first, and I feel as if it were going to be my last, which is absurd, of course, by all the laws of Nature and morality. If you mock me I will smite you, and if you tell anybody I will never forgive you. So much so, that I almost don’t think I’ll send this letter. Anyway, I’ll sleep over it. So good-night, my Cherry — oh!

Your FLEUR.”

❦

VIII

Idyll on Grass

When those two young Forsytes emerged from the chine lane, and set their faces East towards the sun, there was not a cloud in heaven, and the Downs were dewy. They had come at a good bat up the slope and were a little out of breath; if they had anything to say they did not say it, but marched in the early awkwardness of unbreakfasted morning under the songs of the larks. The stealing out had been fun, but with the freedom of the tops the sense of conspiracy ceased, and gave place to dumbness.

"We've made one blooming error," said Fleur, when they had gone half a mile. "I'm hungry."

Jon produced a stick of chocolate. They shared it and their tongues were loosened. They discussed the nature of their homes and previous existences, which had a kind of fascinating unreality up on that lonely height. There remained but one thing solid in Jon's past — his mother; but one thing solid in Fleur's — her father; and of these figures, as though seen in the distance with disapproving faces, they spoke little.

The Down dipped and rose again towards Chanctonbury Ring; a sparkle of far sea came into view, a sparrowhawk hovered in the sun's eye so that the blood-nourished brown of his wings gleamed nearly red. Jon had a passion for birds, and an aptitude for sitting very still to watch them; keen-sighted, and with a memory for what interested him, on birds he was almost worth listening to. But in Chanctonbury Ring there were none — its great beech temple was empty of life, and almost chilly at this early hour; they came out willingly again into the sun on the far side. It was Fleur's turn now. She spoke of dogs, and the way people treated them. It was wicked to keep them on chains! She would like to flog people who did that. Jon was astonished to find her so humanitarian. She knew a dog, it seemed, which some farmer near her home kept chained up at the end of his chicken run, in all weathers till it had almost lost its voice from barking!

"And the misery is," she said vehemently, "that if the poor thing didn't bark at every one who passes it wouldn't be kept there. I do think men are cunning brutes. I've let it go twice, on the sly; it's nearly bitten me both times, and then it goes simply mad with joy; but it always runs back home at last, and they chain it up again. If I had my way, I'd chain that man up."

Jon saw her teeth and her eyes gleam. "I'd brand him on his forehead with the word 'Brute'; that would teach him!"

Jon agreed that it would be a good remedy. "It's their sense of property," he said, "which makes people chain things. The last generation thought of nothing but property; and that's why there was the war."

"Oh!" said Fleur, "I never thought of that. Your people and mine quarrelled about property. And anyway we've all got it — at least, I suppose your people have."

"Oh! yes, luckily; I don't suppose I shall be any good at making money."

"If you were, I don't believe I should like you."

Jon slipped his hand tremulously under her arm.

Fleur looked straight before her, and chanted:

> "Jon, Jon, the farmer's son,
> Stole a pig, and away he run!"

Jon's arm crept round her waist.

"This is rather sudden," said Fleur calmly; "do you often do it?"

Jon dropped his arm. But when she laughed, his arm stole back again; and Fleur began to sing:

> "O who will o'er the downs so free,
> O who will with me ride?
> O who will up and follow me —"

"Sing, Jon!"

Jon sang. The larks joined in, sheep-bells, and an early morning church far away over in Steyning. They went on from tune to tune, till Fleur said:

“My God! I am hungry now!”

“Oh! I AM sorry!”

She looked round into his face.

“Jon, you’re rather a darling.”

And she pressed his hand against her waist. Jon almost reeled with happiness. A yellow-and-white dog coursing a hare startled them apart. They watched the two vanish down the slope, till Fleur said with a sigh: “He’ll never catch it, thank goodness! What’s the time? Mine’s stopped. I never wound it.”

Jon looked at his watch. “By Jove!” he said, “mine’s stopped, too.”

They walked on again, but only hand in hand.

“If the grass is dry,” said Fleur, “let’s sit down for half a minute.”

Jon took off his coat, and they shared it.

“Smell! Actually wild thyme!”

With his arm round her waist again, they sat some minutes in silence.

“We are goats!” cried Fleur, jumping up; “we shall be most fearfully late, and look so silly, and put them on their guard. Look here, Jon! We only came out to get an appetite for breakfast, and lost our way. See?”

“Yes,” said Jon.

“It’s serious; there’ll be a stopper put on us. Are you a good liar?”

“I believe not very; but I can try.” Fleur frowned.

“You know,” she said, “I realise that they don’t mean us to be friends.”

“Why not?”

“I told you why.”

“But that’s silly.”

“Yes; but you don’t know my father!”

“I suppose he’s fearfully fond of you.”

“You see, I’m an only child. And so are you — of your mother. Isn’t it a bore? There’s so much expected of one. By the time they’ve done expecting, one’s as good as dead.”

“Yes,” muttered Jon, “life’s beastly short. One wants to live for ever, and know everything.”

“And love everybody?”

“No,” cried Jon; “I only want to love once — you.”

“Indeed! You’re coming on! Oh! Look! There’s the chalk-pit; we can’t be very far now. Let’s run.”

Jon followed, wondering fearfully if he had offended her.

The chalk-pit was full of sunshine and the murmuration of bees. Fleur flung back her hair.

“Well,” she said, “in case of accidents, you may give me one kiss, Jon,” and she pushed her cheek forward. With ecstasy he kissed that hot soft cheek.

“Now, remember! We lost our way; and leave it to me as much as you can. I’m going to be rather beastly to you; it’s safer; try and be beastly to me!”

Jon shook his head. “That’s impossible.”

“Just to please me; till five o’clock, at all events.”

“Anybody will be able to see through it,” said Jon gloomily.

“Well, do your best. Look! There they are! Wave your hat! Oh! you haven’t got one. Well, I’ll cooee! Get a little away from me, and look sulky.”

Five minutes later, entering the house and, doing his utmost to look sulky, Jon heard her clear voice in the dining-room:

“Oh! I’m simply RAVENOUS! He’s going to be a farmer — and he loses his way! The boy’s an idiot!”

IX

GOYA

Lunch was over and Soames mounted to the picture-gallery in his house near Mapledurham. He had what Annette called "a grief." Fleur was not yet home. She had been expected on Wednesday; had wired that it would be Friday; and again on Friday that it would be Sunday afternoon; and here were her aunt, and her cousins the Cardigans, and this fellow Profond, and everything flat as a pancake for the want of her. He stood before his Gauguin — sorest point of his collection. He had bought the ugly great thing with two early Matisses before the war, because there was such a fuss about those Post-Impressionist chaps. He was wondering whether Profond would take them off his hands — the fellow seemed not to know what to do with his money — when he heard his sister's voice say: "I think that's a horrid thing, Soames." and saw that Winifred had followed him up.

"Oh! you DO?" he said dryly; "I gave five hundred for it."

"Fancy! Women aren't made like that even if they are black."

Soames uttered a glum laugh. "You didn't come up to tell me that."

"No. Do you know that Jolyon's boy is staying with Val and his wife?"

Soames spun round.

"What?"

"Yes," drawled Winifred; "he's gone to live with them there while he learns farming."

Soames had turned away, but her voice pursued him as he walked up and down. "I warned Val that neither of them was to be spoken to about old matters."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

Winifred shrugged her substantial shoulders.

"Fleur does what she likes. You've always spoiled her. Besides, my dear boy, what's the harm?"

"The harm!" muttered Soames. "Why, she —" he checked himself. The Juno, the handkerchief, Fleur's eyes, her questions, and now this delay in her return — the symptoms seemed to him so sinister that, faithful to his nature, he could not part with them.

"I think you take too much care," said Winifred; "if I were you, I should tell her of that old matter. It's no good thinking that girls in these days are as they used to be. Where they pick up their knowledge I can't tell, but they seem to know everything."

Over Soames's face, closely composed, passed a sort of spasm, and Winifred added hastily:

"If you don't like to speak of it, I could for you." Soames shook his head. Unless there was absolute necessity the thought that his adored daughter should learn of that old scandal hurt his pride too much.

"No," he said, "not yet. Never if I can help it."

"Nonsense, my dear. Think what people are!"

"Twenty years is a long time," muttered Soames, "outside our family, who's likely to remember?"

Winifred was silenced. She inclined more and more to that peace and quietness of which Montague Dartie had deprived her in her youth. And, since pictures always depressed her, she soon went down again.

Soames passed into the corner where, side by side, hung his real Goya, and the copy of the fresco "La Vendimia." His acquisition of the real Goya rather beautifully illustrated the cobweb of vested interests and passions, which mesh the bright-winged fly of human life. The real Goya's noble owner's ancestor had come into possession of it during some Spanish war — it was in a word loot. The noble owner had remained in ignorance of its value until in the nineties an enterprising critic discovered that a Spanish painter named Goya was a genius. It was only a fair Goya, but almost unique in England, and the noble owner became a marked man. Having many possessions and that aristocratic culture which, independent of mere sensuous enjoyment, is founded on the sounder principle that one must know everything and be fearfully interested in life, he had fully intended to keep an article which contributed to his reputation while he was alive, and to leave it to the nation after he was dead. Fortunately for Soames, the House of Lords was violently attacked in 1909, and the noble owner became alarmed and angry. “If,” he said to himself, “they think they can have it both ways they are very much mistaken. So long as they leave me in quiet enjoyment the nation can have some of my pictures at my death. But if the nation is going to bait me, and rob me like this, I’m damned if I won’t sell the — lot. They can’t have my private property and my public spirit — both.” He brooded in this fashion for several months till one morning, after reading the speech of a certain statesman, he telegraphed to his agent to come down and bring Bodkin. On going over the collection Bodkin, than whose opinion on market values none was more sought, pronounced that with a free hand to sell to America, Germany, and other places where there was an interest in art, a lot more money could be made than by selling in England. The noble owner’s public spirit — he said — was well known but the pictures were unique. The noble owner put this opinion in his pipe and smoked it for a year. At the end of that time he read another speech by the same statesman, and telegraphed to his agents: “Give Bodkin a free hand.” It was at this juncture that Bodkin conceived the idea which salved the Goya and two other unique pictures for the native country of the noble owner. With one hand Bodkin proffered the pictures to the foreign market, with the other he formed a list of private British collectors. Having obtained what he considered the highest possible bids from across the seas, he submitted pictures and bids to the private British collectors, and invited them, of their public spirit, to outbid. In three instances (including the Goya) out of twenty-one he was successful. And why? One of the private collectors made buttons — he had made so many that he desired that his wife should be called Lady “Buttons.” He therefore bought an unique picture at great cost, and gave it to the nation. It was “part,” his friends said, “of his general game.” The second of the private collectors was an Americo-phobe, and bought a unique picture to “spite the damned Yanks.” The third of the private collectors was Soames, who — more sober than either of the others — bought after a visit to Madrid, because he was certain that Goya was still on the up grade. Goya was not booming at the moment, but he would come again; and, looking at that portrait, Hogarthian, Manetesque in its directness, but with its own queer sharp beauty of paint, he was perfectly satisfied still that he had made no error, heavy though the price had been — heaviest he had ever paid. And next to it was hanging the copy of “La Vendimia.” There she was — the little wretch — looking back at him in her dreamy mood, the mood he loved best because he felt so much safer when she looked like that.

He was still gazing when the scent of a cigar impinged on his nostrils, and a voice said: “Well, Mr. Forsyde, what you goin’ to do with this small lot?”

That Belgian chap, whose mother — as if Flemish blood were not enough — had been Armenian! Subduing a natural irritation, he said: “Are you a judge of pictures?”

“Well, I’ve got a few myself.”

“Any Post-Impressionists?”

“Ye-es, I rather like them.”

“What do you think of this?” said Soames, pointing to the Gauguin.

Monsieur Profond protruded his lower lip and short pointed beard. “Rather fine, I think,” he said; “do you want to sell it?”

Soames checked his instinctive “Not particularly”— he would not chaffer with this alien.

“Yes,” he said.

“What do you want for it?”

“What I gave.”

“All right,” said Monsieur Profond. “I’ll be glad to take that small picture. Post-Impressionists — they’re awful dead, but they’re amusin’. I don’ care for pictures much, but I’ve got some, just a small lot.”

“What DO you care for?”

Monsieur Profond shrugged his shoulders. “Life’s awful like a lot of monkeys scramblin’ for empty nuts.”

“You’re young,” said Soames. If the fellow must make a generalisation, he needn’t suggest that the forms of property lacked solidity!

“I don’ worry,” replied Monsieur Profond smiling; “we’re born, and we die. Half the world’s starvin’. I feed a small lot of babies out in my mother’s country; but what’s the use? Might as well throw my money in the river.”

Soames looked at him, and turned back towards his Goya. He didn't know what the fellow wanted.

"What shall I make my cheque for?" pursued Monsieur Profond.

"Five hundred," said Soames shortly; "but I don't want you to take it if you don't care for it more than that."

"That's all right," said Monsieur Profond; "I'll be 'appy to 'ave that picture."

He wrote a cheque with a fountain-pen heavily chased with gold. Soames watched the process uneasily. How on earth had the fellow known that he wanted to sell that picture? Monsieur Profond held out the cheque.

"The English are awful funny about pictures," he said. "So are the French, so are my people. They're all awful funny."

"I don't understand you," said Soames stiffly.

"It's like hats," said Monsieur Profond enigmatically, "small or large, turnin' up or down — just the fashion. Awful funny." And, smiling, he drifted out of the gallery again, blue and solid like the smoke of his excellent cigar.

Soames had taken the cheque, feeling as if the intrinsic value of ownership had been called in question. 'He's a cosmopolitan,' he thought, watching Profond emerge from under the verandah with Annette, and saunter down the lawn towards the river. What his wife saw in the fellow he didn't know, unless it was that he could speak her language; and there passed in Soames what Monsieur Profond would have called a "small doubt" whether Annette was not too handsome to be walking with any one so "cosmopolitan." Even at that distance he could see the blue fumes from Profond's cigar wreathe out in the quiet sunlight; and his grey buckskin shoes, and his grey hat — the fellow was a dandy! And he could see the quick turn of his wife's head, so very straight on her desirable neck and shoulders. That turn of her neck always seemed to him a little too showy, and in the "Queen of all I survey" manner — not quite distinguished. He watched them walk along the path at the bottom of the garden. A young man in flannels joined them down there — a Sunday caller no doubt, from up the river. Soames went back to his Goya. He was still staring at that replica of Fleur, and worrying over Winifred's news, when his wife's voice said:

"Mr. Michael Mont, Soames. You invited him to see your pictures."

There was the cheerful young man of the Gallery off Cork Street!

"Turned up, you see, sir; I live only four miles from Pangbourne. Jolly day, isn't it?"

Confronted with the results of his expansiveness, Soames scrutinised his visitor. The young man's mouth was excessively large and curly — he seemed always grinning. Why didn't he grow the rest of those idiotic little moustaches, which made him look like a music-hall buffoon? What on earth were young men about, deliberately lowering their class with these tooth-brushes, or little slug whiskers? Ugh! Affected young idiots! In other respects he was presentable, and his flannels very clean.

"Happy to see you!" he said.

The young man, who had been turning his head from side to side, became transfixed. "I say!" he said, "'some' picture!"

Soames saw, with mixed sensations, that he had addressed the remark to the Goya copy.

"Yes," he said dryly, "that's not a Goya. It's a copy. I had it painted because it reminded me of my daughter."

"By Jove! I thought I knew the face, sir. Is she here?"

The frankness of his interest almost disarmed Soames.

"She'll be in after tea," he said. "Shall we go round the gallery?"

And Soames began that round which never tired him. He had not anticipated much intelligence from one who had mistaken a copy for an original, but as they passed from section to section, period to period, he was startled by the young man's frank and relevant remarks. Natively shrewd himself, and even sensuous beneath his mask, Soames had not spent thirty-eight years over his one hobby without knowing something more about pictures than their market values. He was, as it were, the missing link between the artist and the commercial public. Art for art's sake and all that, of course, was cant. But aesthetics and good taste were necessary. The appreciation of enough persons of good taste was what gave a work of art its permanent market value, or in other words made it "a work of art." There was no real cleavage. And he was sufficiently accustomed to sheep-like and unseeing visitors, to be intrigued by one who did not hesitate to say of Mauve: "Good old haystacks!" or of James Maris: "Didn't he just paint and paper 'em! Mathew was the real swell, sir; you could dig into his surfaces!" It was after the young man had whistled before a Whistler, with the words: "D'you think he ever really saw a naked woman, sir?" that Soames remarked:

"What ARE you, Mr. Mont, if I may ask?"

"I, sir? I WAS going to be a painter, but the War knocked that. Then in the trenches, you know, I used to dream of the Stock Exchange, snug and warm and just noisy enough. But the Peace knocked that; shares seem off, don't they? I've only been demobbed about a year. What do you recommend, sir?"

"Have you got money?"

"Well," answered the young man; "I've got a father, I kept him alive during the War, so he's bound to keep me alive now. Though, of course, there's the question whether he ought to be allowed to hang on to his property. What do you think about that, sir?"

Soames, pale and defensive, smiled.

"The old man has fits when I tell him he may have to work yet. He's got land, you know; it's a fatal disease."

"This is my real Goya," said Soames dryly.

"By George! He WAS a swell. I saw a Goya in Munich once that bowled me middle stump. A most evil-looking old woman in the most gorgeous lace. HE made no compromise with the public taste. That old boy was 'some' explosive; he must have smashed up a lot of convention in his day. Couldn't he just paint! He makes Velasquez stiff, don't you think?"

"I have no Velasquez," said Soames.

The young man stared. "No," he said; "only nations or profiteers can afford him, I suppose. I say, why shouldn't all the bankrupt nations sell their Velasquezes and Titians and other swells to the profiteers by force, and then pass a law that any one who holds a picture by an Old Master — see schedule — must hang it in a public gallery? There seems something in that."

"Shall we go down to tea?" said Soames.

The young man's ears seemed to droop on his skull. 'He's not dense,' thought Soames, following him off the premises.

Goya, with his satiric and surpassing precision, his original "line," and the daring of his light and shade, could have reproduced to admiration the group assembled round Annette's tea-tray in the ingle-nook below. He alone, perhaps, of painters would have done justice to the sunlight filtering through a screen of creeper, to the lovely pallor of brass, the old cut glasses, the thin slices of lemon in pale amber tea; justice to Annette in her black lacey dress; there was something of the fair Spaniard in her beauty, though it lacked the spirituality of that rare type; to Winifred's grey-haired, corseted solidity; to Soames, of a certain grey and flat-cheeked distinction; to the vivacious Michael Mont, pointed in ear and eye; to Imogen, dark, luscious of glance, growing a little stout; to Prosper Profond, with his expression as who should say: "Well, Mr. Goya, what's the use of paintin' this small party?" finally, to Jack Cardigan, with his shining stare and tanned sanguinity betraying the moving principle: "I'm English, and I live to be fit."

Curious, by the way, that Imogen, who as a girl had declared solemnly one day at Timothy's that she would never marry a good man — they were so dull — should have married Jack Cardigan, in whom health had so destroyed all traces of original sin, that she might have retired to rest with ten thousand other Englishmen without knowing the difference from the one she had chosen to repose beside. "Oh!" she would say of him, in her "amusing" way; "Jack keeps himself so fearfully fit; he's never had a day's illness in his life. He went right through the war without a finger-ache. You really can't imagine how fit he is!" Indeed, he was so "fit" that he couldn't see when she was flirting, which was such a comfort in a way. All the same she was quite fond of him, so far as one could be of a sports-machine, and of the two little Cardigans made after his pattern. Her eyes just then were comparing him maliciously with Prosper Profond. There was no "small" sport or game which Monsieur Profond had not played at too, it seemed, from skittles to harpon-fishing, and worn out every one. Imogen would sometimes wish that they had worn out Jack, who continued to play at them and talk of them with the simple zeal of a schoolgirl learning hockey; at the age of Great-uncle Timothy she well knew that Jack would be playing carpet golf in her bedroom, and "wiping somebody's eye."

He was telling them now how he had "pipped the pro — a charmin' fellow, playin' a very good game," at the last hole this morning; and how he had pulled down to Caversham since lunch, and trying to incite Prosper Profond to play him a set of tennis after tea — do him good —"keep him fit."

"But what's the use of keepin' fit?" said Monsieur Profond.

"Yes, sir," murmured Michael Mont, "what do you keep fit for?"

“Jack,” cried Imogen, enchanted, “what do you keep fit for?”

Jack Cardigan stared with all his health. The questions were like the buzz of a mosquito, and he put up his hand to wipe them away. During the War, of course, he had kept fit to kill Germans; now that it was over he either did not know, or shrank in delicacy from explanation of his moving principle.

“But he’s right,” said Monsieur Profond unexpectedly, “there’s nothin’ left but keepin’ fit.”

The saying, too deep for Sunday afternoon, would have passed unanswered, but for the mercurial nature of young Mont.

“Good!” he cried. “That’s the great discovery of the war. We all thought we were progressing — now we know we’re only changing.”

“For the worse,” said Monsieur Profond genially.

“How you are cheerful, Prosper!” murmured Annette.

“You come and play tennis!” said Jack Cardigan; “you’ve got the hump. We’ll soon take that down. D’you play, Mr. Mont?”

“I hit the ball about, sir.”

At this juncture Soames rose, ruffled in that deep instinct of preparation for the future which guided his existence.

“When Fleur comes —” he heard Jack Cardigan say.

Ah! and why didn’t she come? He passed through drawing-room, hall, and porch out onto the drive, and stood there listening for the car. All was still and Sunday-fied; the lilacs in full flower scented the air. There were white clouds, like the feathers of ducks gilded by the sunlight. Memory of the day when Fleur was born, and he had waited in such agony with her life and her mother’s balanced in his hands, came to him sharply. He had saved her then, to be the flower of his life. And now! Was she going to give him trouble — pain — give him trouble? He did not like the look of things! A blackbird broke in on his reverie with an evening song — a great big fellow up in that acacia-tree. Soames had taken quite an interest in his birds of late years; he and Fleur would walk round and watch them; her eyes were sharp as needles, and she knew every nest. He saw her dog, a retriever, lying on the drive in a patch of sunlight, and called to him, “Hallo, old fellow — waiting for her too!” The dog came slowly with a grudging tail, and Soames mechanically laid a pat on his head. The dog, the bird, the lilac all were part of Fleur for him; no more, no less. ‘Too fond of her!’ he thought, ‘too fond!’ He was like a man uninsured, with his ships at sea. Uninsured again — as in that other time, so long ago, when he would wander dumb and jealous in the wilderness of London, longing for that woman — his first wife — he mother of this infernal boy. Ah! There was the car at last! It drew up, it had luggage, but no Fleur.

“Miss Fleur is walking up, sir, by the towing-path”

Walking all those miles? Soames stared. The man’s face had the beginning of a smile on it. What was he grinning at? And very quickly he turned, saying: “All right, Sims!” and went into the house. He mounted to the picture-gallery once more. He had from there a view of the river bank, and stood with his eyes fixed on it, oblivious of the fact that it would be an hour at least before her figure showed there. Walking up! And that fellow’s grin! The boy —! He turned abruptly from the window. He couldn’t spy on her. If she wanted to keep things from him — she must; he could not spy on her. His heart felt empty; and bitterness mounted from it into his very mouth. The staccato shouts of Jack Cardigan pursuing the ball, the laugh of young Mont rose in the stillness and came in. He hoped they were making that chap Profond run. And the girl in “La Vendimia” stood with her arm akimbo and her dreamy eyes looking past him. ‘I’ve done all I could for you,’ he thought, ‘since you were no higher than my knee. You aren’t going to — to — hurt me, are you?’

But the Goya copy answered not, brilliant in colour just beginning to tone down. ‘There’s no real life in it,’ thought Soames. ‘Why doesn’t she come?’

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X

TRIO

Among those four Forsytes of the third, and, as one might say, fourth generation, at Wansdon under the Downs, a week-end prolonged unto the ninth day had stretched the crossing threads of tenacity almost to snapping-point. Never had Fleur been so "FINE," Holly so watchful, Val so stable-secretive, Jon so silent and disturbed. What he learned of farming in that week might have been balanced on the point of a pen-knife and puffed off. He, whose nature was essentially averse to intrigue, and whose adoration of Fleur disposed him to think that any need for concealing it was "skittles," chafed and fretted, yet obeyed, taking what relief he could in the few moments when they were alone. On Thursday, while they were standing in the bay window of the drawing-room, dressed for dinner, she said to him:

"Jon, I'm going home on Sunday by the 3.40 from Paddington; if you were to go home on SATURDAY you could come up on Sunday and take me down, and just get back here by the last train, after. You WERE going home anyway, weren't you?"

Jon nodded.

"Anything to be with you," he said; "only why need I pretend —"

Fleur slipped her little finger into his palm:

"You have no instinct, Jon; you MUST leave things to me. It's serious about our people. We've simply got to be secret at present, if we want to be together." The door was opened, and she added loudly: "You ARE a duffer, Jon."

Something turned over within Jon; he could not bear this subterfuge about a feeling so natural, so overwhelming, and so sweet.

On Friday night about eleven he had packed his bag, and was leaning out of his window, half miserable and half lost in a dream of Paddington station, when he heard a tiny sound, as of a finger-nail tapping on his door. He rushed to it and listened. Again the sound. It WAS a nail. He opened. Oh! What a lovely thing came in!

"I wanted to show you my fancy dress," it said, and struck an attitude at the foot of his bed. Jon drew a long breath and leaned against the door. The apparition wore white muslin on its head, a fichu round its bare neck over a wine-coloured dress, fulled out below its slender waist. It held one arm akimbo, and the other raised right-angled holding a fan which touched its head.

"This ought to be a basket of grapes," it whispered, "but I haven't got it here. It's my Goya dress. And this is the attitude in the picture. Do you like it?"

"It's a dream."

The apparition pirouetted. "Touch it, and see."

Jon knelt down and took the skirt reverently.

"Grape colour," came the whisper, "all grapes — La Vendimia — the vintage."

Jon's fingers scarcely touched each side of the waist; he looked up, with adoring eyes.

"Oh! Jon," it whispered; bent, kissed his forehead, pirouetted again, and — gliding out, was gone.

Jon stayed on his knees, and his head fell forward against the bed. How long he stayed like that he did not know. The little noises of the tapping nail, the feet, the skirts rustling — as in a dream — went on about him; and before his closed eyes the figure stood and smiled and whispered, a faint perfume of narcissus lingering in the air. And his forehead where it had been kissed had a little cool place between the brows, like the imprint of a flower. Love filled his soul, that love of boy for girl which knows so little, hopes so much, would not brush the down off for the world, and must become in time a fragrant memory — a searing passion — a humdrum mateship — or, once in many times, vintage full and sweet with sunset colour on the grapes.

Enough has been said about Jon Forsyte here and in another place to show what long marches lay between him and his great-great-grandfather, the first Jolyon, in Dorset down by the sea. Jon was sensitive as a girl, more sensitive than nine out of ten girls of the day; imaginative as one of his half-sister June's "lame duck" painters; affectionate as a son of his father and his mother naturally would be. And yet, in his inner tissue, there was something of the old founder of his family, a secret tenacity of soul, a dread of showing his feelings, a determination not to know when he was beaten. Sensitive, imaginative, affectionate boys get a bad time at school, but Jon had instinctively kept his nature dark, and been but normally unhappy there. Only with his mother had he, up till then, been absolutely frank and natural; and when he went home to Robin Hill that Saturday his heart was heavy because Fleur had said that he must not be frank and natural with her from whom he had never yet kept anything, must not even tell her that they had met again, unless he found that she knew already. So intolerable did this seem to him that he was very near to telegraphing an excuse and staying up in London. And the first thing his mother said to him was:

"So you've had our little friend of the confectioner's there, Jon. What is she like on second thoughts?"

With relief, and a high colour, Jon answered:

"Oh! awfully jolly, Mum."

Her arm pressed his.

Jon had never loved her so much as in that minute which seemed to falsify Fleur's fears and to release his soul. He turned to look at her, but something in her smiling face — something which only he perhaps would have caught — stopped the words bubbling up in him. Could fear go with a smile? If so, there was fear in her face. And out of Jon tumbled quite other words, about farming, Holly, and the Downs. Talking fast, he waited for her to come back to Fleur. But she did not. Nor did his father mention her, though of course he, too, must know. What deprivation, and killing of reality was in this silence about Fleur — when he was so full of her, when his mother was so full of Jon, and his father so full of his mother! And so the trio spent the evening of that Saturday.

After dinner his mother played; she seemed to play all the things he liked best, and he sat with one knee clasped, and his hair standing up where his fingers had run through it. He gazed at his mother while she played, but he saw Fleur — Fleur in the moonlit orchard, Fleur in the sunlit gravel-pit, Fleur in that fancy dress, swaying, whispering, stooping, kissing his forehead. Once, while he listened, he forgot himself and glanced at his father in that other easy chair. What was Dad looking like that for? The expression on his face was so sad and puzzling. It filled him with a sort of remorse, so that he got up and went and sat on the arm of his father's chair. From there he could not see his face; and again he saw Fleur — in his mother's hands, slim and white on the keys, in the profile of her face and her powdery hair; and down the long room in the open window where the May night walked outside.

When he went up to bed his mother came into his room. She stood at the window, and said:

"Those cypresses your grandfather planted down there have done wonderfully. I always think they look beautiful under a dropping moon. I wish you had known your grandfather, Jon."

"Were you married to Father, when he was alive?" asked Jon suddenly.

"No, dear; he died in '92 — very old — eighty-five, I think."

"Is Father like him?"

"A little, but more subtle, and not quite so solid."

"I know, from Grandfather's portrait; who painted that?"

"One of June's 'lame ducks.' But it's quite good."

Jon slipped his hand through his Mother's arm. "Tell me about the family quarrel, Mum."

He felt her arm quivering. "No, dear; that's for your father some day, if he thinks fit."

"Then it WAS serious," said Jon, with a catch in his breath.

"Yes." And there was a silence, during which neither knew whether the arm or the hand within it were quivering most.

"Some people," said Irene softly, "think the moon on her back is evil; to me she's always lovely. Look at those cypress shadows! Jon, Father says we may go to Italy, you and I, for two months. Would you like?"

Jon took his hand from under her arm; his sensation was so sharp and so confused. Italy with his Mother! A fortnight ago it would have been perfection; now it filled him with dismay; he felt that the sudden suggestion had to do with Fleur. He stammered out:

"Oh! yes; only — I don't know. Ought I— now I've just begun? I'd like to think it over."

Her voice answered, cool and gentle:

"Yes, dear; think it over. But better now than when you've begun farming seriously. Italy with you —! It would be nice!"

Jon put his arm round her waist, still slim and firm as a girl's.

"Do you think you ought to leave Father?" he said feebly, feeling very mean.

"Father suggested it; he thinks you ought to see Italy at least before you settle down to anything."

The sense of meanness died in Jon; he knew, yes — he knew — that his father and his mother were not speaking frankly, no more than he himself. They wanted to keep him from Fleur! His heart hardened. And, as if she felt that process going on, his mother said:

"Good-night, darling. Have a good sleep and think it over. But it would be lovely!"

She pressed him to her so quickly that he did not see her face. Jon stood feeling exactly as he used to when he was a naughty little boy; sore because he was not loving, and because he was justified in his own eyes.

But Irene, after she had stood a moment in her own room, passed through the dressing-room between it and her husband's.

"Well?"

"He will think it over, Jolyon."

Watching her lips that wore a little drawn smile, Jolyon said quietly:

"You had better let me tell him, and have done with it. After all, Jon has the instincts of a gentleman. He has only to understand —"

"Only! He can't understand; that's impossible."

"I believe I could have at his age."

Irene caught his hand. "You were always more of a realist than Jon; and never so innocent."

"That's true," said Jolyon. "It's queer, isn't it? You and I would tell our stories to the world without a particle of shame; but our own boy stumps us."

"We've never cared whether the world approves or not."

"Jon would not disapprove of US!"

"Oh! Jolyon, yes. He's in love, I feel he's in love. And he'd say: 'My mother once married WITHOUT LOVE! How could she have!' It'll seem to him a crime! And so it was!"

Jolyon took her hand, and said with a wry smile:

"Ah! why on earth are we born young? Now, if only we were born old and grew younger year by year we should understand how things happen, and drop all our cursed intolerance. But you know if the boy is really in love, he won't forget, even if he goes to Italy. We're a tenacious breed; and he'll know by instinct why he's being sent. Nothing will really cure him but the shock of being told."

"Let me try, anyway."

Jolyon stood a moment without speaking. Between this devil and this deep sea — the pain of a dreaded disclosure and the grief of losing his wife for two months — he secretly hoped for the devil; yet if she wished for the deep sea he must put up with it. After all, it would be training for that departure from which there would be no return. And, taking her in his arms, he kissed her eyes, and said:

"As you will, my love."

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XI

Duet

That "small" emotion, love, grows amazingly when threatened with extinction. Jon reached Paddington station half an hour before his time and a full week after, as it seemed to him. He stood at the appointed book-stall amid a crowd of Sunday travellers, in a Harris tweed suit exhaling, as it were, the emotion of his thumping heart. He read the names of the novels on the bookstall, and bought one at last, to avoid being regarded with suspicion by the book-stall clerk. It was called "The Heart of the Trail" which must mean something, though it did not seem to. He also bought "The Lady's Mirror" and "The Landsman." Every minute was an hour long, and full of horrid imaginings. After nineteen had passed, he saw her with a bag and a porter wheeling her luggage. She came swiftly; she came cool. She greeted him as if he were a brother.

"First class," she said to the porter, "corner seats; opposite."

Jon admired her frightful self-possession.

"Can't we get a carriage to ourselves?" he whispered.

"No good; it's a stopping train. After Maidenhead perhaps. Look natural, Jon."

Jon screwed his features into a scowl. They got in-with two other beasts! — oh! heaven! He tipped the porter unnaturally, in his confusion. The brute deserved nothing for putting them in there, and looking as if he knew all about it into the bargain.

Fleur hid herself behind "The Lady's Mirror." Jon imitated her behind "The Landsman." The train started. Fleur let "The Lady's Mirror" fall and leaned forward. "Well?" she said.

"It's seemed about fifteen days."

She nodded, and Jon's face lighted up at once.

"Look natural," murmured Fleur, and went off into a bubble of laughter. It hurt him. How could he look natural with Italy hanging over him? He had meant to break it to her gently, but now he blurted it out.

"They want me to go to Italy with Mother for two months."

Fleur drooped her eyelids; turned a little pale, and bit her lips.

"Oh!" she said. It was all, but it was much.

That "Oh!" was like the quick drawback of the wrist in fencing ready for riposte. It came.

"You must go!"

"Go?" said Jon in a strangled voice.

"Of course."

"But — two months — it's ghastly."

"No," said Fleur, "six weeks. You'll have forgotten me by then. We'll meet in the National Gallery the day after you get back."

Jon laughed.

"But suppose you've forgotten ME," he muttered into the noise of the train.

Fleur shook her head.

"Some other beast —" murmured Jon.

Her foot touched his.

"No other beast," she said, lifting the "Lady's Mirror."

The train stopped; two passengers got out, and one got in.

'I shall die,' thought Jon, 'if we're not alone at all.'

The train went on; and again Fleur leaned forward.

"I never let go," she said; "do you?"

Jon shook his head vehemently.

"Never!" he said. "Will you write to me?"

"No; but YOU can — to my club."

She had a Club; she was wonderful!

"Did you pump Holly?" he muttered.

"Yes, but got nothing. I didn't dare pump hard."

"What can it be?" cried Jon.

"I shall find out all right."

A long silence followed till Fleur said: "This is Maidenhead, stand by, Jon!"

The train stopped. The remaining passenger got out. Fleur drew down her blind.

"Quick!" she cried. "Hang out! Look as much of a beast as you can."

Jon blew his nose, and scowled; never in all his life had he scowled like that! An old lady recoiled, a young one tried the handle. It turned, but the lock would not open. The train moved, the young lady darted to another carriage.

"What luck!" cried Jon. "It jammed."

"Yes," said Fleur; "I was holding it."

The train moved out, and Jon fell on his knees.

"Look out for the corridor," she whispered; "and — quick!"

Her lips met his. And though their kiss only lasted perhaps ten seconds Jon's soul left his body and went so far beyond that, when he was again sitting opposite that demure figure, he was pale as death. He heard her sigh, and the sound seemed to him the most precious he had ever heard — an exquisite declaration that he meant something to her.

"Six weeks isn't really long," she said; "and you can easily make it six if you keep your head out there, and never seem to think of me."

Jon gasped.

"This is just what's really wanted, Jon, to convince them, don't you see? If we're just as bad when you come back they'll stop being ridiculous about it. Only, I'm sorry it's not Spain; there's a girl in a Goya picture at Madrid who's like me, Father says. Only she isn't — we've got a copy of her."

It was to Jon like a ray of sunshine piercing through a fog. "I'll make it Spain," he said, "Mother won't mind; she's never been there. And my father thinks a lot of Goya."

"Oh! yes, he's a painter — isn't he?"

"Only water-colour," said Jon, with honesty.

"When we come to Reading, Jon, get out first and go down to Caversham lock and wait for me. I'll send the car home and we'll walk by the towing-path."

Jon seized her hand in gratitude, and they sat silent, with the world well lost, and one eye on the corridor. But the train seemed to run twice as fast now, and its sound was almost lost in that of Jon's sighing.

"We're getting near," said Fleur; "the towing-path's awfully exposed. One more! Oh! Jon, don't forget me."

Jon answered with his kiss. And very soon, a flushed, distracted-looking youth could have been seen — as they say — leaping from the train and hurrying along the platform, searching his pockets for his ticket.

When at last she rejoined him on the towing-path a little beyond Caversham lock he had made an effort, and regained some measure of equanimity. If they had to part, he would not make a scene! A breeze by the bright river threw the white side of the willow leaves up into the sunlight, and followed those two with its faint rustle.

"I told our chauffeur that I was train-giddy," said Fleur. "Did you look pretty natural as you went out?" "I don't know. What is natural?"

"It's natural to you to look seriously happy. When I first saw you I thought you weren't a bit like other people."

"Exactly what I thought when I saw you. I knew at once I should never love anybody else."

Fleur laughed.

"We're absurdly young. And love's young dream is out of date, Jon. Besides, it's awfully wasteful. Think of all the fun you might have. You haven't begun, even; it's a shame, really. And there's me. I wonder!"

Confusion came on Jon's spirit. How could she say such things just as they were going to part?

"If you feel like that," he said, "I can't go. I shall tell Mother that I ought to try and work. There's always the condition of the world!"

"The condition of the world!"

Jon thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"But there is," he said; "think of the people starving!"

Fleur shook her head. "No, no, I never, never will make myself miserable for nothing."

"Nothing! But there's an awful state of things, and of course one ought to help."

"Oh! yes, I know all that. But you can't help people, Jon; they're hopeless. When you pull them out of a hole they only get into another. Look at them, still fighting and plotting and struggling, though they're dying in heaps all the time. Idiots!"

"Aren't you sorry for them?"

"Oh! sorry — yes, but I'm not going to make myself unhappy about it; that's no good."

And they were silent, disturbed by this first glimpse of each other's natures.

"I think people are brutes and idiots," said Fleur stubbornly.

"I think they're poor wretches," said Jon. It was as if they had quarrelled — and at this supreme and awful moment, with parting visible out there in that last gap of the willows!

"Well, go and help your poor wretches, and don't think of me."

Jon stood still. Sweat broke out on his forehead, and his limbs trembled. Fleur too had stopped, and was frowning at the river.

"I MUST believe in things," said Jon with a sort of agony;" we're all meant to enjoy life."

Fleur laughed: "Yes; and that's what you won't do, if you don't take care. But perhaps your idea of enjoyment is to make yourself wretched. There are lots of people like that, of course."

She was pale, her eyes had darkened, her lips had thinned. Was it Fleur thus staring at the water? Jon had an unreal feeling as if he were passing through the scene in a book where the lover has to choose between love and duty. But just then she looked round at him. Never was anything so intoxicating as that vivacious look. It acted on him exactly as the tug of a chain acts on a dog — brought him up to her with his tail wagging and his tongue out.

"Don't let's be silly," she said, "time's too short. Look, Jon, you can just see where I've got to cross the river. There, round the bend, where the woods begin."

Jon saw a gable, a chimney or two, a patch of wall through the trees — and felt his heart sink.

"I mustn't dawdle any more. It's no good going beyond the next hedge, it gets all open. Let's get on to it and say good-bye."

They went side by side, hand in hand, silently towards the hedge, where the mayflower, both pink and white, was in full bloom.

"My Club's the 'Talisman,' Stratton Street, Piccadilly. Letters there will be quite safe, and I'm almost always up once a week."

Jon nodded. His face had become extremely set, his eyes stared straight before him.

"To-day's the twenty-third of May," said Fleur; "on the ninth of July I shall be in front of the 'Bacchus and Ariadne' at three o'clock; will you?"

"I will."

"If you feel as bad as I it's all right. Let those people pass!"

A man and woman airing their children went by strung out in Sunday fashion.

The last of them passed the wicket gate.

"Domesticity!" said Fleur, and blotted herself against the hawthorn hedge. The blossom sprayed out above her head, and one pink cluster brushed her cheek. Jon put up his hand jealously to keep it off.

“Good-bye, Jon!” For a second they stood with hands hard clasped. Then their lips met for the third time, and when they parted Fleur broke away and fled through the wicket gate. Jon stood where she had left him, with his forehead against that pink cluster. Gone! For an eternity — for seven weeks all but two days! And here he was, wasting the last sight of her! He rushed to the gate. She was walking swiftly on the heels of the straggling children. She turned her head, he saw her hand make a little flitting gesture; then she sped on, and the trailing family blotted her out from his view.

The words of a comic song —

> “Paddington groan — worst ever known —
> He gave a sepulchral Paddington groan —”

came into his head, and he sped incontinently back to Reading station. All the way up to London and down to Wansdon he sat with “The Heart of the Trail” open on his knee, knitting in his head a poem so full of feeling that it would not rhyme.

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XII

Caprice

Fleur sped on. She had need of rapid motion; she was late, and wanted all her wits about her when she got in. She passed the islands, the station, and hotel, and was about to take the ferry, when she saw a skiff with a young man standing up in it, and holding to the bushes.

"Miss Forsyte," he said; "let me put you across. I've come on purpose."

She looked at him in blank amazement.

"It's all right, I've been having tea with your people. I thought I'd save you the last bit. It's on my way, I'm just off back to Pangbourne. My name's Mont. I saw you at the picture-gallery — you remember — when your father invited me to see his pictures."

"Oh!" said Fleur; "yes — the handkerchief."

To this young man she owed Jon; and, taking his hand, she stepped down into the skiff. Still emotional, and a little out of breath, she sat silent; not so the young man. She had never heard any one say so much in so short a time. He told her his age, twenty-four, his weight, ten stone eleven; his place of residence, not far away; described his sensations under fire, and what it felt like to be gassed; criticised the Juno, mentioned his own conception of that goddess; commented on the Goya copy, said Fleur was not too awfully like it; sketched in rapidly the condition of England; spoke of Monsieur Profond — or whatever his name was — as "an awful sport"; thought her father had some ripping pictures and some rather "dug-up"; hoped he might row down again and take her on the river because he was quite trustworthy; inquired her opinion of Tchekov, gave her his own; wished they could go to the Russian ballet together some time — considered the name Fleur Forsyte simply topping; cursed his people for giving him the name of Michael on the top of Mont; outlined his father, and said that if she wanted a good book she should read "Job"; his father was rather like Job while Job still had land.

"But Job didn't have land," Fleur murmured; "he only had flocks and herds and moved on."

"Ah!" answered Michael Mont, "I wish my gov'nor would move on. Not that I want his land. Land's an awful bore in these days, don't you think?"

"We never have it in my family," said Fleur. "We have everything else. I believe one of my great-uncles once had a sentimental farm in Dorset, because we came from there originally, but it cost him more than it made him happy."

"Did he sell it?"

"No; he kept it."

"Why?"

"Because nobody would buy it."

"Good for the old boy!"

"No, it wasn't good for him. Father says it soured him. His name was Swithin."

"What a corking name!"

"Do you know," said Fleur, "that we're getting farther off, not nearer? This river flows."

"Splendid!" cried Mont, dipping his sculls vaguely; "it's good to meet a girl who's got wit."

"But better to meet a young man who's got it in the plural."

Young Mont raised a hand to tear his hair.

"Look out!" cried Fleur. "Your scull!"

"All right! It's thick enough to bear a scratch."

"Do you mind sculling?" said Fleur severely, "I want to get in."

"Ah! but when you get in, you see, I shan't see you any more today. Fini, as the French girl said when she jumped on her bed after saying her prayers. Don't you bless the day that gave you a French mother, and a name like yours?"

"I like my name, but Father gave it me. Mother wanted me called Marguerite."

“Which is absurd. Do you mind calling me M. M. and letting me call you F. F.? It’s in the spirit of the age.”

“I don’t mind anything, so long as I get in.” Mont caught a little crab, and answered: “That was a nasty one!”

“Please row.”

“I am.” And he did for several strokes, looking at her with rueful eagerness. “Of course, you know,” he ejaculated, pausing, “that I came to see you, not your father’s pictures.”

Fleur rose.

“If you don’t row, I shall get out and swim.”

“Really and truly? Then I could come in after you.”

“Mr. Mont, I’m late and tired; please put me on shore at once.”

When she stepped out on to the garden landing-stage he rose, and grasping his hair with both hands, looked at her.

Fleur smiled.

“Don’t!” cried the irrepressible Mont. “I know you’re going to say: ‘Out, damned hair!’”

Fleur whisked round, threw him a wave of her hand. “Good-bye, Mr. M. M.!” she called, and was gone among the rose-trees. She looked at her wrist-watch and the windows of the house. It struck her as curiously uninhabited. Past six! The pigeons were just gathering to roost, and sunlight slanted on the dove-cot, on their snowy feathers, and beyond in a shower on the top boughs of the woods. The click of billiard-balls came from the ingle-nook — Jack Cardigan, no doubt; a faint rustling, too, from an eucalyptus-tree, startling Southerner in this old English garden. She reached the verandah, and was passing in, but stopped at the sound of voices from the drawing-room to her left. Mother! Profond! From behind the verandah screen which fenced the ingle-nook she heard these words!

“I don’t, Annette.”

Did Father know that he called her mother “Annette”? Always on the side of her father — as children are ever on one side or the other in houses where relations are a little strained — she stood, uncertain. Her mother was speaking in her low, pleasing, slightly metallic voice — one word she caught: “Demain.” And Profond’s answer: “All right.” Fleur frowned. A little sound came out into the stillness. Then Profond’s voice: “I’m takin’ a small stroll.”

Fleur darted through the window into the morning room. There he came — from the drawing-room, crossing the verandah, down the lawn; and the click of billiard-balls which, in listening for other sounds, she had ceased to hear, began again. She shook herself, passed into the hall, and opened the drawing-room door. Her mother was sitting on the sofa between the windows, her knees crossed, her head resting on a cushion, her lips half parted, her eyes half closed. She looked extraordinarily handsome.

“Ah! Here you are, Fleur! Your father is beginning to fuss.”

“Where is he?”

“In the picture-gallery. Go up!”

“What are you going to do tomorrow, Mother?”

“To-morrow? I go up to London with your aunt. Why?”

“I thought you might be. Will you get me a quite plain parasol?”

“What color?”

“Green. They’re all going back, I suppose.”

“Yes, all; you will console your father. Kiss me, then.”

Fleur crossed the room, stooped, received a kiss on her forehead, and went out past the impress of a form on the sofa-cushions in the other corner. She ran up-stairs.

Fleur was by no means the old-fashioned daughter who demands the regulation of her parents’ lives in accordance with the standard imposed on herself. She claimed to regulate her own life, not those of others; besides, an unerring instinct for what was likely to advantage her own case was already at work. In a disturbed domestic atmosphere the heart she had set on Jon would have a better chance. None the less was she offended, as a flower by a crisping wind. If that man had really been kissing her mother it was — serious, and her father ought to know.

“Demain!” “All right!” And her mother going up to Town! She turned in to her bedroom and hung out of the window to cool her face, which had suddenly grown very hot. Jon must be at the station by now! What did her father know about Jon! Probably everything — pretty nearly!

She changed her dress, so as to look as if she had been in some time, and ran up to the gallery.

Soames was standing stubbornly still before his Alfred Stevens — the picture he loved best. He did not turn at the sound of the door, but she knew he had heard, and she knew he was hurt. She came up softly behind him, put her arms round his neck, and poked her face over his shoulder, till her cheek lay against his. It was an advance which had never yet failed, but it failed her now, and she augured the worst.

“Well,” he said stonily, “so you’ve come!”

“Is that all,” murmured Fleur, “from a bad parent?” and rubbed her cheek against his.

Soames shook his head so far as that was possible.

“Why do you keep me on tenterhooks like this, putting me off and off?”

“Darling, it was very harmless.”

“Harmless! Much you know what’s harmless and what isn’t.”

Fleur dropped her arms.

“Well, then, dear, suppose you tell me; and be quite frank about it.”

And she went over to the window-seat.

Her father had turned from his picture, and was staring at his feet. He looked very grey. ‘He has nice small feet,’ she thought, catching his eye, at once averted from her.

“You’re my only comfort,” said Soames suddenly, “and you go on like this.”

Fleur’s heart began to beat.

“Like what, dear?”

Again Soames gave her a look which, but for the affection in it, might have been called furtive.

“You know what I told you,” he said. “I don’t choose to have anything to do with that branch of our family.”

“Yes, ducky, but I don’t know why _I_ shouldn’t.”

Soames turned on his heel.

“I’m not going into the reasons,” he said; “you ought to trust me, Fleur!”

The way he spoke those words affected Fleur, but she thought of Jon, and was silent, tapping her foot against the wainscot. Unconsciously she had assumed a modern attitude, with one leg twisted in and out of the other, with her chin on one bent wrist, her other arm across her chest, and its hand hugging her elbow; there was not a line of her that was not involuted, and yet — in spite of all — she retained a certain grace.

“You knew my wishes,” Soames went on, “and yet you stayed on there four days. And I suppose that boy came with you today.”

Fleur kept her eyes on him.

“I don’t ask you anything,” said Soames; “I make no inquisition where you’re concerned.”

Fleur suddenly stood up, leaning out at the window with her chin on her hands. The sun had sunk behind trees, the pigeons were perched, quite still, on the edge of the dove-cot; the click of the billiard-balls mounted, and a faint radiance shone out below where Jack Cardigan had turned the light up.

“Will it make you any happier,” she said suddenly, “if I promise you not to see him for say — the next six weeks?” She was not prepared for a sort of tremble in the blankness of his voice.

“Six weeks? Six years — sixty years more like. Don’t delude yourself, Fleur; don’t delude yourself!”

Fleur turned in alarm.

“Father, what is it?”

Soames came close enough to see her face.

“Don’t tell me,” he said, “that you’re foolish enough to have any feeling beyond caprice. That would be too much!” And he laughed.

Fleur, who had never heard him laugh like that, thought: 'Then it IS deep! Oh! what is it?' And putting her hand through his arm she said lightly:

"No, of course; caprice. Only, I like my caprices and I don't like yours, dear."

"Mine!" said Soames bitterly, and turned away.

The light outside had chilled, and threw a chalky whiteness on the river. The trees had lost all gaiety of colour. She felt a sudden hunger for Jon's face, for his hands, and the feel of his lips again on hers. And pressing her arms tight across her breast she forced out a little light laugh.

"O la! la! What a small fuss! as Profond would say. Father, I don't like that man."

She saw him stop, and take something out of his breast pocket.

"You don't?" he said. "Why?"

"Nothing," murmured Fleur; "just caprice!"

"No," said Soames; "not caprice!" And he tore what was in his hands across. "You're right. _I_ don't like him either!"

"Look!" said Fleur softly. "There he goes! I hate his shoes; they don't make any noise."

Down in the failing light Prosper Profond moved, his hands in his side pockets, whistling softly in his beard; he stopped, and glanced up at the sky, as if saying: "I don't think much of that small moon."

Fleur drew back. "Isn't he a great cat?" she whispered; and the sharp click of the billiard-balls rose, as if Jack Cardigan had capped the cat, the moon, caprice, and tragedy with: "In off the red!"

Monsieur Profond had resumed his strolling, to a teasing little tune in his beard. What was it? Oh! yes, from "Rigoletto": "Donna e mobile." Just what he would think! She squeezed her father's arm.

"Prowling!" she muttered, as he turned the corner of the house. It was past that disillusioned moment which divides the day and night — still and lingering and warm, with hawthorn scent and lilac scent clinging on the riverside air. A blackbird suddenly burst out. Jon would be in London by now; in the Park perhaps, crossing the Serpentine, thinking of her! A little sound beside her made her turn her eyes; her father was again tearing the paper in his hands. Fleur saw it was a cheque.

"I shan't sell him my Gauguin," he said. "I don't know what your aunt and Imogen see in him."

"Or Mother."

"Your mother!" said Soames.

'Poor Father!' she thought. 'He never looks happy — not really happy. I don't want to make him worse, but of course I shall have to, when Jon comes back. Oh! well, sufficient unto the night!'

"I'm going to dress," she said.

In her room she had a fancy to put on her "freak" dress. It was of gold tissue with little trousers of the same, tightly drawn in at the ankles, a page's cape slung from the shoulders, little gold shoes, and a gold-winged Mercury helmet; and all over her were tiny gold bells, especially on the helmet; so that if she shook her head she pealed. When she was dressed she felt quite sick because Jon could not see her; it even seemed a pity that the sprightly young man Michael Mont would not have a view. But the gong had sounded, and she went down.

She made a sensation in the drawing-room. Winifred thought it "Most amusing." Imogen was enraptured. Jack Cardigan called it "stunning," "ripping," "topping," and "corking." Monsieur Profond, smiling with his eyes, said: "That's a nice small dress!" Her mother, very handsome in black, sat looking at her, and said nothing. It remained for her father to apply the test of common sense. "What did you put on that thing for? You're not going to dance."

Fleur spun round, and the bells pealed.

"Caprice!"

Soames stared at her, and, turning away, gave his arm to Winifred. Jack Cardigan took her mother. Prosper Profond took Imogen. Fleur went in by herself, with her bells jingling. . . .

The "small" moon had soon dropped down, and May night had fallen soft and warm, enwrapping with its grape-bloom colour and its scents the billion caprices, intrigues, passions, longings, and regrets of men and women. Happy was Jack Cardigan who snored into Imogen's white shoulder, fit as a flea; or Timothy in his "mausoleum," too old for anything but baby's slumber. For so many lay awake, or dreamed, teased by the crisscross of the world.

The dew fell and the flowers closed; cattle grazed on in the river meadows, feeling with their tongues for the grass they could not see; and the sheep on the Downs lay quiet as stones. Pheasants in the tall trees of the Pangbourne woods, larks on their grassy nests above the gravel-pit at Wansdon, swallows in the eaves at Robin Hill, and the sparrows of Mayfair, all made a dreamless night of it, soothed by the lack of wind. The Mayfly filly, hardly accustomed to her new quarters, scraped at her straw a little; and the few night-flitting things — bats, moths, owls — were vigorous in the warm darkness; but the peace of night lay in the brain of all day-time Nature, colourless and still. Men and women, alone, riding the hobbyhorses of anxiety or love, burned their wavering tapers of dream and thought into the lonely hours.

Fleur, leaning out of her window, heard the hall clock's muffled chime of twelve, the tiny splash of a fish, the sudden shaking of an aspen's leaves in the puffs of breeze that rose along the river, the distant rumble of a night train, and time and again the sounds which none can put a name to in the darkness, soft obscure expressions of uncatalogued emotions from man and beast, bird and machine, or, maybe, from departed Forsytes, Darties, Cardigans, taking night strolls back into a world which had once suited their embodied spirits. But Fleur heeded not these sounds, her spirit, far from disembodied, fled with swift wing from railway-carriage to flowery hedge, straining after Jon, tenacious of his forbidden image, and the sound of his voice which was taboo. And she crinkled her nose, retrieving from the perfume of the riverside night that moment when his hand slipped between the mayflowers and her cheek. Long she leaned out in her freak dress, keen to burn her wings at life's candle; while the moths brushed her cheeks on their pilgrimage to the lamp on her dressing-table, ignorant that in a Forsyte's house there is no open flame. But at last even she felt sleepy, and, forgetting her bells, drew quickly in.

Through the open window of his room, alongside Annette's, Soames, wakeful too, heard their thin faint tinkle, as it might be shaken from stars, or the dewdrops falling from a flower, if one could hear such sounds.

'Caprice!' he thought. 'I can't tell. She's wilful. What shall I do? Fleur!'

And long into the "small" night he brooded.

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PART II

I

MOTHER AND SON

To say that Jon Forsyte accompanied his mother to Spain unwillingly would scarcely have been adequate. He went as a well-natured dog goes for a walk with its mistress, leaving a choice mutton-bone on the lawn. He went looking back at it. Forsytes deprived of their mutton-bones are wont to sulk. But Jon had little sulkiness in his composition. He adored his mother, and it was his first travel. Spain had become Italy by his simply saying: “I’d rather go to Spain, Mum; you’ve been to Italy so many times; I’d like it new to both of us.”

The fellow was subtle besides being naif. He never forgot that he was going to shorten the proposed two months into six weeks, and must therefore show no sign of wishing to do so. For one with so enticing a mutton-bone and so fixed an idea, he made a good enough travelling companion, indifferent to where or when he arrived, superior to food, and thoroughly appreciative of a country strange to the most travelled Englishman. Fleur’s wisdom in refusing to write to him was profound, for he reached each new place entirely without hope or fever, and could concentrate immediate attention on the donkeys and tumbling bells, the priests, patios, beggars, children, crowing cocks, sombreros, cactus hedges, old high white villages, goats, olive-trees, greening plains, singing birds in tiny cages, water-sellers, sunsets, melons, mules, great churches, pictures, and swimming grey-brown mountains of a fascinating land.

It was already hot, and they enjoyed an absence of their compatriots. Jon, who, so far as he knew, had blood in him which was not English, was often innately unhappy in the presence of his own countrymen. He felt they had no nonsense about them, and took a more practical view of things than himself. He confided to his mother that he must be an unsociable beast — it was jolly to be away from everybody who could talk about the things people did talk about. To which Irene had replied simply: “Yes, Jon, I know.”

In this isolation he had unparalleled opportunities of appreciating what few sons can apprehend, the whole-heartedness of a mother’s love. Knowledge of something kept from her made him, no doubt, unduly sensitive; and a Southern people stimulated his admiration for her type of beauty, which he had been accustomed to hear called Spanish, but which he now perceived to be no such thing. Her beauty was neither English, French, Spanish, nor Italian — it was special! He appreciated, too, as never before, his mother’s subtlety of instinct. He could not tell, for instance, whether she had noticed his absorption in that Goya picture, “La Vendimia,” or whether she knew that he had slipped back there after lunch and again next morning, to stand before it full half an hour, a second and third time. It was not Fleur, of course, but like enough to give him heartache — so dear to lovers — remembering her standing at the foot of his bed with her hand held above her head. To keep a postcard reproduction of this picture in his pocket and slip it out to look at became for Jon one of those bad habits which soon or late disclose themselves to eyes sharpened by love, fear, or jealousy. And his mother’s were sharpened by all three. In Granada he was fairly caught, sitting on a sun-warmed stone bench in a little battlemented garden on the Alhambra hill, whence he ought to have been looking at the view. His mother, he had thought, was examining the potted stocks between the polled acacias, when her voice said:

“Is that your favourite Goya, Jon?”

He checked, too late, a movement such as he might have made at school to conceal some surreptitious document, and answered: “Yes.”

“It certainly is most charming; but I think I prefer the ‘Quitasol.’ Your father would go crazy about Goya; I don’t believe he saw them when he was in Spain in ’92.”

In ’92 — nine years before he had been born! What had been the previous existences of his father and his mother? If they had a right to share in his future, surely he had a right to share in their pasts. He looked up at her. But something in her face — a look of life hard-lived, the mysterious impress of emotions, experience, and suffering — seemed with its incalculable depth, its purchased sanctity, to make curiosity impertinent. His mother must have had a wonderfully interesting life; she was so beautiful, and so — so — but he could not frame what he felt about her. He got up, and stood gazing down at the town, at the plain all green with crops, and the ring of mountains glamorous in sinking sunlight. Her life was like the past of this old Moorish city, full, deep, remote — his own life as yet such a baby of a thing, hopelessly ignorant and innocent! They said that in those mountains to the west, which rose sheer from the blue-green plain, as if out of a sea, Phoenicians had dwelt — a dark, strange, secret race, above the land! His mother's life was as unknown to him, as secret, as that Phoenician past was to the town down there, whose cocks crowed and whose children played and clamoured so gaily, day in, day out. He felt aggrieved that she should know all about him and he nothing about her except that she loved him and his father, and was beautiful. His callow ignorance — he had not even had the advantage of the war, like nearly everybody else! — made him small in his own eyes.

That night, from the balcony of his bedroom, he gazed down on the roof of the town — as if inlaid with honey-comb of jet, ivory, and gold; and, long after, he lay awake, listening to the cry of the sentry as the hours struck, and forming in his head these lines:

"Voice in the night crying, down in the old sleeping
Spanish city darkened under her white stars!
What says the voice — its clear — lingering anguish?

Just the watchman, telling his dateless tale of safety?
Just a roadman, flinging to the moon his song?
No! 'Tis one deprived, whose lover's heart is weeping.
Just his cry: 'How long?'"

The word "deprived" seemed to him cold and unsatisfactory, but bereaved was too final, and no other word of two syllables short-long came to him, which would enable him to keep "whose lover's heart is weeping." It was past two by the time he had finished it, and past three before he went to sleep, having said it over to himself at least twenty-four times. Next day he wrote it out and enclosed it in one of those letters to Fleur, which he always finished before he went down, so as to have his mind free and companionable.

About noon that same day, on the tiled terrace of their hotel, he felt a sudden dull pain in the back of his head, a queer sensation in the eyes, and sickness. The sun had touched him too affectionately. The next three days were passed in semi-darkness, and a dulled, aching indifference to all except the feel of ice on his forehead and his mother's smile. She never moved from his room, never relaxed her noiseless vigilance, which seemed to Jon angelic. But there were moments when he was extremely sorry for himself, and wished terribly that Fleur could see him. Several times he took a poignant imaginary leave of her and of the earth, tears oozing out of his eyes. He even prepared the message he would send to her by his mother — who would regret to her dying day that she had ever sought to separate them — his poor mother! He was not slow, however, in perceiving that he had now his excuse for going home.

Towards half past six each evening came a "gasgacha" of bells — a cascade of tumbling chimes, mounting from the city below and falling back chime on chime. After listening to them on the fourth day he said suddenly:

"I'd like to be back in England, Mum, the sun's too hot."

"Very well, darling. As soon as you're fit to travel." And at once he felt better, and — meaner.

They had been out five weeks when they turned towards home. Jon's head was restored to its pristine clarity, but he was confined to a hat lined by his mother with many layers of orange and green silk, and he still walked from choice in the shade. As the long struggle of discretion between them drew to its close, he wondered more and more whether she could see his eagerness to get back to that which she had brought him away from. Condemned by Spanish Providence to spend a day in Madrid between their trains, it was but natural to go again to the Prado. Jon was elaborately casual this time before his Goya girl. Now that he was going back to her, he could afford a lesser scrutiny. It was his mother who lingered before the picture, saying:

"The face and figure of the girl are exquisite."

Jon heard her uneasily. Did she understand? But he felt once more that he was no match for her in self-control and subtlety. She could, in some supersensitive way, of which he had not the secret, feel the pulse of his thoughts; she knew by instinct what he hoped and feared and wished. It made him terribly uncomfortable and guilty, having, beyond most boys, a conscience. He wished she would be frank with him; he almost hoped for an open struggle. But none came, and steadily, silently, they travelled north. Thus did he first learn how much better than men women play a waiting game. In Paris they had again to pause for a day. Jon was grieved because it lasted two, owing to certain matters in connection with a dressmaker; as if his mother, who looked beautiful in anything, had any need of dresses! The happiest moment of his travel was that when he stepped on to the Folkestone boat.

Standing by the bulwark rail, with her arm in his, she said:

“I’m afraid you haven’t enjoyed it much, Jon. But you’ve been very sweet to me.”

Jon squeezed her arm.

“Oh! yes, I’ve enjoyed it awfully — except for my head lately.”

And now that the end had come, he really had, feeling a sort of glamour over the past weeks — a kind of painful pleasure, such as he had tried to screw into those lines about the voice in the night crying; a feeling such as he had known as a small boy listening avidly to Chopin, yet wanting to cry. And he wondered why it was that he couldn’t say to her quite simply what she had said to him:

“You were very sweet to me.” Odd — one never could be nice and natural like that! He substituted the words: “I expect we shall be sick.”

They were, and reached London somewhat attenuated, having been away six weeks and two days, without a single allusion to the subject which had hardly ever ceased to occupy their minds.

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II

Fathers and Daughters

Deprived of his wife and son by the Spanish adventure, Jolyon found the solitude at Robin Hill intolerable. A philosopher when he has all that he wants is different from a philosopher when he has not. Accustomed, however, to the idea, if not to the reality of resignation, he would perhaps have faced it out but for his daughter June. He was a "lame duck" now, and on her conscience. Having achieved — momentarily — the rescue of an etcher in low circumstances, which she happened to have in hand, she appeared at Robin Hill a fortnight after Irene and Jon had gone. The little lady was living now in a tiny house with a big studio at Chiswick. A Forsyte of the best period, so far as the lack of responsibility was concerned, she had overcome the difficulty of a reduced income in a manner satisfactory to herself and her father. The rent of the Gallery off Cork Street which he had bought for her, and her increased income tax happening to balance, it had been quite simple — she no longer paid him the rent. The Gallery might be expected now at any time, after eighteen years of barren usufruct, to pay its way, so that she was sure her father would not feel it. Through this device she still had twelve hundred a year, and by reducing what she ate, and, in place of two Belgians in a poor way, employing one Austrian in a poorer, practically the same surplus for the relief of genius. After three days at Robin Hill she carried her father back with her to Town. In those three days she had stumbled on the secret he had kept for two years, and had instantly decided to cure him. She knew, in fact, the very man. He had done wonders with Paul Post — that painter a little in advance of Futurism; and she was impatient with her father because his eyebrows would go up, and because he had heard of neither. Of course, if he hadn't "faith" he would never get well! It was absurd not to have faith in the man who had healed Paul Post so that he had only just relapsed, from having overworked, or overlived, himself again. The great thing about this healer was that he relied on Nature. He had made a special study of the symptoms of Nature — when his patient failed in any natural symptom he supplied the poison which caused it — and there you were! She was extremely hopeful. Her father had clearly not been living a natural life at Robin Hill, and she intended to provide the symptoms. He was — she felt — out of touch with the times, which was not natural; his heart wanted stimulating. In the little Chiswick house she and the Austrian — a grateful soul, so devoted to June for rescuing her that she was in danger of decease from overwork — stimulated Jolyon in all sorts of ways, preparing him for his cure. But they could not keep his eyebrows down; as — for example — when the Austrian woke him at eight o'clock just as he was going to sleep or June took The Times away from him, because it was unnatural to read "that stuff" when he ought to be taking an interest in "life." He never failed, indeed, to be astonished at her resource, especially in the evenings. For his benefit, as she declared, though he suspected that she also got something out of it, she assembled the Age so far as it was satellite to genius; and with some solemnity it would move up and down the studio before him in the Fox-trot, and that more mental form of dancing — the One-step — which so pulled against the music, that Jolyon's eyebrows would be almost lost in his hair from wonder at the strain it must impose on the dancers' will-power. Aware that, hung on the line in the Water Colour Society, he was a back number to those with any pretension to be called artists, he would sit in the darkest corner he could find, and wonder about rhythm, on which so long ago he had been raised. And when June brought some girl or young man up to him, he would rise humbly to their level so far as that was possible, and think: 'Dear me! This is very dull for them!' Having his father's perennial sympathy with Youth, he used to get very tired from entering into their points of view. But it was all stimulating, and he never failed in admiration of his daughter's indomitable spirit. Even genius itself attended these gatherings now and then, with its nose on one side; and June always introduced it to her father. This, she felt, was exceptionally good for him, for genius was a natural symptom he had never had — fond as she was of him.

Certain as a man can be that she was his own daughter, he often wondered whence she got herself — her red-gold hair, now greyed into a special colour; her direct, spirited face, so different from his own rather folded and subtilised countenance, her little light figure, when he and most of the Forsytes were tall. And he would dwell on the origin of species, and debate whether she might be Danish or Celtic. Celtic, he thought, from her pugnacity, and her taste in fillets and djibbahs. It was not too much to say that he preferred her to the Age with which she was surrounded, youthful though, for the greater part, it was. She took, however, too much interest in his teeth, for he still had some of those natural symptoms. Her dentist at once found "staphylococcus aureus present in pure culture" (which might cause boils, of course) and wanted to take out all the teeth he had and supply him with two complete sets of unnatural symptoms. Jolyon's native tenacity was roused, and in the studio that evening he developed his objections. He had never had any boils, and his own teeth would last his time. Of course — June admitted — they would last his time if he didn't have them out! But if he had more teeth he would have a better heart and his time would be longer. His recalcitrance — she said — was a symptom of his whole attitude; he was taking it lying down. He ought to be fighting. When was he going to see the man who had cured Paul Post? Jolyon was very sorry, but the fact was he was not going to see him. June chafed. Pondridge — she said — the healer, was such a fine man, and he had such difficulty in making two ends meet and getting his theories recognised. It was just such indifference and prejudice as her father manifested which was keeping him back. It would be so splendid for both of them!

"I perceive," said Jolyon, "that you are trying to kill two birds with one stone."

"To cure, you mean!" cried June.

"My dear, it's the same thing."

June protested. It was unfair to say that without a trial.

Jolyon thought he might not have the chance of saying it after.

"Dad!" cried June, "you're hopeless."

"That," said Jolyon, "is a fact, but I wish to remain hopeless as long as possible. I shall let sleeping dogs lie, my child. They are quiet at present."

"That's not giving science a chance," cried June. "You've no idea how devoted Pondridge is. He puts his science before everything."

"Just," replied Jolyon, puffing the mild cigarette to which he was reduced, "as Mr. Paul Post puts his art, eh? Art for Art's sake — Science for the sake of Science. I know those enthusiastic egomaniac gentry. They vivisect you without blinking. I'm enough of a Forsyte to give them the go-by, June."

"Dad," said June, "if you only knew how old-fashioned that sounds! Nobody can afford to be half-hearted nowadays."

"I'm afraid," murmured Jolyon, with his smile, "that's the only natural symptom with which Mr. Pondridge need not supply me. We are born to be extreme or to be moderate, my dear; though if you'll forgive my saying so, half the people nowadays who believe they're extreme are really very moderate. I'm getting on as well as I can expect, and I must leave it at that."

June was silent, having experienced in her time the inexorable character of her father's amiable obstinacy so far as his own freedom of action was concerned.

How he came to let her know why Irene had taken Jon to Spain puzzled Jolyon, for he had little confidence in her discretion. After she had brooded on the news, it brought a rather sharp discussion, during which he perceived to the full the fundamental opposition between her active temperament and his wife's passivity. He even gathered that a little soreness still remained from that generation-old struggle between them over the body of Philip Bosinney, in which the passive had so signally triumphed over the active principle.

According to June, it was foolish and even cowardly to hide the past from Jon. Sheer opportunism, she called it.

"Which," Jolyon put in mildly, "is the working principle of real life, my dear."

"Oh!" cried June, "YOU don't really defend her for not telling Jon, Dad. If it were left to you, you would."

"I might, but simply because I know he must find out, which will be worse than if we told him."

"Then why DON'T you tell him? It's just sleeping dogs again."

"My dear," said Jolyon, "I wouldn't for the world go against Irene's instinct. He's her boy."

"Yours too," cried June.

"What is a man's instinct compared with a mother's?"

"Well, I think it's very weak of you."

"I dare say," said Jolyon, "I dare say."

And that was all she got from him; but the matter rankled in her brain. She could not bear sleeping dogs. And there stirred in her a tortuous impulse to push the matter towards decision. Jon ought to be told, so that either his feeling might be nipped in the bud, or, flowering in spite of the past, come to fruition. And she determined to see Fleur, and judge for herself. When June determined on anything, delicacy became a somewhat minor consideration. After all, she was Soames' cousin, and they were both interested in pictures. She would go and tell him that he ought to buy a Paul Post, or perhaps a piece of sculpture by Boris Strumolowski, and of course she would say nothing to her father. She went on the following Sunday, looking so determined that she had some difficulty in getting a cab at Reading station. The river country was lovely in those days of her own month, and June ached at its loveliness. She who had passed through this life without knowing what union was had a love of natural beauty which was almost madness. And when she came to that choice spot where Soames had pitched his tent, she dismissed her cab, because, business over, she wanted to revel in the bright water and the woods. She appeared at his front door, therefore, as a mere pedestrian, and sent in her card. It was in June's character to know that when her nerves were fluttering she was doing something worth while. If one's nerves did not flutter, she was taking the line of least resistance, and knew that nobleness was not obliging her. She was conducted to a drawing-room, which, though not in her style, showed every mark of fastidious elegance. Thinking: 'Too much taste — too many knick-knacks,' she saw in an old lacquer-framed mirror the figure of a girl coming in from the verandah. Clothed in white, and holding some white roses in her hand, she had, reflected in that silvery-grey pool of glass, a vision-like appearance, as if a pretty ghost had come out of the green garden.

"How do you do?" said June, turning round. "I'm a cousin of your father's."

"Oh, yes; I saw you in that confectioner's."

"With my young stepbrother. Is your father in?"

"He will be directly. He's only gone for a little walk."

June slightly narrowed her blue eyes, and lifted her decided chin.

"Your name's Fleur, isn't it? I've heard of you from Holly. What do you think of Jon?"

The girl lifted the roses in her hand, looked at them, and answered calmly:

"He's quite a nice boy."

"Not a bit like Holly or me, is he?"

"Not a bit."

'She's cool,' thought June.

And suddenly the girl said: "I wish you'd tell me why our families don't get on?"

Confronted with the question she had advised her father to answer, June was silent; either because this girl was trying to get something out of her, or simply because what one would do theoretically is not always what one will do when it comes to the point.

"You know," said the girl, "the surest way to make people find out the worst is to keep them ignorant. My father's told me it was a quarrel about property. But I don't believe it; we've both got heaps. They wouldn't have been so bourgeois as all that."

June flushed. The word applied to her grandfather and father offended her.

"My grandfather," she said, "was very generous, and my father is, too; neither of them was in the least bourgeois."

"Well, what was it then?" repeated the girl. Conscious that this young Forsyte meant having what she wanted, June at once determined to prevent her, and to get something for herself instead.

"Why do you want to know?"

The girl smelled at her roses. "I only want to know because they won't tell me."

"Well, it WAS about property, but there's more than one kind."

"That makes it worse. Now I really MUST know."

June's small and resolute face quivered. She was wearing a round cap, and her hair had fluffed out under it. She looked quite young at that moment, rejuvenated by encounter.

"You know," she said, "I saw you drop your handkerchief. Is there anything between you and Jon? Because, if so, you'd better drop that too."

The girl grew paler, but she smiled.

"If there were, that isn't the way to make me."

At the gallantry of that reply June held out her hand.

"I like you; but I don't like your father; I never have. We may as well be frank."

"Did you come down to tell him that?"

June laughed. "No; I came down to see YOU."

"How delightful of you!"

This girl could fence.

"I'm two-and-a-half times your age," said June, "but I quite sympathise. It's horrid not to have one's own way."

The girl smiled again. "I really think you MIGHT tell me."

How the child stuck to her point!

"It's not my secret. But I'll see what I can do, because I think both you and Jon OUGHT to be told. And now I'll say good-bye."

"Won't you wait and see Father?"

June shook her head. "How can I get over to the other side?"

"I'll row you across."

"Look!" said June impulsively, "next time you're in London, come and see me. This is where I live. I generally have young people in the evening. But I shouldn't tell your father that you're coming."

The girl nodded.

Watching her scull the skiff across, June thought: 'She's awfully pretty and well made. I never thought Soames would have a daughter as pretty as this. She and Jon would make a lovely couple.'

The instinct to couple, starved within herself, was always at work in June. She stood watching Fleur row back; the girl took her hand off a scull to wave farewell; and June walked languidly on between the meadows and the river, with an ache in her heart. Youth to youth, like the dragon-flies chasing each other, and love like the sun warming them through and through. Her youth! So long ago — when Phil and she —! And since? Nothing — no one had been quite what she had wanted. And so she had missed it all. But what a coil was round those two young things, if they really were in love, as Holly would have it — as her father, and Irene, and Soames himself seemed to dread. What a coil, and what a barrier! And the itch for the future, the contempt, as it were, for what was overpast, which forms the active principle, moved in the heart of one who ever believed that what one wanted was more important than what other people did not want. From the bank, awhile, in the warm summer stillness, she watched the water-lily plants and willow leaves, the fishes rising; sniffed the scent of grass and meadow-sweet, wondering how she could force everybody to be happy. Jon and Fleur! Two little lame ducks — charming callow yellow little ducks! A great pity! Surely something could be done! One must not take such situations lying down. She walked on, and reached a station, hot and cross.

That evening, faithful to the impulse towards direct action, which made many people avoid her, she said to her father:

"Dad, I've been down to see young Fleur. I think she's very attractive. It's no good hiding our heads under our wings, is it?"

The startled Jolyon set down his barley water, and began crumbling his bread.

"It's what you appear to be doing," he said: "Do you realise whose daughter she is?"

"Can't the dead past bury its dead?"

Jolyon rose.

"Certain things can never be buried."

"I disagree," said June. "It's that which stands in the way of all happiness and progress. You don't understand the Age, Dad. It's got no use for outgrown things. Why do you think it matters so terribly that Jon should know about his mother? Who pays any attention to that sort of thing now? The marriage laws are just as they were when Soames and Irene couldn't get a divorce, and you had to come in. We've moved, and they haven't. So nobody cares. Marriage without a decent chance of relief is only a sort of slave-owning; people oughtn't to own each other. Everybody sees that now. If Irene broke such laws, what does it matter?"

"It's not for me to disagree there," said Jolyon; "but that's all quite beside the mark. This is a matter of human feeling."

"Of course, it is," cried June, "the human feeling of those two young things."

"My dear," said Jolyon with gentle exasperation, "you're talking nonsense."

"I'm not. If they prove to be really fond of each other, why should they be made unhappy because of the past?"

"YOU haven't lived that past. I have — through the feelings of my wife; through my own nerves and my imagination, as only one who is devoted can."

June, too, rose, and began to wander restlessly.

"If," she said suddenly, "she were the daughter of Phil Bosinney, I could understand you better. Irene loved him, she never loved Soames."

Jolyon uttered a deep sound — the sort of noise an Italian peasant woman utters to her mule. His heart had begun beating furiously, but he paid no attention to it, quite carried away by his feelings.

"That shows how little you understand. Neither I nor Jon, if I know him, would mind a love-past. It's the brutality of a union without love. This girl is the daughter of the man who once owned Jon's mother as a negro-slave was owned. You can't lay that ghost; don't try to, June! It's asking us to see Jon joined to the flesh and blood of the man who possessed Jon's mother against her will. It's no good mincing words; I want it clear once for all. And now I mustn't talk any more, or I shall have to sit up with this all night." And, putting his hand over his heart, Jolyon turned his back on his daughter and stood looking at the river Thames.

June, who by nature never saw a hornets' nest until she had put her head into it, was seriously alarmed. She came and slipped her arm through his. Not convinced that he was right, and she herself wrong, because that was not natural to her, she was yet profoundly impressed by the obvious fact that the subject was very bad for him. She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder, and said nothing.

After taking her elderly cousin across, Fleur did not land at once, but pulled in among the reeds, into the sunshine. The peaceful beauty of the afternoon seduced for a little one not much given to the vague and poetic. In the field beyond the bank where her skiff lay up, a machine drawn by a grey horse was turning an early field of hay. She watched the grass cascading over and behind the light wheels with fascination — it looked so green and fresh. The click and swish blended with the rustle of the willows and the poplars, and the cooing of a wood-pigeon, in a true river song. Alongside, in the grey-green water, weeds like yellow snakes were writhing and nosing with the current; pied cattle on the farther side stood in the shade lazily swishing their tails. It was an afternoon to dream. And she took out Jon's letters — not flowery effusions, but haunted in their recital of things seen and done by a longing very agreeable to her, and all ending "Your devoted J." Fleur was not sentimental, her desires were ever concrete and concentrated, but what poetry there was in the daughter of Soames and Annette had certainly in those weeks of waiting gathered round her memories of Jon. They all belonged to grass and blossom, flowers and running water. She enjoyed him in the scents absorbed by her crinkling nose. The stars could persuade her that she was standing beside him in the centre of the map of Spain; and of an early morning the dewy cobwebs, the hazy sparkle and promise of the day down in the garden, were Jon personified to her.

Two white swans came majestically by, while she was reading his letters, followed by their brood of six young swans in a line, with just so much space between each tail and head, a flotilla of grey destroyers. Fleur thrust her letters back, got out her sculls, and pulled up to the landing-stage. Crossing the lawn, she wondered whether she should tell her father of June's visit. If he learned of it from the butler, he might think it odd if she did not. It gave her, too, another chance to startle out of him the reason of the feud. She went, therefore, up the road to meet him.

Soames had gone to look at a patch of ground on which the Local Authorities were proposing to erect a Sanatorium for people with weak lungs. Faithful to his native individualism, he took no part in local affairs, content to pay the rates which were always going up. He could not, however, remain indifferent to this new and dangerous scheme. The site was not half a mile from his own house. He was quite of opinion that the country should stamp out tuberculosis; but this was not the place. It should be done farther away. He took, indeed, an attitude common to all true Forsytes, that disability of any sort in other people was not his affair, and the State should do its business without prejudicing in any way the natural advantages which he had acquired or inherited. Francie, the most free-spirited Forsyte of his generation (except perhaps that fellow Jolyon) had once asked him in her malicious way: "Did you ever see the name Forsyte in a subscription list, Soames?" That was as it might be, but a Sanatorium would depreciate the neighbourhood, and he should certainly sign the petition which was being got up against it. Returning with this decision fresh within him, he saw Fleur coming.

She was showing him more affection of late, and the quiet time down here with her in this summer weather had been making him feel quite young; Annette was always running up to Town for one thing or another, so that he had Fleur to himself almost as much as he could wish. To be sure, young Mont had formed a habit of appearing on his motor-cycle almost every other day. Thank goodness, the young fellow had shaved off his half-toothbrushes, and no longer looked like a mountebank! With a girl friend of Fleur's who was staying in the house, and a neighbouring youth or so, they made two couples after dinner, in the hall, to the music of the electric pianola which performed Fox-trots unassisted, with a surprised shine on its expressive surface. Annette, even, now and then passed gracefully up and down in the arms of one or other of the young men. And Soames, coming to the drawing-room door, would lift his nose a little sideways, and watch them, waiting to catch a smile from Fleur; then move back to his chair by the drawing-room hearth, to peruse The Times or some other collector's price — list. To his ever-anxious eyes Fleur showed no sign of remembering that caprice of hers.

When she reached him on the dusty road, he slipped his hand within her arm.

"Who, do you think, has been to see you, Dad? She couldn't wait! Guess!"

"I never guess," said Soames uneasily. "Who?"

"Your cousin, June Forsyte."

Quite unconsciously Soames gripped her arm. "What did SHE want?"

"I don't know. But it was rather breaking through the feud, wasn't it?"

"Feud? What feud?"

"The one that exists in your imagination, dear."

Soames dropped her arm. Was she mocking, or trying to draw him on?

"I suppose she wanted me to buy a picture," he said at last.

"I don't think so. Perhaps it was just family affection."

"She's only a first cousin once removed," muttered Soames.

"And the daughter of your enemy."

"What d'you mean by that?"

"I beg your pardon, dear; I thought he was."

"Enemy!" repeated Soames. "It's ancient history. I don't know where you get your notions."

"From June Forsyte."

It had come to her as an inspiration that if he thought she knew, or were on the edge of knowledge, he would tell her.

Soames was startled, but she had underrated his caution and tenacity.

"If you know," he said coldly, "why do you plague me?"

Fleur saw that she had overreached herself.

"I don't want to plague you, darling. As you say, why want to know more? Why want to know anything of that 'small' mystery — Je m'en fiche, as Profond says."

"That chap!" said Soames profoundly.

That chap, indeed, played a considerable, if invisible, part this summer — for he had not turned up again. Ever since the Sunday when Fleur had drawn attention to him prowling on the lawn, Soames had thought of him a good deal, and always in connection with Annette, for no reason, except that she was looking handsomer than for some time past. His possessive instinct, subtler, less formal, more elastic since the war, kept all misgiving underground. As one looks on some American river, quiet and pleasant, knowing that an alligator perhaps is lying in the mud with his snout just raised and indistinguishable from a snag of wood — so Soames looked on the river of his own existence, subconscious of Monsieur Profond, refusing to see more than the suspicion of his snout. He had at this epoch in his life practically all he wanted, and was as nearly happy as his nature would permit. His senses were at rest; his affections found all the vent they needed in his daughter; his collection was well known, his money well invested; his health excellent, save for a touch of liver now and again; he had not yet begun to worry seriously about what would happen after death, inclining to think that nothing would happen. He resembled one of his own gilt-edged securities, and to knock the gilt off by seeing anything he could avoid seeing, would be, he felt instinctively, perverse and retrogressive. Those two crumpled rose-leaves, Fleur's caprice and

Monsieur Profond's snout, would level away if he lay on them industriously.

That evening Chance, which visits the lives of even the best-invested Forsytes, put a clue into Fleur's hands. Her father came down to dinner without a handkerchief, and had occasion to blow his nose.

"I'll get you one, dear," she had said, and run upstairs. In the sachet where she sought for it — an old sachet of very faded silk — there were two compartments: one held handkerchiefs; the other was buttoned, and contained something flat and hard. By some childish impulse Fleur unbuttoned it. There was a frame and in it a photograph of herself as a little girl. She gazed at it, fascinated, as one is by one's own presentment. It slipped under her fidgeting thumb, and she saw that another photograph was behind. She pressed her own down further, and perceived a face, which she seemed to know, of a young woman, very good-looking, in a very old style of evening dress. Slipping her own photograph up over it again, she took out a handkerchief and went down. Only on the stairs did she identify that face. Surely — surely Jon's mother! The conviction came as a shock. And she stood still in a flurry of thought. Why, of course! Jon's father had married the woman her father had wanted to marry, had cheated him out of her, perhaps. Then, afraid of showing by her manner that she had lighted on his secret, she refused to think further, and, shaking out the silk handkerchief, entered the dining-room.

"I chose the softest, Father."

"H'm!" said Soames; "I only use those after a cold. Never mind!"

That evening passed for Fleur in putting two and two together; recalling the look on her father's face in the confectioner's shop — a look strange, and coldly intimate, a queer look. He must have loved that woman very much to have kept her photograph all this time, in spite of having lost her. Unsparing and matter-of-fact, her mind darted to his relations with her own mother. Had he ever really loved HER? She thought not. Jon was the son of the woman he had really loved. Surely, then, he ought not to mind his daughter loving him; it only wanted getting used to. And a sigh of sheer relief was caught in the folds of her nightgown slipping over her head.

❦

III

Meetings

Youth only recognises Age by fits and starts. Jon, for one, had never really seen his father's age till he came back from Spain. The face of the fourth Jolyon, worn by waiting, gave him quite a shock — it looked so wan and old. His father's mask had been forced awry by the emotion of the meeting, so that the boy suddenly realised how much he must have felt their absence. He summoned to his aid the thought: 'Well, I didn't want to go!' It was out of date for Youth to defer to Age. But Jon was by no means typically modern. His father had always been "so jolly" to him, and to feel that one meant to begin again at once the conduct which his father had suffered six weeks' loneliness to cure, was not agreeable.

At the question, "Well, old man, how did the great Goya strike you?" his conscience pricked him badly. The great Goya only existed because he had created a face which resembled Fleur's.

On the night of their return he went to bed full of compunction; but awoke full of anticipation. It was only the fifth of July, and no meeting was fixed with Fleur until the ninth. He was to have three days at home before going back to farm. Somehow he must contrive to see her!

In the lives of men an inexorable rhythm, caused by the need for trousers, not even the fondest parents can deny. On the second day, therefore, Jon went to Town, and having satisfied his conscience by ordering what was indispensable in Conduit Street, turned his face towards Piccadilly. Stratton Street, where her Club was, adjoined Devonshire House. It would be the merest chance that she should be at her Club. But he dawdled down Bond Street with a beating heart, noticing the superiority of all other young men to himself. They wore their clothes with such an air; they had assurance; they were OLD. He was suddenly overwhelmed by the conviction that Fleur must have forgotten him. Absorbed in his own feeling for her all these weeks, he had mislaid that possibility. The corners of his mouth drooped, his hands felt clammy. Fleur with the pick of youth at the beck of her smile — Fleur incomparable! It was an evil moment. Jon, however, had a great idea that one must be able to face anything. And he braced himself with that dour reflection in front of a bric-a-brac shop. At this high-water mark of what was once the London season, there was nothing to mark it out from any other except a grey top hat or two, and the sun. Jon moved on, and turning the corner into Piccadilly, ran into Val Dartie moving towards the Iseeum Club, to which he had just been elected.

"Hallo! young man! Where are you off to?"

Jon flushed. "I've just been to my tailor's."

Val looked him up and down. "That's good! I'm going in here to order some cigarettes, then come and have some lunch."

Jon thanked him. He might get news of HER from Val. The condition of England, that nightmare of its Press and Public men, was seen in different perspective within the tobacconist's which they now entered.

"Yes, sir; precisely the cigarette I used to supply your father with. Bless me! Mr. Montague Dartie was a customer here from — let me see — the year Melton won the Derby. One of my very best customers he was." And a faint smile illumined the tobacconist's face. "Many's the tip he's given me, to be sure! I suppose he took a couple of hundred of these every week, year in, year out, and never changed his cigarette. Very affable gentleman, brought me a lot of custom. I was sorry he met with that accident. One misses an old customer like him."

Val smiled. His father's decease had closed an account which had been running longer, probably, than any other; and in a ring of smoke puffed out from that time-honoured cigarette he seemed to see again his father's face, dark, good-looking, moustachioed, a little puffy, in the only halo it had earned. His father had his fame here, anyway — a man who smoked two hundred cigarettes a week, who could give tips, and run accounts for ever! To his tobacconist a hero! Even that was some distinction to inherit!

"I pay cash," he said; "how much?"

"To HIS son, sir, and cash — ten and six. I shall never forget Mr. Montague Dartie. I've known him stand talkin' to me half an hour. We don't get many like him now, with everybody in such a hurry. The war was bad for manners, sir — it was bad for manners. You were in it, I see."

“No,” said Val, tapping his knee, “I got this in the war before. Saved my life, I expect. Do you want any cigarettes, Jon?”

Rather ashamed, Jon murmured: “I don’t smoke, you know,” and saw the tobacconist’s lips twisted, as if uncertain whether to say “Good God!” or “Now’s your chance, sir!”

“That’s right,” said Val; “keep off it while you can. You’ll want it when you take a knock. This is really the same tobacco, then?”

“Identical, sir; a little dearer, that’s all. Wonderful staying power — the British Empire, I always say.”

“Send me down a hundred a week to this address, and invoice it monthly. Come on, Jon.”

Jon entered the Iseeum with curiosity. Except to lunch now and then at the Hotch-potch with his father, he had never been in a London Club. The Iseeum, comfortable and unpretentious, did not move, could not, so long as George Forsyte sat on its Committee, where his culinary acumen was almost the controlling force. The Club had made a stand against the newly rich, and it had taken all George Forsyte’s prestige, and praise of him as a “good sportsman,” to bring in Prosper Profond.

The two were lunching together when the half-brothers-inlaw entered the dining-room, and attracted by George’s forefinger, sat down at their table, Val with his shrewd eyes and charming smile, Jon with solemn lips and an attractive shyness in his glance. There was an air of privilege around that corner table, as though past masters were eating there. Jon was fascinated by the hypnotic atmosphere. The waiter, lean in the chaps, pervaded with such freemasonical deference. He seemed to hang on George Forsyte’s lips, to watch the gloat in his eye with a kind of sympathy, to follow the movements of the heavy club-marked silver fondly. His liveried arm and confidential voice alarmed Jon, they came so secretly over one’s shoulder.

Except for George’s: “Your grandfather tipped me once; he was a deuced good judge of a cigar!” neither he nor the other past master took any notice of him, and he was grateful for this. The talk was all about the breeding, points, and prices of horses, and he listened to it vaguely at first, wondering how it was possible to retain so much knowledge in a head. He could not take his eyes off the dark past master — what he said was so deliberate and discouraging — such heavy, queer, smiled-out words. Jon was thinking of butterflies, when he heard him say:

“I want to see Mr. Soames Forsyde take an interest in ‘orses.”

“Old Soames! He’s too dry a file!”

With all his might Jon tried not to grow red, while the dark past master went on.

“His daughter’s an attractive small girl. Mr. Soames Forsyde is a bit old-fashioned. I want to see him have a pleasure some day.”

George Forsyte grinned. “Don’t you worry; he’s not so miserable as he looks. He’ll never show he’s enjoying anything — they might try and take it from him. Old Soames! Once bit, twice shy!”

“Well, Jon,” said Val hastily, “if you’ve finished, we’ll go and have coffee.”

“Who were those?” Jon asked on the stairs: “I didn’t quite —”

“Old George Forsyte is a first cousin of your father’s, and of my uncle Soames. He’s always been here. The other chap, Profond, is a queer fish. I think he’s hanging round Soames’ wife, if you ask me!”

Jon looked at him, startled. “But that’s awful,” he said: “I mean — for Fleur.”

“Don’t suppose Fleur cares very much; she’s very up-to-date.”

“Her mother!”

“You’re very green, Jon.”

Jon grew red. “Mothers,” he stammered angrily, “are different.”

“You’re right,” said Val suddenly; “but things aren’t what they were when I was your age. There’s a ‘Tomorrow we die’ feeling. That’s what old George meant about my uncle Soames. HE doesn’t mean to die tomorrow.”

Jon said quickly: “What’s the matter between him and my father?”

“Stable secret, Jon. Take my advice, and bottle up. You’ll do no good by knowing. Have a liqueur?”

Jon shook his head.

“I hate the way people keep things from one,” he muttered, “and then sneer at one for being green.”

“Well, you can ask Holly. If SHE won’t tell you, you’ll believe it’s for your own good, I suppose.”

Jon got up. “I must go now; thanks awfully for the lunch.”

Val smiled up at him, half-sorry and yet amused. The boy looked so upset.

“All right! See you on Friday.”

“I don’t know,” murmured Jon.

And he did not. This conspiracy of silence made him desperate. It was humiliating to be treated like a child. He retraced his moody steps to Stratton Street. But he would go to her Club now, and find out the worst. To his inquiry the reply was that Miss Forsyte was not in the Club. She might be in perhaps later. She was often in on Monday — they could not say. Jon said he would call again, and, crossing into the Green Park, flung himself down under a tree. The sun was bright, and a breeze fluttered the leaves of the young lime-tree beneath which he lay; but his heart ached. Such darkness seemed gathered round his happiness. He heard Big Ben chime “Three” above the traffic. The sound moved something in him, and taking out a piece of paper, he began to scribble on it with a pencil. He had jotted a stanza, and was searching the grass for another verse, when something hard touched his shoulder — a green parasol. There above him stood Fleur!

“They told me you’d been, and were coming back. So I thought you might be out here; and you are — it’s rather wonderful!”

“Oh, Fleur! I thought you’d have forgotten me.”

“When I told you that I shouldn’t!”

Jon seized her arm.

“It’s too much luck! Let’s get away from this side.”

He almost dragged her on through that too thoughtfully regulated Park, to find some cover where they could sit and hold each other’s hands.

“Hasn’t anybody cut in?” he said, gazing round at her lashes, in suspense above her cheeks.

“There IS a young idiot, but he doesn’t count.”

Jon felt a twitch of compassion for the — young idiot.

“You know I’ve had sunstroke, I didn’t tell you.”

“Really! Was it interesting?”

“No. Mother was an angel. Has anything happened to YOU?”

“Nothing. Except that I think I’ve found out what’s wrong between our families, Jon.”

His heart began beating very fast.

“I believe my father wanted to marry your mother, and your father got her instead.”

“Oh!”

“I came on a photo of her; it was in a frame behind a photo of me. Of course, if he was very fond of her, that would have made him pretty mad, wouldn’t it?”

Jon thought for a minute. “Not if she loved my father best.”

“But suppose they were engaged?”

“If we were engaged, and you found you loved somebody better, I might go cracked, but I shouldn’t grudge it you.”

“I should. You mustn’t ever do that with me, Jon.”

“My God! Not much!”

“I don’t believe that he’s ever really cared for my mother.”

Jon was silent. Val’s words, the two past masters in the Club!

“You see, we don’t know,” went on Fleur; “it may have been a great shock. She may have behaved badly to him. People do.”

“My mother wouldn’t.”

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t think we know much about our fathers and mothers. We just see them in the light of the way they treat US; but they’ve treated other people, you know, before we were born — plenty, I expect. You see, they're both old. Look at your father, with three separate families!"

"Isn't there any place," cried Jon, "in all this beastly London where we can be alone?"

"Only a taxi."

"Let's get one, then."

When they were installed, Fleur asked suddenly: "Are you going back to Robin Hill? I should like to see where you live, Jon. I'm staying with my aunt for the night, but I could get back in time for dinner. I wouldn't come to the house, of course."

Jon gazed at her enraptured.

"Splendid! I can show it you from the copse, we shan't meet anybody. There's a train at four."

The god of property and his Forsytes great and small, leisured, official, commercial, or professional, unlike the working classes, still worked their seven hours a day, so that those two of the fourth generation travelled down to Robin Hill in an empty first-class carriage, dusty and sun-warmed, of that too early train. They travelled in blissful silence, holding each other's hands.

At the station they saw no one except porters, and a villager or two unknown to Jon, and walked out up the lane, which smelled of dust and honeysuckle.

For Jon — sure of her now, and without separation before him — it was a miraculous dawdle, more wonderful than those on the Downs, or along the river Thames. It was love-ina-mist — one of those illumined pages of Life, where every word and smile, and every light touch they gave each other were as little gold and red and blue butterflies and flowers and birds scrolled in among the text — a happy communing, without afterthought, which lasted twenty-seven minutes. They reached the coppice at the milking-hour. Jon would not take her as far as the farmyard; only to where she could see the field leading up to the gardens, and the house beyond. They turned in among the larches, and suddenly, at the winding of the path, came on Irene, sitting on an old log seat.

There are various kinds of shocks: to the vertebrae; to the nerves; to moral sensibility; and, more potent and permanent, to personal dignity. This last was the shock Jon received, coming thus on his mother. He became suddenly conscious that he was doing an indelicate thing. To have brought Fleur down openly — yes! But to sneak her in like this! Consumed with shame, he put on a front as brazen as his nature would permit.

Fleur was smiling a little defiantly; his mother's startled face was changing quickly to the impersonal and gracious. It was she who uttered the first words:

"I'm very glad to see you. It was nice of Jon to think of bringing you down to us."

"We weren't coming to the house," Jon blurted out. "I just wanted Fleur to see where I lived."

His mother said quietly: "Won't you come up and have tea?"

Feeling that he had but aggravated his breach of breeding, he heard Fleur answer: "Thanks very much; I have to get back to dinner. I met Jon by accident, and we thought it would be rather jolly just to see his home."

How self-possessed she was!

"Of course; but you MUST have tea. We'll send you down to the station. My husband will enjoy seeing you."

The expression of his mother's eyes, resting on him for a moment, cast Jon down level with the ground — a true worm. Then she led on, and Fleur followed her. He felt like a child, trailing after those two, who were talking so easily about Spain and Wansdon, and the house up there beyond the trees and the grassy slope. He watched the fencing of their eyes, taking each other in-the two beings he loved most in the world.

He could see his father sitting under the oak-tree; and suffered in advance all the loss of caste he must go through in the eyes of that tranquil figure, with his knees crossed, thin, old, and elegant; already he could feel the faint irony which would come into his voice and smile.

"This is Fleur Forsyte, Jolyon; Jon brought her down to see the house. Let's have tea at once — she has to catch a train. Jon, tell them, dear, and telephone to the Dragon for a car."

To leave her alone with them was strange, and yet, as no doubt his mother had foreseen, the least of evils at the moment; so he ran up into the house. Now he would not see Fleur alone again — not for a minute, and they had arranged no further meeting! When he returned under cover of the maids and teapots, there was not a trace of awkwardness beneath the tree; it was all within himself, but not the less for that. They were talking of the Gallery off Cork Street.

“We back-numbers,” his father was saying, “are awfully anxious to find out why we can’t appreciate the new stuff; you and Jon must tell us.”

“It’s supposed to be satiric, isn’t it?” said Fleur.

He saw his father’s smile.

“Satiric? Oh! I think it’s more than that. What do you say, Jon?”

“I don’t know at all,” stammered Jon. His father’s face had a sudden grimness.

“The young are tired of us, our gods and our ideals. Off with their heads, they say — smash their idols! And let’s get back to — nothing! And, by Jove, they’ve done it! Jon’s a poet. He’ll be going in, too, and stamping on what’s left of us. Property, beauty, sentiment — all smoke. We mustn’t own anything nowadays, not even our feelings. They stand in the way of — Nothing.”

Jon listened, bewildered, almost outraged by his father’s words, behind which he felt a meaning that he could not reach. He didn’t want to stamp on anything!

“Nothing’s the god of today,” continued Jolyon; “we’re back where the Russians were sixty years ago, when they started Nihilism.”

“No, Dad,” cried Jon suddenly; “we only want to LIVE, and we don’t know how, because of the Past — that’s all!”

“By George!” said Jolyon, “that’s profound, Jon. Is it your own? The Past! Old ownerships, old passions, and their aftermath. Let’s have cigarettes.”

Conscious that his mother had lifted her hand to her lips, quickly, as if to hush something, Jon handed the cigarettes. He lighted his father’s and Fleur’s, then one for himself. Had he taken the knock that Val had spoken of? The smoke was blue when he had not puffed, grey when he had; he liked the sensation in his nose, and the sense of equality it gave him. He was glad no one said: “So you’ve begun!” He felt less young.

Fleur looked at her watch, and rose. His mother went with her into the house. Jon stayed with his father, puffing at the cigarette.

“See her into the car, old man,” said Jolyon; “and when she’s gone, ask your mother to come back to me.”

Jon went. He waited in the hall. He saw her into the car. There was no chance for any word; hardly for a pressure of the hand. He waited all that evening for something to be said to him. Nothing was said. Nothing might have happened. He went up to bed; and in the mirror on his dressing-table met himself. He did not speak, nor did the image; but both looked as if they thought the more.

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IV

In Green Street

Uncertain, whether the impression that Prosper Profond was dangerous should be traced to his attempt to give Val the Mayfly filly; to the remark of Fleur's: "Isn't he a great cat? Prowling!" to his preposterous inquiry of Jack Cardigan: "What's the use of keepin' fit?" or, more simply, to the fact that he was a foreigner, or alien as it was now called. Certain that Annette was looking particularly handsome, and that Soames had sold him a Gauguin and then torn up the cheque, so that Monsieur Profond himself had said: "I didn't get that small picture I bought from Mr. Forsyde."

However suspiciously regarded, he still frequented Winifred's evergreen little house in Green Street, with a good-natured obtuseness which no one mistook for naivete; a word hardly applicable to Monsieur Prosper Profond. Winifred still found him "amusing," and would write him little notes saying: "Come and have a 'jolly' with us'— it was breath of life to her to keep up with the phrases of the day.

The mystery, with which all felt him to be surrounded, was due to his having done, seen, heard, and known everything, and found nothing in it — which was unnatural. The English type of disillusionment was familiar enough to Winifred, who had always moved in fashionable circles. It gave a certain cachet or distinction, so that one got something out of it. But to see nothing in anything, not as a pose, but because there WAS nothing in anything, was not English; and that which was not English one could not help secretly feeling dangerous, if not precisely bad form. It was like having the mood which the war had left, seated — dark, heavy, smiling, indifferent — in your Empire chair; it was like listening to that mood talking through thick pink lips above a little diabolic beard. It was, as Jack Cardigan expressed it — for the English character at large —"a bit too thick"— for if nothing was really worth getting excited about, there were always games, and one could make it so! Even Winifred, ever a Forsyte at heart, felt that there was nothing to be had out of a mood of disillusionment; it really ought not to be there. Monsieur Profond, in fact, made the mood too plain, in a country which decently veiled such realities.

When Fleur, after her hurried return from Robin Hill, came down to dinner that evening, the mood was standing at the window of Winifred's little drawing-room, looking out into Green Street, with an air of seeing nothing in it. And Fleur gazed promptly into the fireplace with an air of seeing a fire which was not there.

Monsieur Profond came from the window. He was in full fig, with a white waistcoat and a white flower in his buttonhole.

"Well, Miss Forsyde," he said, "I'm awful pleased to see you. Mr. Forsyde well? I was sayin' today I want to see him have some pleasure. He worries."

"You think so?" said Fleur shortly.

"Worries," repeated Monsieur Profond, burring the r's.

Fleur spun round. "Shall I tell you," she said, "what would give him pleasure?" But the words: "To hear that you had cleared out" died at the expression on his face. All his fine white teeth were showing.

"I was hearin' at the Club today, about his old trouble."

"What do you mean?"

Monsieur Profond moved his sleek head as if to minimise his statement.

"Before you were born," he said; "that small business."

Though conscious that he had cleverly diverted her from his own share in her father's worry, Fleur could not withstand a rush of nervous curiosity. "What did you hear?"

"Why!" murmured Monsieur Profond, "you know all that."

"I expect I do. But I should like to know that you haven't heard it all wrong."

"His first wife," murmured Monsieur Profond.

Choking back the words: "He was never married before"; she said: "Well, what about her?"

"Mr. George Forsyde was tellin' me about your father's first wife marryin' his cousin Jolyon afterwards. It was a small bit unpleasant, I should think. I saw their boy — nice boy!"

Fleur looked up. Monsieur Profond was swimming, heavily diabolical, before her. That — the reason! With the most heroic effort of her life so far, she managed to arrest that swimming figure. She could not tell whether he had noticed. And just then Winifred came in.

"Oh! here you both are already! Imogen and I have had the most amusing afternoon at the Babies' bazaar."

"What babies?" said Fleur mechanically.

"The 'Save the Babies.' I got such a bargain, my dear. A piece of old Armenian work — from before the flood. I want your opinion on it, Prosper."

"Auntie," whispered Fleur suddenly.

At the tone in the girl's voice Winifred closed in on her.

"What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

Monsieur Profond had withdrawn into the window, where he was practically out of hearing.

"Auntie, he told me that father has been married before. Is it true that he divorced her, and she married Jon Forsyte's father?"

Never in all the life of the mother of four little Darties had Winifred felt more seriously embarrassed. Her niece's face was so pale, her eyes so dark, her voice so whispery and strained.

"Your Father didn't wish you to hear," she said, with all the aplomb she could muster. "These things will happen. I've often told him he ought to let you know."

"Oh!" said Fleur, and that was all, but it made Winifred pat her shoulder — a firm little shoulder, nice and white! She never could help an appraising eye and touch in the matter of her niece, who would have to be married, of course — though not to that boy Jon.

"We've forgotten all about it years and years ago," she said comfortably. "Come and have dinner!"

"No, Auntie. I don't feel very well. May I go upstairs?"

"My dear!" murmured Winifred, concerned; "you're not taking this to heart? Why, you haven't properly come out yet! That boy's a child!"

"What boy? I've only got a headache. But I can't stand that man to-night."

"Well, well," said Winifred; "go and lie down. I'll send you some bromide, and I shall talk to Prosper Profond. What business had he to gossip? Though I must say I think it's much better you should know."

Fleur smiled. "Yes," she said, and slipped from the room.

She went up with her head whirling, a dry sensation in her throat, a fluttered, frightened feeling in her breast. Never in her life as yet had she suffered from even momentary fear that she would not get what she had set her heart on. The sensations of the afternoon had been full, and poignant, and this gruesome discovery coming on the top of them had really made her head ache. No wonder her father had hidden that photograph so secretly behind her own — ashamed of having kept it! But could he hate Jon's mother and yet keep her photograph? She pressed her hands over her forehead, trying to see things clearly. Had they told Jon — had her visit to Robin Hill forced them to tell him? Everything now turned on that! She knew, they all knew, except — perhaps — Jon!

She walked up and down, biting her lip and thinking desperately hard. Jon loved his mother. If they had told him, what would he do? She could not tell. But if they had not told him, should she not — could she not get him for herself — get married to him, before he knew? She searched her memories of Robin Hill. His mother's face so passive — with its dark eyes and as if powdered hair, its reserve, its smile — baffled her; and his father's — kindly, sunken, ironic. Instinctively she felt they would shrink from telling Jon, even now, shrink from hurting him — for of course it would hurt him awfully to know!

Her aunt must be made not to tell her father that she knew. So long as neither she herself nor Jon were supposed to know, there was still a chance — freedom to cover one's tracks, and get what her heart was set on. But she was almost overwhelmed by her isolation. Every one's hand was against her — every one's! It was as Jon had said — he and she just wanted to live and the past was in their way, a past they hadn't shared in, and didn't understand! Oh! What a shame! And suddenly she thought of June. Would she help them? For somehow June had left on her the impression that she would be sympathetic with their love, impatient of obstacle. Then, instinctively, she thought: ‘I won’t give anything away, though, even to her. I daren’t! I mean to have Jon; in spite of them all.’

Soup was brought up to her, and one of Winifred’s pet headache cachets. She swallowed both. Then Winifred herself appeared. Fleur opened her campaign with the words:

“You know, Auntie, I do wish people wouldn’t think I’m in love with that boy. Why, I’ve hardly seen him!”

Winifred, though experienced, was not ‘fine’. She accepted the remark with considerable relief. Of course, it was not pleasant for the girl to hear of the family scandal, and she set herself to minimise the matter, a task for which she was eminently qualified, raised fashionably under a comfortable mother and a father whose nerves might not be shaken, and for many years the wife of Montague Dartie. Her description was a masterpiece of understatement. Fleur’s father’s first wife had been very foolish. There had been a young man who had got run over, and she had left Fleur’s father. Then, years after, when it might all have come right again, she had taken up with their cousin Jolyon; and, of course, her father had been obliged to have a divorce. Nobody remembered anything of it now, except just the family. And, perhaps, it had all turned out for the best; her father had Fleur; and Jolyon and Irene had been quite happy, they said, and their boy was a nice boy. “Val having Holly, too, is a sort of plaster, don’t you know?” With these soothing words, Winifred patted her niece’s shoulder, thought: “She’s a nice, plump little thing!” and went back to Prosper Profond, who, in spite of his indiscretion, was very “amusing” this evening.

For some minutes after her aunt had gone Fleur remained under influence of bromide material and spiritual. But then reality came back. Her aunt had left out all that mattered — all the feeling, the hate, the love, the unforgivingness of passionate hearts. She, who knew so little of life, and had touched only the fringe of love, was yet aware by instinct that words have as little relation to fact and feeling as coin to the bread it buys. ‘Poor Father!’ she thought. ‘Poor me! Poor Jon! But I don’t care, I mean to have him!’ From the window of her darkened room she saw “that man” issue from the door below and “prowl” away. If he and her mother — how would that affect her chance? Surely it must make her father cling to her more closely, so that he would consent in the end to anything she wanted, or become reconciled the sooner to what she did without his knowledge.

She took some earth from the flower-box in the window, and with all her might flung it after that disappearing figure. It fell short, but the action did her good.

And a little puff of air came up from Green Street, smelling of petrol, not sweet.

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V

Purely Forsyte Affairs

Soames, coming up to the City, with the intention of calling in at Green Street at the end of his day and taking Fleur back home with him, suffered from rumination. Sleeping partner that he was, he seldom visited the City now, but he still had a room of his own at Cuthcott Kingson & Forsyte's, and one special clerk and a half assigned to the management of purely Forsyte affairs. They were somewhat in flux just now — an auspicious moment for the disposal of house property. And Soames was unloading the estates of his father and uncle Roger, and to some extent of his uncle Nicholas. His shrewd and matter-of-course probity in all money concerns had made him something of an autocrat in connection with these trusts. If Soames thought this or thought that, one had better save oneself the bother of thinking too. He guaranteed, as it were, irresponsibility to numerous Forsytes of the third and fourth generations. His fellow trustees, such as his cousins Roger or Nicholas, his cousins-inlaw Tweetyman and Spender, or his sister Cicely's husband all trusted him; he signed first, and where he signed first they signed after, and nobody was a penny the worse. Just now they were all a good many pennies the better, and Soames was beginning to see the close of certain trusts, except for distribution of the income from securities as gilt-edged as was compatible with the period.

Passing the more feverish parts of the City towards the most perfect backwater in London, he ruminated. Money was extraordinarily tight; and morality extraordinarily loose! The War had done it. Banks were not lending; people breaking contracts all over the place. There was a feeling in the air and a look on faces that he did not like. The country seemed in for a spell of gambling and bankruptcies. There was satisfaction in the thought that neither he nor his trusts had an investment which could be affected by anything less maniacal than national repudiation or a levy on capital. If Soames had faith, it was in what he called "English common sense"— or the power to have things, if not one way then another. He might — like his father James before him — say he didn't know what things were coming to, but he never in his heart believed they were. If it rested with him, they wouldn't — and, after all, he was only an Englishman like any other, so quietly tenacious of what he had that he knew he would never really part with it without something more or less equivalent in exchange. Take his own case, for example! He was well off. Did that do anybody harm? He did not eat ten meals a day; he ate no more than, perhaps not so much as, a poor man. He spent no money on vice; breathed no more air, used no more water to speak of than the mechanic or the porter. He certainly had pretty things about him, but they had given employment in the making, and somebody must use them. He bought pictures, but Art must be encouraged. He was, in fact, an accidental channel through which money flowed, employing labour. What was there objectionable in that? In his charge money was in quicker and more useful flux than it would be in charge of the State and a lot of slow-fly money-sucking officials. And as to what he saved each year — it was just as much in flux as what he didn't save, going into Water Board or Council Stocks, or something sound and useful. The State paid him no salary for being trustee of his own or other people's money — HE DID ALL THAT FOR NOTHING. Therein lay the whole case against nationalisation — owners of private property were unpaid, and yet had every incentive to quicken up the flux. Under nationalisation — just the opposite! In a country smarting from officialism he felt that he had a strong case.

It particularly annoyed him, entering that backwater of perfect peace, to think that a lot of unscrupulous Trusts and Combinations had been cornering the market in goods of all kinds, and keeping prices at an artificial height. Such abusers of the individualistic system were the ruffians who caused all the trouble, and it was some satisfaction to see them getting into a stew at last lest the whole thing might come down with a run-and land in the soup.

The offices of Cuthcott Kingson & Forsyte occupied the ground and first floors of a house on the right-hand side; and, ascending to his room, Soames thought: 'Time we had a coat of paint.'

His old clerk Gradman was seated, where he always was, at a huge bureau with countless pigeonholes. Half-the-clerk stood beside him, with a broker's note recording investment of the proceeds from sale of the Bryanston Square house, in Roger Forsyte's estate. Soames took it, and said:

"Vancouver City Stock. H'm! It's down today!"

With a sort of grating ingratiation old Gradman answered him:

"Ye-es; but everything's down, Mr. Soames." And half-the-clerk withdrew.

Soames skewered the document onto a number of other papers and hung up his hat.

"I want to look at my Will and Marriage Settlement, Gradman."

Old Gradman, moving to the limit of his swivel chair, drew out two drafts from the bottom left-hand drawer. Recovering his body, he raised his grizzle-haired face, very red from stooping.

"Copies, sir."

Soames took them. It struck him suddenly how like Gradman was to the stout brindled yard dog they had been wont to keep on his chain at 'The Shelter,' till one day Fleur had come and insisted it should be let loose, so that it had at once bitten the cook and been destroyed. If you let Gradman off his chair, would he bite the cook?

Checking this frivolous fancy, Soames unfolded his Marriage Settlement. He had not looked at it for over eighteen years, not since he remade his Will when his father died and Fleur was born. He wanted to see whether the words "during coverture" were in. Yes, they were — odd expression, when you thought of it, and derived perhaps from horse-breeding! Interest on fifteen thousand pounds (which he paid her without deducting income tax) so long as she remained his wife, and afterwards during widowhood "dum casta"— old-fashioned and rather pointed words, put in to insure the conduct of Fleur's mother. His Will made it up to an annuity of a thousand under the same conditions. All right! He returned the copies to Gradman, who took them without looking up, swung the chair, restored the papers to their drawer, and went on casting up.

"Gradman! I don't like the condition of the country; there are a lot of people about without any common sense. I want to find a way by which I can safeguard Miss Fleur against anything which might arise."

Gradman wrote the figure "2" on his blotting-paper.

"Ye-es," he said; "there's a nahsty spirit."

"The ordinary restraint against anticipation doesn't meet the case."

"Nao," said Gradman.

"Suppose those Labour fellows come in, or worse! It's these people with fixed ideas who are the danger. Look at Ireland!"

"Ah!" said Gradman.

"Suppose I were to make a settlement on her at once with myself as beneficiary for life, they couldn't take anything but the interest from me, unless of course they alter the law."

Gradman moved his head and smiled.

"Aoh!" he said, "they wouldn't do tha-at!"

"I don't know," muttered Soames; "I don't trust them."

"It'll take two years, sir, to be valid against death duties."

Soames sniffed. Two years! He was only sixty-five!

"That's not the point. Draw a form of settlement that passes all my property to Miss Fleur's children in equal shares, with antecedent life-interests first to myself and then to her without power of anticipation, and add a clause that in the event of anything happening to divert her life-interest, that interest passes to the trustees, to apply for her benefit, in their absolute discretion."

Gradman grated: "Rather extreme at your age, sir; you lose control."

"That's my business," said Soames sharply.

Gradman wrote on a piece of paper. "Life-interest — anticipation — divert interest — absolute discretion . . . " and said:

"What trustees? There's young Mr. Kingson, he's a nice steady young fellow."

"Yes, he might do for one. I must have three. There isn't a Forsyte now who appeals to me."

"Not young Mr. Nicholas? He's at the Bar. We've given 'im briefs."

"He'll never set the Thames on fire," said Soames.

A smile oozed out on Gradman's face, greasy with countless mutton-chops, the smile of a man who sits all day.

"You can't expect it, at his age, Mr. Soames."

“Why? What is he? Forty?”

“Ye-es, quite a young fellow.”

“Well, put him in; but I want somebody who’ll take a personal interest. There’s no one that I can see.”

“What about Mr. Valerius, now he’s come home?”

“Val Dartie? With that father?”

“We-ell,” murmured Gradman, “he’s been dead seven years — the Statute runs against him.”

“No,” said Soames. “I don’t like the connection.”

He rose. Gradman said suddenly:

“If they were makin’ a levy on capital, they could come on the trustees, sir. So there you’d be just the same. I’d think it over, if I were you.”

“That’s true,” said Soames, “I will. What have you done about that dilapidation notice in Vere Street?”

“I ‘aven’t served it yet. The party’s very old. She won’t want to go out at her age.”

“I don’t know. This spirit of unrest touches every one.”

“Still, I’m lookin’ at things broadly, sir. She’s eighty-one.”

“Better serve it,” said Soames, “and see what she says. Oh! and Mr. Timothy? Is everything in order in case of accidents.”

“I’ve got the inventory of his estate all ready; had the furniture and pictures valued so that we know what reserves to put on. I shall be sorry when he goes, though. Dear me! It is a time since I first saw Mr. Timothy!”

“We can’t live for ever,” said Soames, taking down his hat.

“Nao,” said Gradman; “but it’ll be a pity — the last of the old family! Shall I take up the matter of that nuisance in Old Compton Street? Those organs — they’re nahsty things.”

“Do. I must call for Miss Fleur and catch the four o’clock. Good-day, Gradman.”

“Good-day, Mr. Soames. I hope Miss Fleur —”

“Well enough, but gads about too much.”

“Ye-es,” grated Gradman; “she’s young.”

Soames went out, musing: “Old Gradman! If he were younger I’d put him in the trust. There’s nobody I can depend on to take a real interest.”

Leaving the bilious and mathematical exactitude, the preposterous peace of that backwater, he thought suddenly: ‘During coverture! Why can’t they exclude fellows like Profond, instead of a lot of hard-working Germans?’ and was surprised at the depth of uneasiness which could provoke so unpatriotic a thought. But there it was! One never got a moment of real peace. Always something at the back of everything! And he made his way towards Green Street.

Two hours later by his watch, Thomas Gradman, stirring in his swivel chair, closed the last drawer of his bureau, and putting into his waistcoat pocket a bunch of keys so fat that they gave him a protuberance on the liver side, brushed his old top hat round with his sleeve, took his umbrella, and descended. Thick, short, and buttoned closely into his old frock coat, he walked towards Covent Garden market. He never missed that daily promenade to the Tube for Highgate, and seldom some critical transaction on the way in connection with vegetables and fruit. Generations might be born, and hats might change, wars be fought, and Forsytes fade away, but Thomas Gradman, faithful and grey, would take his daily walk and buy his daily vegetable. Times were not what they were, and his son had lost a leg, and they never gave him those nice little plaited baskets to carry the stuff in now, and these Tubes were convenient things — still he mustn’t complain; his health was good considering his time of life, and after fifty-four years in the Law he was getting a round eight hundred a year and a little worried of late, because it was mostly collector’s commission on the rents, and with all this conversion of Forsyte property going on, it looked like drying up, and the price of living still so high; but it was no good worrying —“The good God made us all”— as he was in the habit of saying; still, house property in London — he didn’t know what Mr. Roger or Mr. James would say if they could see it being sold like this — seemed to show a lack of faith; but Mr. Soames — he worried. Life and lives in being and twenty-one years after — beyond that you couldn’t go; still, he kept his health wonderfully — and Miss Fleur was a pretty little thing — she was; she’d marry; but lots of people had no children nowadays — he had had his first child at twenty-two; and Mr. Jolyon, married while he was at Cambridge, had his child the same year

— gracious Peter! That was back in ’70, a long time before old Mr. Jolyon — fine judge of property — had taken his Will away from Mr. James — dear, yes! Those were the days when they were buyin’ property right and left, and none of this khaki and fallin’ over one another to get out of things; and cucumbers at twopence; and a melon — the old melons, that made your mouth water! Fifty years since he went into Mr. James’ office, and Mr. James had said to him: “Now, Gradman, you’re only a shaver — you pay attention, and you’ll make your five hundred a year before you’ve done.” And he had, and feared God, and served the Forsytes, and kept a vegetable diet at night. And, buying a copy of John Bull — not that he approved of it, an extravagant affair — he entered the Tube elevator with his mere brown-paper parcel, and was borne down into the bowels of the earth.

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VI

Soames' Private Life

On his way to Green Street it occurred to Soames that he ought to go into Dumetrius' in Suffolk Street about the possibility of the Bolderby Old Crome. Almost worth while to have fought the War to have the Bolderby Old Crome, as it were, in flux! Old Bolderby had died, his son and grandson had been killed — a cousin was coming into the estate, who meant to sell it, some said because of the condition of England, others said because he had asthma.

If Dumetrius once got hold of it the price would become prohibitive; it was necessary for Soames to find out whether Dumetrius had got it, before he tried to get it himself. He therefore confined himself to discussing with Dumetrius whether Monticellis would come again now that it was the fashion for a picture to be anything except a picture; and the future of Johns, with a side-slip into Buxton Knights. It was only when leaving that he added: "So they're not selling the Bolderby Old Crome, after all?" In sheer pride of racial superiority, as he had calculated would be the case, Dumetrius replied:

"Oh! I shall get it, Mr. Forsyte, sir."

The flutter of his eyelid fortified Soames in a resolution to write direct to the new Bolderby, suggesting that the only dignified way of dealing with an Old Crome was to avoid dealers. He therefore said: "Well, good-day!" and went, leaving Dumetrius the wiser.

At Green Street he found that Fleur was out and would be all the evening; she was staying one more night in London. He cabbed on dejectedly, and caught his train.

He reached his house about six o'clock. The air was heavy, midges biting, thunder about. Taking his letters he went up to his dressing-room to cleanse himself of London.

An uninteresting post. A receipt, a bill for purchases on behalf of Fleur. A circular about an exhibition of etchings. A letter beginning:

"SIR,

"I feel it my duty —"

That would be an appeal or something unpleasant. He looked at once for the signature. There was none! Incredulously he turned the page over and examined each corner. Not being a public man, Soames had never yet had an anonymous letter, and his first impulse was to tear it up, as a dangerous thing; his second to read it, as a thing still more dangerous.

"SIR,

"I feel it my duty to inform you that having no interest in the matter your lady is carrying on with a foreigner —"

Reaching that word Soames stopped mechanically and examined the post-mark. So far as he could pierce the impenetrable disguise in which the Post Office had wrapped it, there was something with a "sea" at the end and a "t" in it. Chelsea? No! Battersea? Perhaps! He read on.

"These foreigners are all the same. Sack the lot! This one meets your lady twice a week. I know it of my own knowledge — and to see an Englishman put on goes against the grain. You watch it and see if what I say isn't true. I shouldn't meddle if it wasn't a dirty foreigner that's in it. Yours obedient."

The sensation with which Soames dropped the letter was similar to that he would have had entering his bedroom and finding it full of black-beetles. The meanness of anonymity gave a shuddering obscenity to the moment. And the worst of it was that this shadow had been at the back of his mind ever since the Sunday evening when Fleur had pointed down at Prosper Profond strolling on the lawn, and said: "Prowling cat!" Had he not in connection therewith, this very day, perused his Will and Marriage Settlement? And now this anonymous ruffian, with nothing to gain, apparently, save the venting of his spite against foreigners, had wrenched it out of the obscurity in which he had hoped and wished it would remain. To have such knowledge forced on him, at his time of life, about Fleur's mother! He picked the letter up from the carpet, tore it across, and then, when it hung together by just the fold at the back, stopped tearing, and re-read it. He was taking at that moment one of the decisive resolutions of his life. He would NOT be forced into another scandal. No! However he decided to deal with this matter — and it required the most far-sighted and careful consideration — he would do nothing that might injure Fleur. That resolution taken, his mind answered the helm again, and he made his ablutions. His hands trembled as he dried them. Scandal he would not have, but something must be done to stop this sort of thing! He went into his wife's room and stood looking round him. The idea of searching for anything which would incriminate, and entitle him to hold a menace over her, did not even come to him. There would be nothing — she was much too practical. The idea of having her watched had been dismissed before it came — too well he remembered his previous experience of that. No! He had nothing but this torn-up letter from some anonymous ruffian, whose impudent intrusion into his private life he so violently resented. It was repugnant to him to make use of it, but he might have to. What a mercy Fleur was not at home to-night! A tap on the door broke up his painful cogitations.

"Mr. Michael Mont, sir, is in the drawing-room. Will you see him?"

"No," said Soames; "yes. I'll come down."

Anything that would take his mind off for a few minutes!

Michael Mont in flannels stood on the verandah, smoking a cigarette. He threw it away as Soames came up, and ran his hand through his hair.

Soames' feeling towards this young man was singular. He was no doubt a rackety, irresponsible young fellow according to old standards, yet somehow likeable, with his extraordinarily cheerful way of blurting out his opinions.

"Come in," he said; "have you had tea?"

Mont came in.

"I thought Fleur would have been back, sir; but I'm glad she isn't. The fact is, I— I'm fearfully gone on her; so fearfully gone that I thought you'd better know. It's old-fashioned, of course, coming to fathers first, but I thought you'd forgive that. I went to my own dad, and he says if I settle down he'll see me through. He rather cottons to the idea, in fact. I told him about your Goya."

"Oh!" said Soames, inexpressibly dry. "He rather cottons?"

"Yes, sir; do you?"

Soames smiled faintly. "You see," resumed Mont, twiddling his straw hat, while his hair, ears, eyebrows, all seemed to stand up from excitement, "when you've been through the War you can't help being in a hurry."

"To get married; and unmarried afterwards," said Soames slowly.

"Not from Fleur, sir. Imagine, if you were me!"

Soames cleared his throat. That way of putting it was forcible enough.

"Fleur's too young," he said.

"Oh! no, sir. We're awfully old nowadays. My dad seems to me a perfect babe; his thinking apparatus hasn't turned a hair. But he's a Baronight, of course; that keeps him back."

"Baronight," repeated Soames; "what may that be?"

"Bart, sir. I shall be a Bart some day. But I shall live it down, you know."

"Go away and live this down," said Soames.

Young Mont said imploringly: "Oh! no, sir. I simply must hang round, or I shouldn't have a dog's chance. You'll let Fleur do what she likes, I suppose, anyway. Madame passes me."

"Indeed!" said Soames frigidly.

"You don't really bar me, do you?" and the young man looked so doleful that Soames smiled.

"You may think you're very old," he said; "but you strike me as extremely young. To rattle ahead of everything is not a proof of maturity."

"All right, sir; I give you our age. But to show you I mean business — I've got a job."

"Glad to hear it."

"Joined a publisher; my governor is putting up the stakes."

Soames put his hand over his mouth — he had so very nearly said: "God help the publisher." His grey eyes scrutinised the agitated young man.

"I don't dislike you, Mr. Mont, but Fleur is everything to me. Everything — do you understand?"

“Yes, sir, I know; but so she is to me.”

“That’s as may be. I’m glad you’ve told me, however. And now I think there’s nothing more to be said.”

“I know it rests with her, sir.”

“It will rest with her a long time, I hope.”

“You aren’t cheering,” said Mont suddenly.

“No,” said Soames; “my experience of life has not made me anxious to couple people in a hurry. Good-night, Mr. Mont. I shan’t tell Fleur what you’ve said.”

“Oh!” murmured Mont blankly; “I really could knock my brains out for want of her. She knows that perfectly well.”

“I dare say,” and Soames held out his hand. A distracted squeeze, a heavy sigh, and, soon after, sounds from the young man’s motor-cycle called up visions of flying dust and broken bones.

‘The younger generation!’ he thought heavily, and went out on to the lawn. The gardeners had been mowing, and there was still the smell of fresh-cut grass — the thundery air kept all scents close to earth. The sky was of a purplish hue — the poplars black. Two or three boats passed on the river, scuttling, as it were, for shelter before the storm. ‘Three days fine weather,’ thought Soames, ‘and then a storm!’ Where was Annette? With that chap, for all he knew — she was a young woman! Impressed with the queer charity of that thought, he entered the summer-house and sat down. The fact was — and he admitted it — Fleur was so much to him that his wife was very little — very little; French — had hardly been more than a mistress, and he was getting indifferent to that side of things! It was odd how, with all his ingrained care for moderation and secure investment, Soames ever put his emotional eggs into one basket. First Irene — now Fleur. He was just conscious of it, sitting there, conscious of its odd dangerousness. It had brought him to wreck and scandal once, but now — now it should save him! He cared so much for Fleur that he would have no further scandal. If only he could get at that anonymous letter writer, he would teach the fellow not to meddle and stir up mud at the bottom of water which he wished should remain stagnant! . . . A distant flash, a low rumble, and large drops of rain spattered on the thatch above him. He remained indifferent, tracing a pattern with his finger on the dusty surface of a little rustic table. Fleur’s future! ‘I want fair sailing for her,’ he thought. ‘Nothing else matters at my time of life.’ A lonely business — life! What you had you never could keep to yourself! As you warned one off, you let another in. One could make sure of nothing! He reached up and pulled a red rambler rose from a cluster which blocked the window. Flowers grew and dropped — you couldn’t keep them! The thunder rumbled and crashed, travelling east along the river, the paling flashes flicked his eyes; the poplar tops showed sharp and dense against the sky, a heavy shower rustled and rattled and veiled in the little house wherein he sat, indifferent, thinking.

When the storm was over, he left his retreat and went down the wet path to the river bank.

Two swans had come, sheltering in among the reeds. He knew the birds well, and stood watching the dignity in the curve of those white necks and formidable snake-like heads. ‘Not dignified — what I have to do!’ he thought. And yet it must be tackled, lest worse befell. Annette must be back by now from wherever she had gone, for it was nearly dinner-time, and as the moment for seeing her approached, the difficulty of knowing what to say and how to say it had increased. A new and scaring thought occurred to him. Suppose she wanted her liberty to marry this fellow! Well, if she did, she couldn’t have it. He had not married her for that. The image of Prosper Profond dawdled before him reassuringly. Not a marrying man! No, no! Anger replaced that momentary scare. ‘He had better not come my way,’ he thought. The mongrel represented —! Ah! what did Prosper Profond represent? Nothing that mattered surely. And yet something real enough in the world — unmorality let off its chain, disillusionment on the prowl! That expression Annette had caught from him: “Je m’en fiche!” A fatalistic chap! A Continental — a cosmopolitan — a product of the age! If there were condemnation more complete, Soames felt that he did not know it.

The swans had turned their heads, and were looking past him into some distance of their own. One of them uttered a little hiss, wagged its tail, turned as if answering to a rudder, and swam away. The other followed. Their white bodies, their stately necks, passed out of his sight, and he went towards the house.

Annette was in the drawing-room, dressed for dinner, and he thought as he went up-stairs: ‘Handsome is as handsome does.’ Handsome! Except for remarks about the curtains in the drawing-room, and the storm, there was practically no conversation during a meal distinguished by exactitude of quantity and perfection of quality. Soames drank nothing. He followed her into the drawing-room afterwards, and found her smoking a cigarette on the sofa between the two French windows. She was leaning back, almost upright, in a low black frock, with her knees crossed and her blue eyes half closed; grey-blue smoke issued from her red, rather full lips, a fillet bound her chestnut hair, she wore the thinnest silk stockings, and shoes with very high heels showing off her instep. A fine piece in any room! Soames, who held that torn letter in a hand thrust deep into the side-pocket of his dinner-jacket, said:

"I'm going to shut the window; the damp's lifting in."

He did so, and stood looking at a David Cox adorning the cream-panelled wall close by.

What was she thinking of? He had never understood a woman in his life — except Fleur — and Fleur not always! His heart beat fast. But if he meant to do it, now was the moment. Turning from the David Cox, he took out the torn letter.

"I've had this."

Her eyes widened, stared at him, and hardened.

Soames handed her the letter.

"It's torn, but you can read it." And he turned back to the David Cox — a seapiece, of good tone but without movement enough. 'I wonder what that chap's doing at this moment?' he thought. 'I'll astonish him yet.' Out of the corner of his eye he saw Annette holding the letter rigidly; her eyes moved from side to side under her darkened lashes and frowning darkened eyebrows. She dropped the letter, gave a little shiver, smiled, and said:

"Dirrty!"

"I quite agree," said Soames; "degrading. Is it true?"

A tooth fastened on her red lower lip. "And what if it were?"

She was brazen!

"Is that all you have to say?"

"No."

"Well, speak out!"

"What is the good of talking?"

Soames said icily: "So you admit it?"

"I admit nothing. You are a fool to ask. A man like you should not ask. It is dangerous."

Soames made a tour of the room, to subdue his rising anger.

"Do you remember," he said, halting in front of her, "what you were when I married you? Working at accounts in a restaurant."

"Do you remember that I was not half your age?"

Soames broke off the hard encounter of their eyes, and went back to the David Cox.

"I am not going to bandy words. I require you to give up this — friendship. I think of the matter entirely as it affects Fleur."

"Ah! — Fleur!"

"Yes," said Soames stubbornly; "Fleur. She is your child as well as mine."

"It is kind to admit that!"

"Are you going to do what I say?"

"I refuse to tell you."

"Then I must make you."

Annette smiled.

"No, Soames," she said. "You are helpless. Do not say things that you will regret."

Anger swelled the veins on his forehead. He opened his mouth to vent that emotion, and — could not. Annette went on:

"There shall be no more such letters, I promise you. That is enough."

Soames writhed. He had a sense of being treated like a child by this woman who had deserved he did not know what.

"When two people have married, and lived like us, Soames, they had better be quiet about each other. There are things one does not drag up into the light for people to laugh at. You will be quiet, then; not for my sake — for your own. You are getting old; I am not, yet. You have made me ver-ry practical.” Soames, who had passed through all the sensations of being choked, repeated dully:

“I require you to give up this friendship.”

“And if I do not?”

“Then — then I will cut you out of my Will.”

Somehow it did not seem to meet the case. Annette laughed.

“You will live a long time, Soames.”

“You — you are a bad woman,” said Soames suddenly.

Annette shrugged her shoulders.

“I do not think so. Living with you has killed things in me, it is true; but I am not a bad woman. I am sensible — that is all. And so will you be when you have thought it over.”

“I shall see this man,” said Soames sullenly, “and warn him off.”

“Mon cher, you are funny. You do not want me, you have as much of me as you want; and you wish the rest of me to be dead. I admit nothing, but I am not going to be dead, Soames, at my age; so you had better be quiet, I tell you. I myself will make no scandal; none. Now, I am not saying any more, whatever you do.”

She reached out, took a French novel off a little table, and opened it. Soames watched her, silenced by the tumult of his feelings. The thought of that man was almost making him want her, and this was a revelation of their relationship, startling to one little given to introspective philosophy. Without saying another word he went out and up to the picture-gallery. This came of marrying a Frenchwoman! And yet, without her there would have been no Fleur! She had served her purpose.

‘She’s right,’ he thought; ‘I can do nothing. I don’t even KNOW that there’s anything in it.’ The instinct of self-preservation warned him to batten down his hatches, to smother the fire with want of air. Unless one believed there was something in a thing, there wasn’t.

That night he went into her room. She received him in the most matter-of-fact way, as if there had been no scene between them. And he returned to his own room with a curious sense of peace. If one didn’t choose to see, one needn’t. And he did not choose — in future he did not choose. There was nothing to be gained by it — nothing! Opening the drawer he took from the sachet a handkerchief, and the framed photograph of Fleur. When he had looked at it a little he slipped it down, and there was that other one — that old one of Irene. An owl hooted while he stood in his window gazing at it. The owl hooted, the red climbing roses seemed to deepen in colour, there came a scent of lime-blossom. God! That had been a different thing! Passion — Memory! Dust!

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VII

June Takes a Hand

One who was a sculptor, a Slav, a sometime resident in New York, an egoist, and impecunious, was to be found of an evening in June Forsyte's studio on the bank of the Thames at Chiswick. On the evening of July 6, Boris Strumolowski — several of whose works were on show there because they were as yet too advanced to be on show anywhere else — had begun well, with that aloof and rather Christlike silence which admirably suited his youthful, round, broad-cheekboned countenance framed in bright hair banged like a girl's. June had known him three weeks, and he still seemed to her the principal embodiment of genius, and hope of the future; a sort of Star of the East which had strayed into an unappreciative West. Until that evening he had conversationally confined himself to recording his impressions of the United States, whose dust he had just shaken from off his feet — a country, in his opinion, so barbarous in every way that he had sold practically nothing there, and become an object of suspicion to the police; a country, as he said, without a race of its own, without liberty, equality, or fraternity, without principles, traditions, taste, without — in a word — a soul. He had left it for his own good, and come to the only other country where he could live well. June had dwelt unhappily on him in her lonely moments, standing before his creations — frightening, but powerful and symbolic once they had been explained! That he, haloed by bright hair like an early Italian painting, and absorbed in his genius to the exclusion of all else — the only sign of course by which real genius could be told — should still be a "lame duck" agitated her warm heart almost to the exclusion of Paul Post. And she had begun to take steps to clear her Gallery, in order to fill it with Strumolowski masterpieces. She had at once encountered trouble. Paul Post had kicked; Vospovitch had stung. With all the emphasis of a genius which she did not as yet deny them, they had demanded another six weeks at least of her Gallery. The American stream, still flowing in, would soon be flowing out. The American stream was their right, their only hope, their salvation — since nobody in this "beastly" country cared for Art. June had yielded to the demonstration. After all Boris would not mind their having the full benefit of an American stream, which he himself so violently despised.

This evening she had put that to Boris with nobody else present, except Hannah Hobdey, the mediaeval black-and-whitist, and Jimmy Portugal, editor of the Neo-Artist. She had put it to him with that sudden confidence which continual contact with the neo-artistic world had never been able to dry up in her warm and generous nature. He had not broken his Christlike silence, however, for more than two minutes before she began to move her blue eyes from side to side, as a cat moves its tail. This — he said — was characteristic of England, the most selfish country in the world; the country which sucked the blood of other countries; destroyed the brains and hearts of Irishmen, Hindus, Egyptians, Boers, and Burmese, all the finest races in the world; bullying, hypocritical England! This was what he had expected, coming to such a country, where the climate was all fog, and the people all tradesmen perfectly blind to Art, and sunk in profiteering and the grossest materialism. Conscious that Hannah Hobdey was murmuring: "Hear, hear!" and Jimmy Portugal sniggering, June grew crimson, and suddenly rapped out:

"Then why did you ever come? We didn't ask you." The remark was so singularly at variance with all that she had led him to expect from her, that Strumolowski stretched out his hand and took a cigarette.

"England never wants an idealist," he said.

But in June something primitively English was thoroughly upset; old Jolyon's sense of justice had risen, as it were, from bed. "You come and sponge on us," she said, "and then abuse us. If you think that's playing the game, I don't."

She now discovered that which others had discovered before her — the thickness of hide beneath which the sensibility of genius is sometimes veiled. Strumolowski's young and ingenuous face became the incarnation of a sneer.

"Sponge, one does not sponge, one takes what is owing — a tenth part of what is owing. You will repent to say that, Miss Forsyte."

"Oh, no," said June, "I shan't."

"Ah! We know very well, we artists — you take us to get what you can out of us. I want nothing from you"— and he blew out a cloud of June's smoke.

Decision rose in an icy puff from the turmoil of insulted shame within her. "Very well, then, you can take your things away.”

And, almost in the same moment, she thought: ‘Poor boy! He’s only got a garret, and probably not a taxi fare. In front of these people, too; it’s positively disgusting!’

Young Strumolowski shook his head violently; his hair, thick, smooth, close as a golden plate, did not fall off.

“I can live on nothing,” he said shrilly; “I have often had to for the sake of my Art. It is you bourgeois who force us to spend money.”

The words hit June like a pebble, in the ribs. After all she had done for Art, all her identification with its troubles and lame ducks. She was struggling for adequate words when the door was opened, and her Austrian murmured:

“A young lady, gnadiges fraulein.”

“Where?”

“In the little meal-room.”

With a glance at Boris Strumolowski, at Hannah Hobdey, at Jimmy Portugal, June said nothing, and went out, devoid of equanimity. Entering the “little meal-room,” she perceived the young lady to be Fleur — looking very pretty, if pale. At this disenchanted moment a lame duck of her own breed was welcome to June, so homoeopathic by instinct.

The girl must have come, of course, because of Jon; or, if not, at least to get something out of her. And June felt just then that to assist somebody was the only bearable thing.

“So you’ve remembered to come,” she said.

“Yes. What a jolly little duck of a house! But please don’t let me bother you, if you’ve got people.”

“Not at all,” said June. “I want to let them stew in their own juice for a bit. Have you come about Jon?”

“You said you thought we ought to be told. Well, I’ve found out.”

“Oh!” said June blankly. “Not nice, is it?”

They were standing one on each side of the little bare table at which June took her meals. A vase on it was full of Iceland poppies; the girl raised her hand and touched them with a gloved finger. To her new-fangled dress, frilly about the hips and tight below the knees, June took a sudden liking — a charming colour, flax-blue.

‘She makes a picture,’ thought June. Her little room, with its whitewashed walls, its floor and hearth of old pink brick, its black paint, and latticed window athwart which the last of the sunlight was shining, had never looked so charming, set off by this young figure, with the creamy, slightly frowning face. She remembered with sudden vividness how nice she herself had looked in those old days when HER heart was set on Philip Bosinney, that dead lover, who had broken from her to destroy for ever Irene’s allegiance to this girl’s father. Did Fleur know of that, too?

“Well,” she said, “what are you going to do?”

It was some seconds before Fleur answered.

“I don’t want Jon to suffer. I must see him once more to put an end to it.”

“You’re going to put an end to it!”

“What else is there to do?”

The girl seemed to June, suddenly, intolerably spiritless.

“I suppose you’re right,” she muttered. “I know my father thinks so; but — I should never have done it myself. I can’t take things lying down.”

How poised and watchful that girl looked; how unemotional her voice sounded!

“People WILL assume that I’m in love.”

“Well, aren’t you?”

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. ‘I might have known it,’ thought June; ‘she’s Soames’ daughter — fish! And yet — he!’

“Well, what do you want ME to do?” she said with a sort of disgust.

“Could I see Jon here tomorrow on his way down to Holly’s? He’d come if you sent him a line to-night, and perhaps afterwards you’d let them know quietly at Robin Hill that it’s all over, and that they needn’t tell Jon about his mother.”

“All right!” said June abruptly. “I’ll write now, and you can post it. Half-past two tomorrow. I shan’t be in, myself.”

She sat down at the tiny bureau which filled one corner. When she looked round with the finished note Fleur was still touching the poppies with her gloved finger.

June licked a stamp. “Well, here it is. If you’re not in love, of course, there’s no more to be said. Jon’s lucky.”

Fleur took the note. “Thanks awfully!”

‘Cold-blooded little baggage!’ thought June. Jon, son of her father, to love, and not to be loved by the daughter of — Soames! It was humiliating!

“Is that all?”

Fleur nodded; her frills shook and trembled as she swayed towards the door.

“Good-bye!”

“Good-bye! . . . Little piece of fashion!” muttered June, closing the door. “That family!” And she marched back towards her studio. Boris Strumolowski had regained his Christlike silence, and Jimmy Portugal was damning everybody, except the group in whose behalf he ran the Neo-Artist. Among the condemned were Eric Cobbley, and several other “lame-duck” genii who at one time or another had held first place in the repertoire of June’s aid and adoration. She experienced a sense of futility and disgust, and went to the window to let the river-wind blow those squeaky words away.

But when at length Jimmy Portugal had finished, and gone with Hannah Hobdey, she sat down and mothered young Strumolowski for half an hour, promising him a month, at least, of the American stream; so that he went away with his halo in perfect order. ‘In spite of all,’ June thought, ‘Boris IS wonderful.’

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VIII

The Bit Between the Teeth

To know that your hand is against every one's is — for some natures — to experience a sense of moral release. Fleur felt no remorse when she left June's house. Reading condemnatory resentment in her little kinswoman's blue eyes — she was glad that she had fooled her, despising June because that elderly idealist had not seen what she was after.

End it, forsooth! She would soon show them all that she was only just beginning. And she smiled to herself on the top of the 'bus which carried her back to Mayfair. But the smile died, squeezed out by spasms of anticipation and anxiety. Would she be able to manage Jon? She had taken the bit between her teeth, but could she make him take it too? She knew the truth and the real danger of delay — he knew neither; therein lay all the difference in the world.

'Suppose I tell him,' she thought; 'wouldn't it really be safer?' This hideous luck had no right to spoil their love; he must see that! They could not let it! People always accepted an accomplished fact, in time! From that piece of philosophy — profound enough at her age — she passed to another consideration less philosophic. If she persuaded Jon to a quick and secret marriage, and he found out afterwards that she had known the truth! What then? Jon hated subterfuge. Again, then, would it not be better to tell him? But the memory of his mother's face kept intruding on that impulse. Fleur was afraid. His mother had power over him; more power perhaps than she herself. Who could tell? It was too great a risk. Deep-sunk in these instinctive calculations she was carried on past Green Street as far as the Ritz Hotel. She got down there, and walked back on the Green Park side. The storm had washed every tree; they still dripped. Heavy drops fell on to her frills, and to avoid them she crossed over under the eyes of the Iseeum Club. Chancing to look up she saw Monsieur Profond with a tall stout man in the bay window. Turning into Green Street she heard her name called, and saw "that prowler" coming up. He took off his hat — a glossy "bowler" such as she particularly detested:

"Good-evenin'! Miss Forsyde. Isn't there a small thing I can do for you?"

"Yes, pass by on the other side."

"I say! Why do you dislike me?"

"It looks like it."

"Well, then, because you make me feel life isn't worth living."

Monsieur Profond smiled.

"Look here, Miss Forsyde, don't worry. It'll be all right. Nothing lasts."

"Things do last," cried Fleur; "with me anyhow — especially likes and dislikes."

"Well, that makes me a bit un'appy."

"I should have thought nothing could ever make you happy or unhappy."

"I don't like to annoy other people. I'm goin' on my yacht."

Fleur looked at him, startled.

"Where?"

"Small voyage to the South Seas or somewhere," said Monsieur Profond.

Fleur suffered relief and a sense of insult. Clearly he meant to convey that he was breaking with her mother. How dared he have anything to break, and yet how dared he break it?

"Good-night, Miss Forsyde! Remember me to Mrs. Dartie. I'm not so bad, really. Good-night!" Fleur left him standing there with his hat raised. Stealing a look round, she saw him stroll — immaculate and heavy — back towards his Club.

'He can't even love with conviction,' she thought. 'What will Mother do?'

Her dreams that night were endless and uneasy; she rose heavy and unrested, and went at once to the study of Whitaker's Almanac. A Forsyte is instinctively aware that facts are the real crux of any situation. She might conquer Jon's prejudice, but without exact machinery to complete their desperate resolve, nothing would happen. From the invaluable tome she learned that they must each be twenty-one; or some one's consent would be necessary, which of course was unobtainable; then she became lost in directions concerning licenses, certificates, notices, districts, coming finally to the word “perjury.” But that was nonsense! Who would really mind their giving wrong ages in order to be married for love! She ate hardly any breakfast, and went back to Whitaker. The more she studied the less sure she became; till, idly turning the pages, she came to Scotland. People could be married there without any of this nonsense. She had only to go and stay there twenty-one days, then Jon could come, and in front of two people they could declare themselves married. And what was more — they would be! It was far the best way; and at once she ran over her school-fellows. There was Mary Lambe who lived in Edinburgh and was “quite a sport!” She had a brother too. She could stay with Mary Lambe, who with her brother would serve for witnesses. She well knew that some girls would think all this unnecessary, and that all she and Jon need do was to go away together for a week-end and then say to their people: “We are married by Nature, we must now be married by Law.” But Fleur was Forsyte enough to feel such a proceeding dubious, and to dread her father’s face when he heard of it. Besides, she did not believe that Jon would do it; he had an opinion of her such as she could not bear to diminish. No! Mary Lambe was preferable, and it was just the time of year to go to Scotland. More at ease now, she packed, avoided her aunt, and took a ‘bus to Chiswick. She was too early and went on to Kew Gardens. She found no peace among its flower-beds, labelled trees, and broad green spaces, and having lunched off anchovy-paste sandwiches and coffee, returned to Chiswick and rang June’s bell. The Austrian admitted her to the “little meal-room.” Now that she knew what she and Jon were up against, her longing for him had increased tenfold, as if he were a toy with sharp edges or dangerous paint such as they had tried to take from her as a child. If she could not have her way, and get Jon for good and all, she felt like dying of privation. By hook or crook she must and would get him! A round dim mirror of very old glass hung over the pink brick hearth. She stood looking at herself reflected in it, pale, and rather dark under the eyes; little shudders kept passing through her nerves. Then she heard the bell ring, and, stealing to the window, saw him standing on, the doorstep smoothing his hair and lips, as if he too were trying to subdue the fluttering of his nerves.

She was sitting on one of the two rush-seated chairs, with her back to the door, when he came in, and she said at once:

“Sit down, Jon, I want to talk seriously.”

Jon sat on the table by her side, and without looking at him she went on:

“If you don’t want to lose me, we must get married.”

Jon gasped.

“Why? Is there anything new?”

“No, but I felt it at Robin Hill, and among my people.”

“But —” stammered Jon, “at Robin Hill — it was all smooth — and they’ve said nothing to me.”

“But they mean to stop us. Your mother’s face was enough. And my father’s.”

“Have you seen him since?”

Fleur nodded. What mattered a few supplementary lies?

“But,” said Jon eagerly, “I can’t see how they can feel like that after all these years.”

Fleur looked up at him.

“Perhaps you don’t love me enough.”

“Not love you enough! Why-I—”

“Then make sure of me”

“Without telling them?”

“Not till after.”

Jon was silent. How much older he looked than on that day, barely two months ago, when she first saw him — quite two years older!

“It would hurt Mother awfully,” he said.

Fleur drew her hand away.

“You’ve got to choose.”

Jon slid off the table onto his knees.

“But why not tell them? They can’t really stop us, Fleur!”

“They can! I tell you, they can.”

"How?"

"We're utterly dependent — by putting money pressure, and all sorts of other pressure. I'm not patient, Jon."

"But it's deceiving them."

Fleur got up.

"You can't really love me, or you wouldn't hesitate. 'He either fears his fate too much —!'"

Lifting his hands to her waist, Jon forced her to sit down again. She hurried on:

"I've planned it all out. We've only to go to Scotland. When we're married they'll soon come round. People always come round to facts. Don't you SEE, Jon?"

"But to hurt them so awfully!"

So he would rather hurt her than those people of his!

"All right, then; let me go!"

Jon got up and put his back against the door. "I expect you're right," he said slowly; "but I want to think it over."

She could see that he was seething with feelings he wanted to express; but she did not mean to help him. She hated herself at this moment, and almost hated him.

Why had she to do all the work to secure their love? It wasn't fair. And then she saw his eyes, adoring and distressed.

"Don't look like that! I only don't want to lose you, Jon."

"You can't lose me so long as you want me."

"Oh, yes, I can."

Jon put his hands on her shoulders.

"Fleur, do you know anything you haven't told me?"

It was the point-blank question she had dreaded. She looked straight at him, and answered: "No." She had burnt her boats; but what did it matter, if she got him? He would forgive her. And throwing her arms round his neck, she kissed him on the lips. She was winning! She felt it in the beating of his heart against her, in the closing of his eyes. "I want to make sure! I want to make sure!" she whispered. "Promise!"

Jon did not answer. His face had the stillness of extreme trouble. At last he said:

"It's like hitting them. I must think a little, Fleur. I really must."

Fleur slipped out of his arms.

"Oh! Very well!" And suddenly she burst into tears of disappointment, shame, and overstrain. Followed five minutes of acute misery. Jon's remorse and tenderness knew no bounds; but he did not promise. Despite her will to cry: "Very well, then, if you don't love me enough — good-bye!" she dared not. From birth accustomed to her own way, this check from one so young, so tender, so devoted, baffled and surprised her. She wanted to push him away from her, to try what anger and coldness would do, and again she dared not. The knowledge that she was scheming to rush him blindfold into the irrevocable weakened everything — weakened the sincerity of pique, and the sincerity of passion; even her kisses had not the lure she wished for them. That stormy little meeting ended inconclusively.

"Will you some tea, gnadiges Fraulein?"

Pushing Jon from her, she cried out:

"No — no, thank you! I'm just going."

And before he could prevent her she was gone.

She went stealthily, mopping her flushed, stained cheeks, frightened, angry, very miserable. She had stirred Jon up so fearfully, yet nothing definite was promised or arranged! But the more uncertain and hazardous the future, the more "the will to have" worked its tentacles into the flesh of her heart — like some burrowing tick!

No one was at Green Street. Winifred had gone with Imogen to see a play which some said was allegorical, and others "very exciting, don't you know?" It was because of what others said that Winifred and Imogen had gone. Fleur went on to Paddington. Through the carriage the air from the brick-kilns of West Drayton and the late hay-fields fanned her still-flushed cheeks. Flowers had seemed to be had for the picking; now they were all thorned and prickled. But the golden flower within the crown of spikes seemed to her tenacious spirit all the fairer and more desirable.

IX

Fat in the Fire

On reaching home Fleur found an atmosphere so peculiar that it penetrated even the perplexed aura of her own private life. Her mother was in blue stockingette and a brown study; her father in a white felt hat and the vinery. Neither of them had a word to throw to a dog. 'Is it because of me?' thought Fleur. 'Or because of Profond?' To her mother she said:

"What's the matter with Father?"

Her mother answered with a shrug of her shoulders.

To her father:

"What's the matter with Mother?"

Her father answered:

"Matter? What should be the matter?" and gave her a sharp look.

"By the way," murmured Fleur, "Monsieur Profond is going a 'small' voyage on his yacht, to the South Seas."

Soames examined a branch on which no grapes were growing.

"This vine's a failure," he said. "I've had young Mont here. He asked me something about you."

"Oh! How do you like him, Father?"

"He — he's a product — like all these young people."

"What were you at his age, dear?"

Soames smiled grimly.

"We went to work, and didn't play about — flying and motoring, and making love."

"Didn't you ever make love?"

She avoided looking at him while she said that, but she saw him well enough. His pale face had reddened, his eyebrows, where darkness was still mingled with the grey, had come close together.

"I had no time or inclination to philander."

"Perhaps you had a grand passion."

Soames looked at her intently.

"Yes — if you want to know — and much good it did me." He moved away, along by the hot-water pipes. Fleur tiptoed silently after him.

"Tell me about it, Father!"

Soames became very still.

"What should you want to know about such things, at your age?"

"Is she alive?"

He nodded.

"And married?"

"Yes."

"It's Jon Forsyte's mother, isn't it? And she was your wife first."

It was said in a flash of intuition. Surely his opposition came from his anxiety that she should not know of that old wound to his pride. But she was startled. To see some one so old and calm wince as if struck, to hear so sharp a note of pain in his voice!

"Who told you that? If your aunt —! I can't bear the affair talked of."

"But, darling," said Fleur, softly, "it's so long ago."

"Long ago or not, I—"

Fleur stood stroking his arm.

"I've tried to forget," he said suddenly; "I don't wish to be reminded." And then, as if venting some long and secret irritation, he added: "In these days people don't understand. Grand passion, indeed! No one knows what it is."

"I do," said Fleur, almost in a whisper.

Soames, who had turned his back on her, spun round.

"What are you talking of — a child like you!"

"Perhaps I've inherited it, Father."

"What?"

"For her son, you see."

He was pale as a sheet, and she knew that she was as bad. They stood staring at each other in the steamy heat, redolent of the mushy scent of earth, of potted geranium, and of vines coming along fast.

"This is crazy," said Soames at last, between dry lips.

Scarcely moving her own, she murmured:

"Don't be angry, Father. I can't help it."

But she could see he wasn't angry; only scared, deeply scared.

"I thought that foolishness," he stammered, "was all forgotten."

"Oh, no! It's ten times what it was."

Soames kicked at the hot-water pipe. The hapless movement touched her, who had no fear of her father — none.

"Dearest!" she said: "What must be, must, you know."

"Must!" repeated Soames. "You don't know what you're talking of. Has that boy been told?"

The blood rushed into her cheeks.

"Not yet."

He had turned from her again, and, with one shoulder a little raised, stood staring fixedly at a joint in the pipes.

"It's most distasteful to me," he said suddenly; "nothing could be more so. Son of that fellow — It's — it's — perverse!"

She had noted, almost unconsciously, that he did not say "son of that woman," and again her intuition began working.

Did the ghost of that grand passion linger in some corner of his heart?

She slipped her hand under his arm.

"Jon's father is quite ill and old; I saw him."

"You —?"

"Yes, I went there with Jon; I saw them both."

"Well, and what did they say to you?"

"Nothing. They were very polite."

"They would be." He resumed his contemplation of the pipe-joint, and then said suddenly: "I must think this over — I'll speak to you again to-night."

She knew this was final for the moment, and stole away, leaving him still looking at the pipe-joint. She wandered into the fruit-garden, among the raspberry and currant bushes, without impetus to pick and eat. Two months ago — she was light-hearted! Even two days ago — light-hearted, before Prosper Profond told her. Now she felt tangled in a web — of passions, vested rights, oppressions and revolts, the ties of love and hate. At this dark moment of discouragement there seemed, even to her hold-fast nature, no way out. How deal with it — how sway and bend things to her will, and get her heart's desire? And, suddenly, round the corner of the high box hedge, she came plump on her mother, walking swiftly, with an open letter in her hand. Her bosom was heaving, her eyes dilated, her cheeks flushed. Instantly Fleur thought: "The yacht! Poor Mother!"

Annette gave her a wide startled look, and said:

"J'ai la migraine."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mother."

"Oh; yes! you and your father — sorry!"

"But, Mother — I am. I know what it feels like."

Annette's startled eyes grew wide, till the whites showed above them. "You innocent!" she said.

Her mother — so self-possessed, and commonsensical — to look and speak like this! It was all frightening! Her father, her mother, herself! And only two months back they had seemed to have everything they wanted in this world.

Annette crumpled the letter in her hand. Fleur knew that she must ignore the sight.

"Can't I do anything for your head, Mother?"

Annette shook that head and walked on, swaying her hips.

'It's cruel,' thought Fleur, 'and I was glad! That man! What do men come prowling for, disturbing everything! I suppose he's tired of her. What business has he to be tired of my mother? What business!' And at that thought, so natural and so peculiar, she uttered a little choked laugh.

She ought, of course, to be delighted, but what was there to be delighted at? Her father didn't really care! Her mother did, perhaps? She entered the orchard, and sat down under a cherry-tree. A breeze sighed in the higher boughs; the sky seen through their green was very blue and very white in cloud — those heavy white clouds almost always present in river landscape. Bees, sheltering out of the wind, hummed softly, and over the lush grass fell the thick shade from those fruit-trees planted by her father five-and-twenty years ago. Birds were almost silent, the cuckoos had ceased to sing, but wood-pigeons were cooing. The breath and drone and cooing of high summer were not for long a sedative to her excited nerves. Crouched over her knees she began to scheme. Her father must be made to back her up. Why should he mind so long as she was happy? She had not lived for nearly nineteen years without knowing that her future was all he really cared about. She had, then, only to convince him that her future could not be happy without Jon. He thought it a mad fancy. How foolish the old were, thinking they could tell what the young felt! Had not he confessed that he — when young — had loved with a grand passion! He ought to understand. 'He piles up his money for me,' she thought; 'but what's the use, if I'm not going to be happy?' Money, and all it bought, did not bring happiness. Love only brought that. The ox-eyed daisies in this orchard, which gave it such a moony look sometimes, grew wild and happy, and had their hour. 'They oughtn't to have called me Fleur,' she mused, 'if they didn't mean me to have my hour, and be happy while it lasts.' Nothing real stood in the way, like poverty, or disease — sentiment only, a ghost from the unhappy past! Jon was right. They wouldn't let you live, these old people! They made mistakes, committed crimes, and wanted their children to go on paying! The breeze died away; midges began to bite. She got up, plucked a piece of honeysuckle, and went in.

It was hot that night. Both she and her mother had put on thin, pale low frocks. The dinner flowers were pale. Fleur was struck with the pale look of everything: her father's face, her mother's shoulders; the pale panelled walls, the pale-grey velvety carpet, the lamp-shade, even the soup was pale. There was not one spot of colour in the room, not even wine in the pale glasses, for no one drank it. What was not pale was black — her father's clothes, the butler's clothes, her retriever stretched out exhausted in the window, the curtains black with a cream pattern. A moth came in, and that was pale. And silent was that half-mourning dinner in the heat.

Her father called her back as she was following her mother out.

She sat down beside him at the table, and, unpinning the pale honeysuckle, put it to her nose.

"I've been thinking," he said.

"Yes, dear?"

"It's extremely painful for me to talk, but there's no help for it. I don't know if you understand how much you are to me — I've never spoken of it, I didn't think it necessary; but — but you're everything. Your mother —"he paused, staring at his finger-bowl of Venetian glass.

"Yes?"

"I've only you to look to. I've never had — never wanted anything else, since you were born."

"I know," Fleur murmured.

Soames moistened his lips.

"You may think this a matter I can smooth over and arrange for you. You're mistaken. I— I'm helpless."

Fleur did not speak.

“Quite apart from my own feelings,” went on Soames with more resolution, “those two are not amenable to anything I can say. They — they hate me, as people always hate those whom they have injured.”

“But he — Jon —”

“He’s their flesh and blood, her only child. Probably he means to her what you mean to me. It’s a deadlock.”

“No,” cried Fleur, “no, Father!”

Soames leaned back, the image of pale patience, as if resolved on the betrayal of no emotion.

“Listen!” he said. “You’re putting the feelings of two months — two months — against the feelings of thirty-five years! What chance do you think you have? Two months — your very first love-affair, a matter of half a dozen meetings, a few walks and talks, a few kisses — against, against what you can’t imagine, what no one could who hasn’t been through it. Come, be reasonable, Fleur! It’s midsummer madness!”

Fleur tore the honeysuckle into little, slow bits. “The madness is in letting the past spoil it all. What do we care about the past? It’s our lives, not yours.”

Soames raised his hand to his forehead, where suddenly she saw moisture shining.

“Whose child are you?” he said. “Whose child is he? The present is linked with the past, the future with both. There’s no getting away from that.”

She had never heard philosophy pass those lips before. Impressed even in her agitation, she leaned her elbows on the table, her chin on her hands.

“But, Father, consider it practically. We want each other. There’s ever so much money, and nothing whatever in the way but sentiment. Let’s bury the past, Father.”

Soames shook his head. “Impossible!”

“Besides,” said Fleur gently, “you can’t prevent us.”

“I don’t suppose,” said Soames, “that if left to myself I should try to prevent you; I must put up with things, I know, to keep your affection. But it’s not I who control this matter. That’s what I want you to realise before it’s too late. If you go on thinking you can get your way, and encourage this feeling, the blow will be much heavier when you find you can’t.”

“Oh!” cried Fleur, “help me, Father; you CAN help me, you know.”

Soames made a startled movement of negation.

“I?” he said bitterly. “Help? I am the impediment — the just cause and impediment — isn’t that the jargon? You have my blood in your veins.”

He rose.

“Well, the fat’s in the fire. If you persist in your wilfulness you’ll have yourself to blame. Come! Don’t be foolish, my child — my only child!”

Fleur laid her forehead against his shoulder.

All was in such turmoil within her. But no good to show it! No good at all! She broke away from him, and went out into the twilight, distraught, but unconvinced. All was indeterminate and vague within her, like the shapes and shadows in the garden, except — her will to have. A poplar pierced up into the dark-blue sky and touched a white star there. The dew wetted her shoes, and chilled her bare shoulders. She went down to the river bank, and stood gazing at a moonstreak on the darkening water. Suddenly she smelled tobacco smoke, and a white figure emerged as if created by the moon. It was young Mont in flannels, standing in his boat. She heard the tiny hiss of his cigarette extinguished in the water.

“Fleur,” came his voice, “don’t be hard on a poor devil! I’ve been waiting hours.”

“For what?”

“Come in my boat!”

“Not I.”

“Why not?”

“I’m not a water-nymph.”

“Haven’t you ANY romance in you? Don’t be modern, Fleur!”

He appeared on the path within a yard of her.

“Go away!”

“Fleur, I love you. Fleur!”

Fleur uttered a short laugh.

“Come again,” she said, “when I haven’t got my wish.”

“What is your wish?”

“Ask another.”

“Fleur,” said Mont, and his voice sounded strange, “don’t mock me! Even vivisected dogs are worth decent treatment before they’re cut up for good.”

Fleur shook her head; but her lips were trembling.

“Well, you shouldn’t make me jump. Give me a cigarette.”

Mont gave her one, lighted it, and another for himself.

“I don’t want to talk rot,” he said, “but please imagine all the rot that all the lovers that ever were have talked, and all my special rot thrown in.”

“Thank you, I have imagined it. Good-night!”

They stood for a moment facing each other in the shadow of an acacia-tree with very moonlit blossoms, and the smoke from their cigarettes mingled in the air between them.

“Also ran: ‘Michael Mont’?” he said. Fleur turned abruptly towards the house. On the lawn she stopped to look back. Michael Mont was whirling his arms above him; she could see them dashing at his head, then waving at the moonlit blossoms of the acacia. His voice just reached her. “Jolly — jolly!” Fleur shook herself. She couldn’t help him, she had too much trouble of her own! On the verandah she stopped very suddenly again. Her mother was sitting in the drawing-room at her writing bureau, quite alone. There was nothing remarkable in the expression of her face except its utter immobility. But she looked desolate! Fleur went up-stairs. At the door of her room she paused. She could hear her father walking up and down, up and down the picture-gallery.

‘Yes,’ she thought, jolly! Oh, Jon!’

❦

X

Decision

When Fleur left him Jon stared at the Austrian. She was a thin woman with a dark face and the concerned expression of one who has watched every little good that life once had slip from her, one by one.

"No tea?" she said.

Susceptible to the disappointment in her voice, Jon murmured:

"No, really; thanks."

"A lil cup — it ready. A lil cup and cigarette."

Fleur was gone! Hours of remorse and indecision lay before him! And with a heavy sense of disproportion he smiled, and said:

"Well — thank you!"

She brought in a little pot of tea with two cups, and a silver box of cigarettes on a little tray.

"Sugar? Miss Forsyte has much sugar — she buy my sugar, my friend's sugar also. Miss Forsyte is a veree kind lady. I am happy to serve her. You her brother?"

"Yes," said Jon, beginning to puff the second cigarette of his life.

"Very young brother," said the Austrian, with a little anxious smile, which reminded him of the wag of a dog's tail.

"May I give you some?" he said. "And won't you sit down?"

The Austrian shook her head.

"Your father a very nice man — the most nice old man I ever see. Miss Forsyte tell me all about him. Is he better?"

Her words fell on Jon like a reproach. "Oh! I think he's all right."

"I like to see him again," said the Austrian, putting a hand on her heart; "he have veree kind heart."

"Yes," said Jon. And again her words seemed to him a reproach.

"He never give no trouble to no one, and smile so gentle."

"Yes! doesn't he?"

"He look at Miss Forsyte so funny sometimes. I tell him all my story; he so sympatisch. Your mother — she nice and well?"

"Very."

"He have her photograph on his dressing-table. Veree beautiful."

Jon gulped down his tea. This woman, with her concerned face and her reminding words, was like the first and second murderers.

"Thank you," he said; "I must go now. May — may I leave this with you?"

He put a ten-shilling note on the tray with a doubting hand and gained the door. He heard the Austrian gasp, and hurried out. He had just time to catch his train, and all the way to Victoria looked at every face that passed, as lovers will, hoping against hope. On reaching Worthing he put his luggage into the local train, and set out across the Downs for Wansdon, trying to walk off his aching irresolution. So long as he went full bat, he could enjoy the beauty of those green slopes, stopping now and again to sprawl on the grass, admire the perfection of a wild rose, or listen to a lark's song. But the war of motives within him was but postponed — the longing for Fleur, and the hatred of deception. He came to the old chalk-pit above Wansdon with his mind no more made up than when he started. To see both sides of a question vigorously was at once Jon's strength and weakness. He tramped in, just as the first dinner-bell rang. His things had already been brought up. He had a hurried bath and came down to find Holly alone — Val had gone to Town and would not be back till the last train.

Since Val's advice to him to ask his sister what was the matter between the two families, so much had happened — Fleur's disclosure in the Green Park, her visit to Robin Hill, today's meeting — that there seemed nothing to ask. He talked of Spain, his sunstroke, Val's horses, their father's health. Holly startled him by saying that she thought their father not at all well. She had been twice to Robin Hill for the week-end. He had seemed fearfully languid, sometimes even in pain, but had always refused to talk about himself.

"He's awfully dear and unselfish — don't you think, Jon?"

Feeling far from dear and unselfish himself, Jon answered: "Rather!"

"I think, he's been a simply perfect father, so long as I can remember."

"Yes," answered Jon, very subdued.

"He's never interfered, and he's always seemed to understand. I've not forgotten how he let me go out to South Africa in the Boer War when I was in love with Val."

"That was before he married Mother, wasn't it?" said Jon suddenly.

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh! nothing. Only, wasn't she engaged to Fleur's father first?"

Holly put down the spoon she was using, and raised her eyes. Her stare was circumspect. What did the boy know? Enough to make it better to tell him? She could not decide. He looked strained and worried, altogether older, but that might be the sunstroke.

"There WAS something," she said. "Of course we were out there, and got no news of anything. "She could not take the risk. It was not her secret. Besides, she was in the dark about his feelings now. Before Spain she had made sure he was in love; but boys were boys; that was seven weeks ago, and all Spain between.

She saw that he knew she was putting him off, and added:

"Have you heard anything of Fleur?"

"Yes."

His face told her more than the most elaborate explanations. He had not forgotten!

She said very quietly: "Fleur is awfully attractive, Jon, but you know — Val and I don't really like her very much."

"Why?"

"We think she's got rather a 'having' nature."

"'Having?' I don't know what you mean. She — she —" he pushed his dessert plate away, got up, and went to the window.

Holly, too, got up, and put her arm round his waist.

"Don't be angry, Jon dear. We can't all see people in the same light, can we? I believe each of us only has about one or two people who can see the best that's in us, and bring it out. For you I think it's your mother. I once saw her looking at a letter of yours; it was wonderful to see her face. I think she's the most beautiful woman I ever saw — Age doesn't seem to touch her."

Jon's face softened, then again became tense. He recognised the intention of those words. Everybody was against him and Fleur! It all strengthened her appeal:

"Make sure of me — marry me, Jon!"

Here, where he had passed that wonderful week with her — the tug of her enchantment, the ache in his heart increased with every minute that she was not there to make the room, the garden, the very air magical. Would he ever be able to live down here, not seeing her? And he closed up utterly, going early to bed. It would not make him healthy, wealthy, and wise, but it closeted him with memory of Fleur in her fancy frock. He heard Val's arrival — the Ford discharging cargo, then the stillness of the summer night stole back — with only the bleating of very distant sheep, and a night-jar's harsh purring. He leaned far out. Cold moon — warm air — the Downs like silver! Small wings, a stream bubbling, the rambler roses! God-how empty all of it without her! In the Bible it was written: Thou shalt leave father and mother and cleave to — Fleur!

Let him have pluck, and go and tell them! They couldn't stop him marrying her — they wouldn't want to stop him when they knew how he felt. Yes! He would go! Bold and open — Fleur was wrong!

The night-jar ceased, the sheep were silent; the only sound in the darkness was the bubbling of the stream. And Jon in his bed slept, freed from the worst of life's evils — indecision.

XI

TIMOTHY PROPHESIES

On the day of the cancelled meeting at the National Gallery, began the second anniversary of the resurrection of England's pride and glory — or, more shortly, the top hat. "Lord's"— that festival which the war had driven from the field — raised its light and dark blue flags for the second time, displaying almost every feature of a glorious past. Here, in the luncheon interval, were all species of female and one species of male hat, protecting the multiple types of face associated with "the classes" The observing Forsyte might discern in the free or unconsidered seats a certain number of the squash-hatted, but they hardly ventured on the grass; the old school — or schools — could still rejoice that the proletariat was not yet paying the necessary half-crown. Here was still a close borough, the only one left on a large scale — for the papers were about to estimate the attendance at ten thousand. And the ten thousand, all animated by one hope, were asking each other one question: "Where are you lunching? "Something wonderfully uplifting and reassuring in that query and the sight of so many people like themselves voicing it! What reserve power in the British realm — enough pigeons, lobsters, lamb, salmon mayonnaise, strawberries, and bottles of champagne, to feed the lot! No miracle in prospect — no case of seven loaves and a few fishes — faith rested on surer foundations. Six thousand top hats, four thousand parasols would be doffed and furled, ten thousand mouths all speaking the same English would be filled. There was life in the old dog yet! Tradition! And again Tradition! How strong and how elastic! Wars might rage, taxation prey, Trades Unions take toll, and Europe perish of starvation; but the ten thousand would be fed; and, within their ring fence, stroll upon green turf, wear their top hats, and meet — themselves. The heart was sound, the pulse still regular. E-ton! E-ton! Har-r-o-o-o-w!

Among the many Forsytes present, on a hunting-ground theirs, by personal prescriptive right, or proxy, was Soames, with his wife and daughter. He had not been at either school, he took no interest in cricket, but he wanted Fleur to show her frock, and he wanted to wear his top hat — parade it again in peace and plenty among his peers. He walked sedately with Fleur between him and Annette. No women equalled them, so far as he could see. They could walk, and hold themselves up; there was substance in their good looks; the modern woman had no build, no chest, no anything! He remembered suddenly with what intoxication of pride he had walked round with Irene in the first years of his first marriage. And how they used to lunch on the drag which his mother WOULD make his father have, because it was so "chic"— all drags and carriages in those days, not these lumbering great Stands! And how consistently Montague Dartie had drunk too much. He supposed that people drank too much still, but there was not the scope for it there used to be. He remembered George Forsyte — whose brothers Roger and Eustace had been at Harrow and Eton — towering up on the top of the drag waving a light-blue flag with one hand and a dark-blue flag with the other, and shouting: "Etroow — Harrton!" just when everybody was silent, like the buffoon he had always been; and Eustace got up to the nines below, too dandified to wear any colour or take any notice. H'm! Old days, and Irene in grey silk shot with palest green. He looked, sideways, at Fleur's face. Rather colourless — no light, no eagerness! That love affair was preying on her — a bad business! He looked beyond, at his wife's face, rather more touched up than usual, a little disdainful — not that she had any business to disdain, so far as he could see. She was taking Profond's defection with curious quietude; or was his "small" voyage just a blind? If so, he should refuse to see it! After promenading round the pitch and in front of the pavilion, they sought Winifred's table in the Bedouin Club tent. This Club — a new "cock and hen"— had been founded in the interests of travel, and of a gentleman with an old Scottish name, whose father had somewhat strangely been called Levi. Winifred had joined, not because she had travelled, but because instinct told her that a Club with such a name and such a founder was bound to go far; if one didn't join at once one might never have the chance. Its tent, with a text from the Koran on an orange ground, and a small green camel embroidered over the entrance, was the most striking on the ground. Outside it they found Jack Cardigan in a dark-blue tie (he had once played for Harrow), batting with a Malacca cane to show how that fellow ought to have hit that ball. He piloted them in. Assembled in Winifred's corner were Imogen, Benedict with his young wife, Val Dartie without Holly, Maud and her husband, and, after Soames and his two were seated, one empty place.

"I'm expecting Prosper," said Winifred, "but he's so busy with his yacht."

Soames stole a glance. No movement in his wife's face! Whether that fellow were coming or not, she evidently knew all about it. It did not escape him that Fleur, too, looked at her mother. If Annette didn't respect his feelings, she might think of Fleur! The conversation, very desultory, was syncopated by Jack Cardigan talking about "mid-off." He cited all the "great mid-offs" from the beginning of time, as if they had been a definite racial entity in the composition of the British people. Soames had finished his lobster, and was beginning on pigeon-pie, when he heard the words: "I'm a small bit late, Mrs. Dartie," and saw that there was no longer any empty place. THAT FELLOW was sitting between Annette and Imogen. Soames ate steadily on, with an occasional word to Maud and Winifred. Conversation buzzed around him. He heard the voice of Profond say:

"I think you're mistaken, Mrs. Forsyde I'll — I'll bet Miss Forsyde agrees with me."

"In what?" came Fleur's clear tones across the table.

"I was sayin', young gurls are much the same as they always were — there's very small difference."

"Do you know so much about them?"

That sharp reply caught the ears of all, and Soames moved uneasily on his thin green chair.

"Well, I don't know, I think they want their own small way, and I think they always did."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, but — Prosper," Winifred interjected comfortably, "the girls in the streets — the girls who've been in munitions, the little flappers in the shops; their manners now really quite hit you in the eye."

At the word "hit" Jack Cardigan stopped his disquisition; and in the silence Monsieur Profond said:

"It was inside before, now it's outside; that's all."

"But their morals!" cried Imogen.

"Just as moral as they ever were, Mrs. Cardigan, but they've got more opportunity."

The saying, so cryptically cynical, received a little laugh from Imogen, a slight opening of Jack Cardigan's mouth, and another creak from Soames' chair.

Winifred said: "That's too bad, Prosper."

"What do you say, Mrs. Forsyde; don't you think human nature's always the same?"

Soames subdued a sudden longing to get up and kick the fellow. He heard his wife reply:

"Human nature is not the same in England as anywhere else." That was her confounded mockery!

"Well, I don't know much about this small country"—'No, thank God!' thought Soames —"but I should say the pot was boilin' under the lid everywhere. We all want pleasure, and we always did."

Damn the fellow! His cynicism was outrageous!

When lunch was over they broke up into couples for the digestive promenade. Too proud to notice, Soames knew perfectly that Annette and that fellow had gone prowling round together. Fleur was with Val; she had chosen him, no doubt, because he knew that boy. He himself had Winifred for partner. They walked in the bright, circling stream, a little flushed and sated, till Winifred sighed:

"I wish we were back forty years, old boy!"

Before the eyes of her spirit an interminable procession of her own "Lord's" frocks was passing, paid for with the money of her father, to save a recurrent crisis. "It's been very amusing, after all. Sometimes I even wish Monty was back. What do you think of people nowadays, Soames?"

"Precious little style. The thing began to go to pieces with bicycles and motor-cars; the war has finished it."

"I wonder what's coming?" said Winifred in a voice dreamy from pigeon-pie. "I'm not at all sure we shan't go back to crinolines and pegtops. Look at that dress!" Soames shook his head.

"There's money, but no faith in things. We don't lay by for the future. These youngsters — it's all a short life and a merry one with them."

"There's a hat!" said Winifred. "I don't know — when you come to think of the people killed and all that in the war, it's rather wonderful, I think. There's no other country — Prosper says the rest are all bankrupt, except America; and of course her men always took their style in dress from us."

"Is that chap," said Soames, "really going to the South Seas?"

“Oh, one never knows where Prosper’s going!”

“HE’S a sign of the times,” muttered Soames, “if you like.”

Winifred’s hand gripped his arm.

“Don’t turn your head,” she said in a low voice, “but look to your right in the front row of the Stand.”

Soames looked as best he could under that limitation. A man in a grey top hat, grey-bearded, with thin brown, folded cheeks, and a certain elegance of posture, sat there with a woman in a lawn-coloured frock, whose dark eyes were fixed on himself. Soames looked quickly at his feet. How funnily feet moved, one after the other like that! Winifred’s voice said in his ear:

“Jolyon looks very ill, but he always had style. SHE doesn’t change — except her hair.”

“Why did you tell Fleur about that business?”

“I didn’t; she picked it up. I always knew she would.”

“Well, it’s a mess. She’s set her heart upon their boy.”

“The little wretch,” murmured Winifred. “She tried to take me in about that. What shall you do, Soames?”

“Be guided by events.”

They moved on, silent, in the almost solid crowd.

“Really,” said Winifred suddenly; “it almost seems like Fate. Only that’s so old-fashioned. Look! There are George and Eustace!”

George Forsyte’s lofty bulk had halted before them.

“Hallo, Soames!” he said. “Just met Profond and your wife. You’ll catch ’em if you put on steam. Did you ever go to see old Timothy?”

Soames nodded, and the streams forced them apart.

“I always liked old George,” said Winifred. “He’s so droll.”

“I never did,” said Soames. “Where’s your seat? I shall go to mine. Fleur may be back there.”

Having seen Winifred to her seat, he regained his own, conscious of small, white, distant figures running, the click of the bat, the cheers and counter-cheers. No Fleur, and no Annette! You could expect nothing of women nowadays! They had the vote. They were “emancipated,” and much good it was doing them. So Winifred would go back, would she, and put up with Dartie all over again? To have the past once more — to be sitting here as he had sat in ’83 and ’84, before he was certain that his marriage with Irene had gone all wrong, before her antagonism had become so glaring that with the best will in the world he could not overlook it. The sight of her with that fellow had brought all memory back. Even now he could not understand why she had been so impracticable. She could love other men; she had it in her! To himself, the one person she ought to have loved, she had chosen to refuse her heart. It seemed to him, fantastically, as he looked back, that all this modern relaxation of marriage — though its forms and laws were the same as when he married her — that all this modern looseness had come out of her revolt; it seemed to him, fantastically, that she had started it, till all decent ownership of anything had gone, or was on the point of going. All came from her! And now — a pretty state of things! Homes! How could you have them without mutual ownership? Not that he had ever had a real home! But had that been his fault? He had done his best. And his reward — those two sitting in that Stand! And this affair of Fleur’s!

And overcome by loneliness he thought: ‘Shan’t wait any longer! They must find their own way back to the hotel — if they mean to come!’ Hailing a cab outside the ground, he said:

“Drive me to the Bayswater Road.” His old aunts had never failed him. To them he had meant an everwelcome visitor. Though they were gone, there, still, was Timothy!

Smither was standing in the open doorway.

“Mr. Soames! I was just taking the air. Cook will be so pleased.”

“How is Mr. Timothy?”

“Not himself at all these last few days, sir; he’s been talking a great deal. Only this morning he was saying: ‘My brother James, he’s getting old.’ His mind wanders, Mr. Soames, and then he will talk of them. He troubles about their investments. The other day he said: ‘There’s my brother Jolyon won’t look at Consols’— he seemed quite down about it.

Come in, Mr. Soames, come in! It's such a pleasant change!"

"Well," said Soames, "just for a few minutes."

"No," murmured Smither in the hall, where the air had the singular freshness of the outside day, "we haven't been very satisfied with him, not all this week. He's always been one to leave a titbit to the end; but ever since Monday he's been eating it first. If you notice a dog, Mr. Soames, at its dinner, it eats the meat first. We've always thought it such a good sign of Mr. Timothy at his age to leave it to the last, but now he seems to have lost all his self-control; and, of course, it makes him leave the rest. The doctor doesn't make anything of it, but"— Smither shook her head —"he seems to think he's got to eat it first, in case he shouldn't get to it. That and his talking makes us anxious."

"Has he said anything important?"

"I shouldn't like to say that, Mr. Soames; but he's turned against his Will. He gets quite pettish — and after having had it out every morning for years, it does seem funny. He said the other day: 'They want my money.' It gave me such a turn, because, as I said to him, nobody wants his money, I'm sure. And it does seem a pity he should be thinking about money at his time of life. I took my courage in my 'ands. 'You know, Mr. Timothy,' I said, 'my dear mistress'— that's Miss Forsyte, Mr. Soames, Miss Ann that trained me —'SHE never thought about money,' I said, 'it was all CHARACTER with her.' He looked at me, I can't tell you how funny, and he said quite dry: 'Nobody wants my character.' Think of his saying a thing like that! But sometimes he'll say something as sharp and sensible as anything."

Soames, who had been staring at an old print by the hat-rack, thinking, 'That's got value!' murmured: "I'll go up and see him, Smither."

"Cook's with him," answered Smither above her corsets; "she will be pleased to see you."

He mounted slowly, with the thought: 'Shan't care to live to be that age.'

On the second floor, he paused, and tapped. The door was opened, and he saw the round homely face of a woman about sixty.

"Mr. Soames!" she said: "Why! Mr. Soames!"

Soames nodded. "All right, Cook!" and entered.

Timothy was propped up in bed, with his hands joined before his chest, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling, where a fly was standing upside down. Soames stood at the foot of the bed, facing him.

"Uncle Timothy," he said, raising his voice; "Uncle Timothy!"

Timothy's eyes left the fly, and levelled themselves on his visitor. Soames could see his pale tongue passing over his darkish lips.

"Uncle Timothy," he said again, "is there anything I can do for you? Is there anything you'd like to say?"

"Ha!" said Timothy.

"I've come to look you up and see that everything's all right."

Timothy nodded. He seemed trying to get used to the apparition before him.

"Have you got everything you want?"

"No," said Timothy.

"Can I get you anything?"

"No," said Timothy.

"I'm Soames, you know; your nephew, Soames Forsyte. Your brother James' son."

Timothy nodded.

"I shall be delighted to do anything I can for you."

Timothy beckoned. Soames went close to him.

"You —" said Timothy in a voice which seemed to have outlived tone, "you tell them all from me — you tell them all —" and his finger tapped on Soames' arm, "to hold on — hold on — Consols are goin' up," and he nodded thrice.

"All right!" said Soames; "I will."

"Yes," said Timothy, and, fixing his eyes again on the ceiling, he added: "That fly!"

Strangely moved, Soames looked at the Cook's pleasant fattish face, all little puckers from staring at fires.

"That'll do him a world of good, sir," she said.

A mutter came from Timothy, but he was clearly speaking to himself, and Soames went out with the cook.

"I wish I could make you a pink cream, Mr. Soames, like in old days; you did so relish them. Good-bye, sir; it HAS been a pleasure."

"Take care of him, Cook, he is old."

And, shaking her crumpled hand, he went down-stairs. Smither was still taking the air in the doorway.

"What do you think of him, Mr. Soames?"

"H'm!" Soames murmured: "He's lost touch."

"Yes," said Smither, "I was afraid you'd think that, coming fresh out of the world to see him like."

"Smither," said Soames, "we're all indebted to you."

"Oh, no, Mr. Soames, don't say that! It's a pleasure — he's such a wonderful man."

"Well, good-bye!" said Soames, and got into his taxi.

'Going up!' he thought; 'going up!'

Reaching the hotel at Knightsbridge he went to their sitting-room, and rang for tea. Neither of them were in. And again that sense of loneliness came over him. These hotels! What monstrous great places they were now! He could remember when there was nothing bigger than Long's or Brown's, Morley's or the Tavistock, and the heads that were shaken over the Langham and the Grand. Hotels and Clubs — Clubs and Hotels; no end to them now! And Soames, who had just been watching at Lord's a miracle of tradition and continuity, fell into reverie over the changes in that London where he had been born five-and-sixty years before. Whether Consols were going up or not, London had become a terrific property. No such property in the world, unless it were New York! There was a lot of hysteria in the papers nowadays; but any one who, like himself, could remember London sixty years ago, and see it now, realised the fecundity and elasticity of wealth. They had only to keep their heads, and go at it steadily. Why! he remembered cobble-stones, and stinking straw on the floor of your cab. And old Timothy — what could HE not tell them, if he had kept his memory! Things were unsettled, people in a funk or in a hurry, but here were London and the Thames, and out there the British Empire, and the ends of the earth. "Consols are goin' up!" He shouldn't be a bit surprised. It was the breed that counted. And all that was bull-dogged in Soames stared for a moment out of his grey eyes, till diverted by the print of a Victorian picture on the walls. The hotel had bought three dozen of that little lot! The old hunting or "Rake's Progress" prints in the old inns were worth looking at — but this sentimental stuff — well, Victorianism had gone! "Tell them to hold on!" old Timothy had said. But to what were they to hold on in this modern welter of the "democratic principle"? Why, even privacy was threatened! And at the thought that privacy might perish, Soames pushed back his teacup and went to the window. Fancy owning no more of Nature than the crowd out there owned of the flowers and trees and waters of Hyde Park! No, no! Private possession underlay everything worth having. The world had slipped its sanity a bit, as dogs now and again at full moon slipped theirs and went off for a night's rabbiting; but the world, like the dog, knew where its bread was buttered and its bed warm, and would come back sure enough to the only home worth having — to private ownership. The world was in its second childhood for the moment, like old Timothy — eating its titbit first!

He heard a sound behind him, and saw that his wife and daughter had come in.

"So you're back!" he said.

Fleur did not answer; she stood for a moment looking at him and her mother, then passed into her bedroom. Annette poured herself out a cup of tea.

"I am going to Paris, to my mother, Soames."

"Oh! To your mother?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"I do not know."

"And when are you going?"

"On Monday."

Was she really going to her mother? Odd, how indifferent he felt! Odd, how clearly she had perceived the indifference he would feel so long as there was no scandal. And suddenly between her and himself he saw distinctly the face he had seen that afternoon — Irene's.

"Will you want money?"

"Thank you; I have enough."

"Very well. Let us know when you are coming back."

Annette put down the cake she was fingering, and, looking up through darkened lashes, said:

"Shall I give Maman any message?"

"My regards."

Annette stretched herself, her hands on her waist, and said in French:

"What luck that you have never loved me, Soames!" Then rising, she too left the room. Soames was glad she had spoken it in French — it seemed to require no dealing with. Again that other face — pale, dark-eyed, beautiful still! And there stirred far down within him the ghost of warmth, as from sparks lingering beneath a mound of flaky ash. And Fleur infatuated with her boy! Queer chance! Yet, was there such a thing as chance? A man went down a street, a brick fell on his head. Ah! that was chance, no doubt. But this! "Inherited," his girl had said. She — she was "holding on!"

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Part III

I

Old Jolyon Walks

Twofold impulse had made Jolyon say to his wife at breakfast: "Let's go up to Lord's!"

"Wanted"— something to abate the anxiety in which those two had lived during the sixty hours since Jon had brought Fleur down. "Wanted"— too, that which might assuage the pangs of memory in one who knew he might lose them any day!

Fifty-eight years ago Jolyon had become an Eton boy, for old Jolyon's whim had been that he should be canonised at the greatest possible expense. Year after year he had gone to Lord's from Stanhope Gate with a father whose youth in the eighteen-twenties had been passed without polish in the game of cricket. Old Jolyon would speak quite openly of swipes, full tosses, half and three-quarter balls; and young Jolyon with the guileless snobbery of youth had trembled lest his sire should be overheard. Only in this supreme matter of cricket he had been nervous, for his father — in Crimean whiskers then — had ever impressed him as the beau ideal. Though never canonised himself, old Jolyon's natural fastidiousness and balance had saved him from the errors of the vulgar. How delicious, after howling in a top hat and a sweltering heat, to go home with his father in a hansom cab, bathe, dress, and forth to the "Disunion" Club, to dine off whitebait, cutlets, and a tart, and go — two "swells," old and young, in lavender kid gloves — to the opera or play. And on Sunday, when the match was over, and his top hat duly broken, down with his father in a special hansom to the "Crown and Sceptre," and the terrace above the river — the golden sixties when the world was simple, dandies glamorous, Democracy not born, and the books of Whyte Melville coming thick and fast.

A generation later, with his own boy, Jolly, Harrow — buttonholed with cornflowers — by old Jolyon's whim his grandson had been canonised at a trifle less expense — again Jolyon had experienced the heat and counter-passions of the day, and come back to the cool and the strawberry beds of Robin Hill, and billiards after dinner, his boy making the most heart-breaking flukes and trying to seem languid and grown-up. Those two days each year he and his son had been alone together in the world, one on each side — and Democracy just born!

And so, he had unearthed a grey top hat, borrowed a tiny bit of light-blue ribbon from Irene, and gingerly, keeping cool, by car and train and taxi, had reached Lord's Ground. There, beside her in a lawn-coloured frock with narrow black edges, he had watched the game, and felt the old thrill stir within him.

When Soames passed, the day was spoiled, and Irene's face distorted by compression of the lips. No good to go on sitting here with Soames or perhaps his daughter recurring in front of them, like decimals. And he said:

"Well, dear, if you've had enough — let's go!"

That evening Jolyon felt exhausted. Not wanting her to see him thus, he waited till she had begun to play, and stole off to the little study. He opened the long window for air, and the door, that he might still hear her music drifting in; and, settled in his father's old armchair, closed his eyes, with his head against the worn brown leather. Like that passage of the Cesar Franck Sonata — so had been his life with her, a divine third movement. And now this business of Jon's — this bad business! Drifted to the edge of consciousness, he hardly knew if it were in sleep that he smelled the scent of a cigar, and seemed to see a shape in the blackness before his closed eyes. That shape formed, went, and formed again; as if in the very chair where he himself was sitting, he saw his father, black-coated, with knees crossed, glasses balanced between thumb and finger; saw the big white moustaches, and the deep eyes looking up below a dome of forehead, seeming to search his own; seeming to speak. "Are you facing it, Jo? It's for you to decide. She's only a woman!" How well he knew his father in that phrase; how all the Victorian Age came up with it! — And his answer "No, I've funked it — funked hurting her and Jon and myself. I've got a heart; I've funked it." But the old eyes, so much older, so much younger than his own, kept at it: "It's your wife, your son, your past. Tackle it, my boy!" Was it a message from walking spirit; or but the instinct of his sire living on within him? And again came that scent of cigar smoke — from the old saturated leather. Well! he would tackle it, write to Jon, and put the whole thing down in black and white! And suddenly he breathed with difficulty, with a sense of suffocation, as if his heart were swollen. He got up and went out into the air. Orion's Belt was very bright. He passed along the terrace round the corner of the house, till, through the window of the music-room, he could see Irene at the piano, with lamplight falling on her powdery hair; withdrawn into herself she seemed, her dark eyes staring straight before her, her hands idle. Jolyon saw her raise those hands and clasp them over her breast. 'It's Jon, with her,' he thought; 'all Jon! I'm dying out of her — it's natural!'

And, careful not to be seen, he stole back.

Next day, after a bad night, he sat down to his task. He wrote with difficulty and many erasures.

"MY DEAREST BOY,

"You are old enough to understand how very difficult it is for elders to give themselves away to their young. Especially when — like your mother and myself, though I shall never think of her as anything but young — their hearts are altogether set on him to whom they must confess. I cannot say we are conscious of having sinned exactly — people in real life very seldom are, I believe, but most persons would say we had, and at all events our conduct, righteous or not, has found us out. The truth is, my dear, we both have pasts, which it is now my task to make known to you, because they so grievously and deeply affect your future. Many, very many years ago, as far back indeed as 1883, when she was only twenty, your mother had the great and lasting misfortune to make an unhappy marriage — no, not with me, Jon. Without money of her own, and with only a stepmother — closely related to Jezebel — she was very unhappy in her home life. IT WAS FLEUR'S FATHER THAT SHE MARRIED, my cousin Soames Forsyte. He had pursued her very tenaciously and to do him justice was deeply in love with her. Within a week she knew the fearful mistake she had made. It was not his fault; it was her error of judgment — her misfortune."

So far Jolyon had kept some semblance of irony, but now his subject carried him away.

"Jon, I want to explain to you if I can — and it's very hard — how it is that an unhappy marriage such as this can so easily come about. You will of course say: 'If she didn't really love him how could she ever have married him?' You would be quite right if it were not for one or two rather terrible considerations. From this initial mistake of hers all the subsequent trouble, sorrow, and tragedy have come, and so I must make it clear to you if I can. You see, Jon, in those days and even to this day — indeed, I don't see, for all the talk of enlightenment, how it can well be otherwise — most girls are married ignorant of the sexual side of life. Even if they know what it means they have not EXPERIENCED it. That's the crux. It is this actual lack of experience, whatever verbal knowledge they have, which makes all the difference and all the trouble. In a vast number of marriages — and your mother's was one — girls are not and CANNOT be certain whether they love the man they marry or not; they do not know until after that act of union which makes the reality of marriage. Now, in many, perhaps in most doubtful cases, this act cements and strengthens the attachment, but in other cases, and your mother's was one, it is a revelation of mistake, a destruction of such attraction as there was. There is nothing more tragic in a woman's life than such a revelation, growing daily, nightly clearer. Coarse-grained and unthinking people are apt to laugh at such a mistake, and say 'what a fuss about nothing!' Narrow and self-righteous people, only capable of judging the lives of others by their own, are apt to condemn those who make this tragic error, to condemn them for life to the dungeons they have made for themselves. You know the expression: 'She has made her bed, she must lie on it!' It is a hard-mouthed saying, quite unworthy of a gentleman or lady in the best sense of those words; and I can use no stronger condemnation. I have not been what is called a moral man, but I wish to use no words to you, my dear, which will make you think lightly of ties or contracts into which you enter. Heaven forbid! But with the experience of a life behind me I do say that those who condemn the victims of these tragic mistakes, condemn them and hold out no hands to help them, are inhuman or rather they would be if they had the understanding to know what they are doing. But they haven't! Let them go! They are as much anathema to me as I, no doubt, am to them. I have had to say all this, because I am going to put you into a position to judge your mother, and you are very young, without experience of what life is. To go on with the story. After three years of effort to subdue her shrinking — I was going to say her loathing and it's not too strong a word, for shrinking soon becomes loathing under such circumstances — three years of what to a sensitive, beauty-loving nature like your mother's, Jon, was torment, she met a young man who fell in love with her. He was the architect of this very house that we live in now, he was building it for her and Fleur's father to live in, a new prison to hold her, in place of the one she inhabited with him in London. Perhaps that fact played some part in what came of it. But in any case she, too, fell in love with him. I know it's not necessary to explain to you that one does not precisely choose with whom one will fall in love. It comes. Very well! It came. I can imagine — though she never said much to me about it — the struggle that then took place in her, because, Jon, she was brought up strictly and was not light in her ideas — not at all. However, this was an overwhelming feeling, and it came to pass that they loved in deed as well as in thought. Then came a fearful tragedy. I must tell you of it because if I don't you will never understand the real situation that you have now to face. The man whom she had married — Soames Forsyte, the father of Fleur — one night, at the height of her passion for this young man, forcibly reasserted his rights over her. The next day she met her lover and told him of it. Whether he committed suicide or whether he was accidentally run over in his distraction, we never knew; but so it was. Think of your mother as she was that evening when she heard of his death. I happened to see her. Your grand-father sent me to help her if I could. I only just saw her, before the door was shut against me by her husband. But I have never forgotten her face, I can see it now. I was not in love with her then, nor for twelve years after, but I have never forgotten. My dear boy — it is not easy to write like this. But you see, I must. Your mother is wrapped up in you, utterly, devotedly. I don't wish to write harshly of Soames Forsyte. I don't think harshly of him. I have long been sorry for him; perhaps I was sorry even then. As the world judges she was in error, he was within his rights. He loved her — in his way. SHE WAS HIS PROPERTY. That is the view he holds of life — of human feelings and hearts — property. It's not his fault — so was he born! To me it is a view that has always been abhorrent — so was I born! Knowing you as I do, I feel it cannot be otherwise than abhorrent to you. Let me go on with the story. Your mother fled from his house that night; for twelve years she lived quietly alone without companionship of any sort, until, in 1899 her husband — you see, he was still her husband, for he did not attempt to divorce her, and she of course had no right to divorce him, became conscious, it seems, of the want of children, and commenced a long attempt to induce her to go back to him and give him a child. I was her trustee then, under your grandfather's Will, and I watched this going on. While watching, I became devotedly attached to her. His pressure increased, till one day she came to me here and practically put herself under my protection. Her husband, who was kept informed of all her movements, attempted to force us apart by bringing a divorce suit, or at all events by threatening one; anyway our names were publicly joined. That decided us, and we became united in fact. She was divorced, married me, and you were born. We have lived in perfect happiness, at least I have, and I believe your mother also. Soames, soon after the divorce, married Fleur's mother, and she was born. That is the story, Jon. I have told it you, because by the affection which we see you have formed for this man's daughter you are blindly moving towards what must utterly destroy your mother's happiness, if not your own. I don't wish to speak of myself, because at my age there's no use supposing I shall cumber the ground much longer, besides, what I should suffer would be mainly on her account, and on yours. But what I want you to realise is that feelings of horror and aversion such as those can never be buried or forgotten. They are alive in her today. Only yesterday at Lord's we happened to see Soames Forsyte. Her face, if you had seen it, would have convinced you. The idea that you should marry his daughter is a nightmare to her, Jon. I have nothing to say against Fleur save that she IS his daughter. But your children, if you married her, would be the grandchildren of Soames, as much as of your mother, of a man who once owned your mother as a man might own a slave. Think what that would mean. By such a marriage you enter the camp which held your mother prisoner and wherein she ate her heart out. You are just on the threshold of life, you have only known this girl two months, and however deeply you think you love her, I appeal to you to break it off at once. Don't give your mother this rankling pain and humiliation during the rest of her life. Young though she will always seem to me, she is fifty-seven. Except for us two she has no one in the world. She will soon have only you. Pluck up your spirit, Jon, and break away. Don't put this cloud and barrier between you. Don't break her heart! Bless you, my dear boy, and again forgive me for all the pain this letter must bring you — we tried to spare it you, but Spain — it seems — was no good.

Ever your devoted father

JOLYON FORSYTE."

Having finished his confession, Jolyon sat with a thin cheek on his hand, re-reading. There were things in it which hurt him so much, when he thought of Jon reading them — that he nearly tore the letter up. To speak of such things at all to a boy — his own boy — to speak of them in relation to his own wife and the boy's own mother, seemed dreadful to the reticence of his Forsyte soul. And yet without speaking of them how make Jon understand the reality, the deep cleavage, the ineffaceable scar? Without them, how justify this stifling of the boy's love? He might just as well not write at all!

He folded the confession, and put it in his pocket. It was — thank heaven! — Saturday; he had till Sunday evening to think it over; for even if posted now it could not reach Jon till Monday. He felt a curious relief at this delay, and at the fact that, whether sent or not, it was written.

In the rose garden, which had taken the place of the old fernery, he could see Irene snipping and pruning, with a little basket on her arm. She was never idle, it seemed to him, and he envied her now that he himself was idle nearly all his time.

He went down to her. She held up a stained glove and smiled. A piece of lace tied under her chin concealed her hair, and her oval face with its still dark brows looked very young.

“The green fly are awful this year, and yet it’s cold. You look tired, Jolyon.”

Jolyon took the confession from his pocket. “I’ve been writing this. I think you ought to see it.”

“To Jon?” Her whole face had changed, in that instant, becoming almost haggard.

“Yes; the murder’s out.”

He gave it her, and walked away among the roses. Presently, seeing that she had finished reading and was standing quite still with the sheets of the letter against her skirt, he came back to her.

“Well?”

“It’s wonderfully put. I don’t see how it could be put better. Thank you, dear.”

“Is there anything you would like left out?”

She shook her head.

“No; he must know all, if he’s to understand.”

“That’s what I thought, but I hate it like the devil!”

He had the feeling that he hated it more than she — to him sex was so much easier to mention between man and woman than between man and man; and she had always been more natural and frank, not deeply secretive like his Forsyte self.

“I wonder if he will understand, even now, Jolyon? He’s so young; and he shrinks from the physical.”

“He gets that shrinking from my father, he was as fastidious as a girl in all such matters. Would it be better to rewrite the whole thing, and just say you hated Soames?”

Irene shook her head.

“Hate’s only a word. It conveys nothing. No, better as it is.”

“Very well. It shall go tomorrow.”

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II

Confession

Late that same afternoon, Jolyon had a nap in the old armchair. Face down on his knee was La Rotisserie de la Reine Pedaugue, and just before he fell asleep he had been thinking: ‘As a people shall we ever really like the French? Will they ever really like us?’ He himself had always liked the French, feeling at home with their wit, their taste, their cooking. Irene and he had paid many visits to France before the war, when Jon had been at his private school. His romance with her had begun in Paris — his last and most enduring romance. But the French — no Englishman could like them who could not see them in some sort with the detached aesthetic eye! And with that melancholy conclusion he had nodded off.

When he woke he saw Jon standing between him and the window. The boy had evidently come in from the garden and was waiting for him to wake. Jolyon smiled, still half asleep. How nice the chap looked-sensitive, affectionate, straight! Then his heart gave a nasty jump; and a quaking sensation overcame him. That confession! He controlled himself with an effort. “Why, Jon, where did you spring from?”

Jon bent over and kissed his forehead.

Only then he noticed the look on the boy’s face.

“I came home to tell you something, Dad.”

With all his might Jolyon tried to get the better of the jumping, gurgling sensations within his chest.

“Well, sit down, old man. Have you seen your mother?”

“No.” The boy’s flushed look gave place to pallor; he sat down on the arm of the old chair, as, in old days, Jolyon himself used to sit beside his own father, installed in its recesses. Right up to the time of the rupture in their relations he had been wont to perch there — had he now reached such a moment with his own son? All his life he had hated scenes like poison, avoided rows, gone on his own way quietly and let others go on theirs. But now — it seemed — at the very end of things, he had a scene before him more painful than any he had avoided. He drew a visor down over his emotion, and waited for his son to speak.

“Father,” said Jon slowly, “Fleur and I are engaged.”

‘Exactly!’ thought Jolyon, breathing with difficulty.

“I know that you and Mother don’t like the idea. Fleur says that Mother was engaged to her father before you married her. Of course I don’t know what happened, but it must be ages ago. I’m devoted to her, Dad, and she says she is to me.”

Jolyon uttered a queer sound, half laugh, half groan.

“You are nineteen, Jon, and I am seventy-two. How are we to understand each other in a matter like this, eh?”

“You love Mother, Dad; you must know what we feel. It isn’t fair to us to let old things spoil our happiness, is it?”

Brought face to face with his confession, Jolyon resolved to do without it if by any means he could. He laid his hand on the boy’s arm.

“Look, Jon! I might put you off with talk about your both being too young and not knowing your own minds, and all that, but you wouldn’t listen; besides, it doesn’t meet the case — Youth, unfortunately, cures itself. You talk lightly about ‘old things like that,’ knowing nothing — as you say truly — of what happened. Now, have I ever given you reason to doubt my love for you, or my word?”

At a less anxious moment he might have been amused by the conflict his words aroused — the boy’s eager clasp, to reassure him on these points, the dread on his face of what that reassurance would bring forth; but he could only feel grateful for the squeeze.

“Very well, you can believe what I tell you. If you don’t give up this love affair, you will make Mother wretched to the end of her days. Believe me, my dear, the past, whatever it was, can’t be buried — it can’t indeed.”

Jon got off the arm of the chair.

‘The girl —’ thought Jolyon —‘there she goes — starting up before him — life itself — eager, pretty, loving!’

“I can’t, Father; how can I— just because you say that? Of course I can’t!”

“Jon, if you knew the story you would give this up without hesitation; you would have to! Can’t you believe me?”

“How can you tell what I should think? Why, I love her better than anything in the world.”

Jolyon’s face twitched, and he said with painful slowness:

“Better than your mother, Jon?”

From the boy’s face, and his clenched fists Jolyon realised the stress and struggle he was going through.

“I don’t know,” he burst out, “I don’t know! But to give Fleur up for nothing — for something I don’t understand, for something that I don’t believe can really matter half so much, will make me — make me —”

“Make you feel us unjust, put a barrier — yes. But that’s better than going on with this.”

“I can’t. Fleur loves me, and I love her. You want me to trust you; why don’t you trust me, Father? We wouldn’t want to know anything — we wouldn’t let it make any difference. It’ll only make us both love you and Mother all the more.”

Jolyon put his hand into his breast pocket, but brought it out again empty, and sat, clucking his tongue against his teeth.

“Think what your mother’s been to you, Jon! She has nothing but you; I shan’t last much longer.”

“Why not? It isn’t fair to — Why not?”

“Well,” said Jolyon, rather coldly, “because the doctors tell me I shan’t; that’s all.”

“Oh! Dad!” cried Jon, and burst into tears.

This downbreak of his son, whom he had not seen cry since he was ten, moved Jolyon terribly. He recognised to the full how fearfully soft the boy’s heart was, how much he would suffer in this business, and in life generally. And he reached out his hand helplessly — not wishing, indeed not daring to get up.

“Dear man,” he said, “don’t — or you’ll make me!”

Jon smothered down his paroxysm, and stood with face averted, very still.

‘What now?’ thought Jolyon; ‘what can I say to move him?’

“By the way, don’t speak of that to Mother,” he said; “she has enough to scare her with this affair of yours. I know how you feel. But, Jon, you know her and me well enough to be sure we wouldn’t wish to spoil your happiness lightly. Why, my dear boy, we don’t care for anything but your happiness — at least, with me it’s just yours and Mother’s and with her just yours. It’s all the future for you both that’s at stake.”

Jon turned. His face was deadly pale; his eyes, deep in his head, seemed to burn.

“What is it? What is it? Don’t keep me like this!”

Jolyon, who knew that he was beaten, thrust his hand again into his breast pocket, and sat for a full minute, breathing with difficulty, his eyes closed. The thought passed through his mind: ‘I’ve had a good long innings — some pretty bitter moments — this is the worst!’ Then he brought his hand out with the letter, and said with a sort of fatigue: “Well, Jon, if you hadn’t come today, I was going to send you this. I wanted to spare you — I wanted to spare your mother and myself, but I see it’s no good. Read it, and I think I’ll go into the garden.” He reached forward to get up.

Jon, who had taken the letter, said quickly: “No, I’ll go”; and was gone.

Jolyon sank back in his chair. A blue-bottle chose that moment to come buzzing round him with a sort of fury; the sound was homely, better than nothing. . . . Where had the boy gone to read his letter? The wretched letter — the wretched story! A cruel business — cruel to her — to Soames — to those two children — to himself! . . . His heart thumped and pained him. Life — its loves — its work — its beauty — its aching, and — its end! A good time; a fine time in spite of all; until — you regretted that you had ever been born. Life — it wore you down, yet did not make you want to die — that was the cunning evil! Mistake to have a heart! Again the blue-bottle came buzzing — bringing in all the heat and hum and scent of summer — yes, even the scent — as of ripe fruits, dried grasses, sappy shrubs, and the vanilla breath of cows. And out there somewhere in the fragrance Jon would be reading that letter, turning and twisting its pages in his trouble, his bewilderment and trouble-breaking his heart about it! The thought made Jolyon acutely miserable. Jon was such a tender-hearted chap, affectionate to his bones, and conscientious, too — it was so damned unfair! He remembered Irene saying to him once: “Never was any one born more loving and lovable than Jon. “Poor little Jon! His world gone up the spout, all of a summer afternoon! Youth took things so hard! And stirred, tormented by that vision of Youth taking things hard, Jolyon got out of his chair, and went to the window. The boy was nowhere visible. And he passed out. If one could take any help to him now — one must!

He traversed the shrubbery, glanced into the walled garden — no Jon! Nor where the peaches and the apricots were beginning to swell and colour. He passed the Cupressus-trees, dark and spiral, into the meadow. Where had the boy got to? Had he rushed down to the coppice — his old hunting-ground? Jolyon crossed the rows of hay. They would cock it on Monday and be carrying the day after, if rain held off. Often they had crossed this field together — hand in hand, when Jon was a little chap. Dash it! The golden age was over by the time one was ten! He came to the pond, where flies and gnats were dancing over a bright reedy surface; and on into the coppice. It was cool there, fragrant of larches. Still no Jon! He called. No answer! On the log seat he sat down, nervous, anxious, forgetting his own physical sensations. He had been wrong to let the boy get away with that letter; he ought to have kept him under his eye from the start! Greatly troubled, he got up to retrace his steps. At the farm-buildings he called again, and looked into the dark cow-house. There in the cool, and the scent of vanilla and ammonia, away from flies, the three Alderneys were chewing the quiet cud; just milked, waiting for evening, to be turned out again into the lower field. One turned a lazy head, a lustrous eye; Jolyon could see the slobber on its grey lower lip. He saw everything with passionate clearness, in the agitation of his nerves — all that in his time he had adored and tried to paint — wonder of light and shade and colour. No wonder the legend put Christ into a manger — what more devotional than the eyes and moon-white horns of a chewing cow in the warm dusk! He called again. No answer! And he hurried away out of the coppice, past the pond, up the hill. Oddly ironical — now he came to think of it — if Jon had taken the gruel of his discovery down in the coppice where his mother and Bosinney in those old days had made the plunge of acknowledging their love. Where he himself, on the log seat the Sunday morning he came back from Paris, had realised to the full that Irene had become the world to him. That would have been the place for Irony to tear the veil from before the eyes of Irene's boy! But he was not here! Where had he got to? One must find the poor chap!

A gleam of sun had come, sharpening to his hurrying senses all the beauty of the afternoon, of the tall trees and lengthening shadows, of the blue, and the white clouds, the scent of the hay, and the cooing of the pigeons; and the flower shapes standing tall. He came to the rosary, and the beauty of the roses in that sudden sunlight seemed to him unearthly. "Rose, you Spaniard!" Wonderful three words! There she had stood by that bush of dark red roses; had stood to read and decide that Jon must know it all! He knew all now! Had she chosen wrong? He bent and sniffed a rose, its petals brushed his nose and trembling lips; nothing so soft as a rose-leaf's velvet, except her neck — Irene! On across the lawn he went, up the slope, to the oak-tree. Its top alone was glistening, for the sudden sun was away over the house; the lower shade was thick, blessedly cool — he was greatly overheated. He paused a minute with his hand on the rope of the swing — Jolly, Holly — Jon! The old swing! And, suddenly, he felt horribly — deadly ill. 'I've overdone it!' he thought: 'by Jove. I've overdone it — after all!' He staggered up towards the terrace, dragged himself up the steps, and fell against the wall of the house. He leaned there gasping, his face buried in the honeysuckle that he and she had taken such trouble with that it might sweeten the air which drifted in. Its fragrance mingled with awful pain. 'My Love!' he thought; 'the boy!' And with a great effort he tottered in through the long window, and sank into old Jolyon's chair. The book was there, a pencil in it; he caught it up, scribbled a word on the open page. . . . His hand dropped. . . . So it was like this — was it? . . .

There was a great wrench; and darkness. . . .

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III

Irene!

When Jon rushed away with the letter in his hand, he ran along the terrace and round the corner of the house, in fear and confusion. Leaning against the creepered wall he tore open the letter. It was long — very long! This added to his fear, and he began reading. When he came to the underlined words: “It was Fleur’s father that she married,” everything swam before him. He was close to a window, and entering by it, he passed, through music-room and hall, up to his bedroom. Dipping his face in cold water, he sat on his bed, and went on reading, dropping each finished page on the bed beside him. His father’s writing was easy to read — he knew it so well, though he had never had a letter from him one quarter so long. He read with a dull feeling — imagination only half at work. He best grasped, on that first reading, the pain his father must have had in writing such a letter. He let the last sheet fall, and in a sort of mental, moral helplessness he began to read the first again. It all seemed to him disgusting — dead and disgusting. Then, suddenly, a hot wave of horrified emotion tingled through him. He buried his face in his hands. His mother! Fleur’s father! He took up the letter again, and read on mechanically. And again came the feeling that it was all dead and disgusting; his own love so different! This letter said his mother — and her father! An awful letter!

Property! Could there be men who looked on women as their property? Faces seen in street and countryside came thronging up before him — red, stock-fish faces; hard, dull faces; prim, dry faces; violent faces; hundreds, thousands of them! How could he know what men who had such faces thought and did? He held his head in his hands and groaned. His mother! He caught up the letter and read on again: “horror and aversion — alive in her today . . . your children . . . grandchildren . . . of a man who once owned your mother as a man might own a slave. . . . ” He got up from his bed. This cruel shadowy past, lurking there to murder his love and Fleur’s, was true, or his father could never have written it. ‘Why didn’t they tell me the first thing,’ he thought, ‘the day I first saw Fleur? They knew I’d seen her. They were afraid, and — now — I’ve — got it!’ Overcome by misery too acute for thought or reason, he crept into a dusky corner of the room and sat down on the floor. He sat there, like some unhappy little animal. There was comfort in dusk, and in the floor — as if he were back in those days when he played his battles sprawling all over it. He sat there huddled, his hair ruffled, his hands clasped round his knees, for how long he did not know. He was wrenched from his blank wretchedness by the sound of the door opening from his mother’s room. The blinds were down over the windows of his room, shut up in his absence, and from where he sat he could only hear a rustle, her footsteps crossing, till beyond the bed he saw her standing before his dressing-table. She had something in her hand. He hardly breathed, hoping she would not see him, and go away. He saw her touch things on the table as if they had some virtue in them, then face the window — grey from head to foot like a ghost. The least turn of her head, and she must see him! Her lips moved: “Oh! Jon!” She was speaking to herself; the tone of her voice troubled Jon’s heart. He saw in her hand a little photograph. She held it towards the light, looking at it — very small. He knew it — one of himself as a tiny boy, which she always kept in her bag. His heart beat fast. And, suddenly, as if she had heard it, she turned her eyes and saw him. At the gasp she gave, and the movement of her hands pressing the photograph against her breast, he said:

“Yes, it’s me.”

She moved over to the bed, and sat down on it, quite close to him, her hands still clasping her breast, her feet among the sheets of the letter which had slipped to the floor. She saw them, and her hands grasped the edge of the bed. She sat very upright, her dark eyes fixed on him. At last she spoke.

“Well, Jon, you know, I see.”

“Yes.”

“You’ve seen Father?”

“Yes.”

There was a long silence, till she said:

“Oh! my darling!”

“It’s all right.” The emotions in him were so violent and so mixed that he dared not move — resentment, despair, and yet a strange yearning for the comfort of her hand on his forehead.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

There was another long silence, then she got up. She stood a moment, very still, made a little movement with her hand, and said: "My darling boy, my most darling boy, don't think of me — think of yourself." And, passing round the foot of the bed, went back into her room.

Jon turned — curled into a sort of ball, as might a hedgehog — into the corner made by the two walls.

He must have been twenty minutes there before a cry roused him. It came from the terrace below. He got up, scared. Again came the cry: "Jon!" His mother was calling! He ran out and down the stairs, through the empty dining-room into the study. She was kneeling before the old armchair, and his father was lying back quite white, his head on his breast, one of his hands resting on an open book, with a pencil clutched in it — more strangely still than anything he had ever seen. She looked round wildly, and said:

"Oh! Jon — he's dead — he's dead!"

Jon flung himself down, and reaching over the arm of the chair, where he had lately been sitting, put his lips to the forehead. Icy cold! How could — how could Dad be dead, when only an hour ago — His mother's arms were round the knees; pressing her breast against them. "Why — why wasn't I with him?" he heard her whisper. Then he saw the tottering word "Irene" pencilled on the open page, and broke down himself. It was his first sight of human death, and its unutterable stillness blotted from him all other emotion; all else, then, was but preliminary to this! All love and life, and joy, anxiety, and sorrow, all movement, light and beauty, but a beginning to this terrible white stillness. It made a dreadful mark on him; all seemed suddenly little, futile, short. He mastered himself at last, got up, and raised her.

"Mother! don't cry — Mother!"

Some hours later, when all was done that had to be, and his mother was lying down, he saw his father alone, on the bed, covered with a white sheet. He stood for a long time gazing at that face which had never looked angry — always whimsical, and kind. "To be kind and keep your end up — there's nothing else in it," he had once heard his father say. How wonderfully Dad had acted up to that philosophy! He understood now that his father had known for a long time past that this would come suddenly — known, and not said a word. He gazed with an awed and passionate reverence. The loneliness of it — just to spare his mother and himself! His own trouble seemed small while he was looking at that face. The word scribbled on the page! The farewell word! Now his mother had no one but himself! He went up close to the dead face — not changed at all, and yet completely changed. He had heard his father say once that he did not believe in consciousness surviving death, or that if it did it might be just survival till the natural age-limit of the body had been reached — the natural term of its inherent vitality; so that if the body were broken by accident, excess, violent disease, consciousness might still persist till, in the course of Nature uninterfered with, it would naturally have faded out. The whimsical conceit had struck him. When the heart failed like this — surely it was not quite natural! Perhaps his father's consciousness was in the room with him. Above the bed hung a picture of his father's father. Perhaps HIS consciousness, too, was still alive; and his brother's — his half-brother, who had died in the Transvaal. Were they all gathered round this bed? Jon kissed the forehead, and stole back to his own room. The door between it and his mother's was ajar; she had evidently been in — everything was ready for him, even some biscuits and hot milk, and the letter no longer on the floor. He ate and drank, watching the last light fade. He did not try to see into the future — just stared at the dark branches of the oak-tree, level with his window, and felt as if life had stopped. Once in the night, turning in his heavy sleep, he was conscious of something white and still, beside his bed, and started up. His mother's voice said:

"It's only I, Jon dear!" Her hand pressed his forehead gently back; her white figure disappeared.

Alone! He fell heavily asleep again, and dreamed he saw his mother's name crawling on his bed.

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IV

Soames Cogitates

The announcement in THE TIMES of his cousin Jolyon's death affected Soames quite simply. So that chap was gone! There had never been a time in their two lives when love had not been lost between them. That quick-blooded sentiment hatred had run its course long since in Soames' heart, and he had refused to allow any recrudescence, but he considered this early decease a piece of poetic justice. For twenty years the fellow had enjoyed the reversion of his wife and house, and — he was dead! The obituary notice, which appeared a little later, paid Jolyon — he thought — too much attention. It spoke of that "diligent and agreeable painter whose work we have come to look on as typical of the best late-Victorian water-colour art." Soames, who had almost mechanically preferred Mole, Morpin, and Caswell Baye, and had always sniffed quite audibly when he came to one of his cousin's on the line, turned THE TIMES with a crackle.

He had to go up to Town that morning on Forsyte affairs, and was fully conscious of Gradman's glance sidelong over his spectacles. The old clerk had about him an aura of regretful congratulation. He smelled, as it were, of old days. One could almost hear him thinking: "Mr. Jolyon, ye-es — just my age, and gone — dear, dear! I dare say she feels it. She was a naice-lookin' woman. Flesh is flesh! They've given 'im a notice in the papers. Fancy!" His atmosphere in fact caused Soames to handle certain leases and conversions with exceptional swiftness.

"About that settlement on Miss Fleur, Mr. Soames?"

"I've thought better of that," answered Soames shortly.

"Aoh! I'm glad of that. I thought you were a little hasty. The times do change."

How this death would affect Fleur had begun to trouble Soames. He was not certain that she knew of it — she seldom looked at the paper, never at the births, marriages, and deaths.

He pressed matters on, and made his way to Green Street for lunch. Winifred was almost doleful. Jack Cardigan had broken a splashboard, so far as one could make out, and would not be "fit" for some time. She could not get used to the idea.

"Did Profond ever get off?" he said suddenly.

"He got off," replied Winifred, "but where — I don't know."

Yes, there it was — impossible to tell anything! Not that he wanted to know. Letters from Annette were coming from Dieppe, where she and her mother were staying.

"You saw that fellow's death, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Winifred. "I'm sorry for his children. He was very amiable."

Soames uttered a rather queer sound. A suspicion of the old deep truth — that men were judged in this world rather by what they were than by what they did — crept and knocked resentfully at the back door of his mind.

"I know there was a superstition to that effect," he muttered.

"One must do him justice now he's dead."

"I should like to have done him justice before," said Soames; "but I never had the chance. Have you got a 'Baronetage' here?"

"Yes; in that bottom row."

Soames took out a fat red book, and ran over the leaves.

"Mont — Sir Lawrence, 9th Bt. cr. 1620. e.s. of Geoffrey 8th Bt. and Lavinia daur. of Sir Charles Muskham Bt. of Muskham Hall, Shrops: marr. 1890 Emily, daur. of Conway Charwell Esq. of Condaford Grange, co. Oxon; 1 son, heir Michael Conway, b. 1895, 2 daurs. Residence: Lippinghall Manor, Folwell, Bucks: Clubs: Snooks: Coffee House: Aeroplane. See Bidlicott."

"H'm!" he said: "Did you ever know a publisher?"

"Uncle Timothy."

"Alive, I mean."

“Monty knew one at his Club. He brought him here to dinner once. Monty was always thinking of writing a book, you know, about how to make money on the turf. He tried to interest that man.”

“Well?”

“He put him on to a horse — for the Two Thousand. We didn’t see him again. He was rather smart, if I remember.”

“Did it win?”

“No; it ran last, I think. You know Monty really was quite clever in his way.”.

“Was he?” said Soames. “Can you see any connection between a sucking baronet and publishing?”

“People do all sorts of things nowadays,” replied Winifred. “The great stunt seems not to be idle — so different from our time. To do nothing was the thing then. But I suppose it’ll come again.”

“This young Mont that I’m speaking of is very sweet on Fleur. If it would put an end to that other affair I might encourage it.”

“Has he got style?” asked Winifred.

“He’s no beauty; pleasant enough, with some scattered brains. There’s a good deal of land, I believe. He seems genuinely attached. But I don’t know.”

“No,” murmured Winifred; “it’s very difficult. I always found it best to do nothing. It IS such a bore about Jack; now we shan’t get away till after Bank holiday. Well, the people are always amusing, I shall go into the Park and watch them.”

“If I were you,” said Soames, “I should have a country cottage, and be out of the way of holidays and strikes when you want.”

“The country bores me,” answered Winifred, “and I found the railway strike quite exciting.”

Winifred had always been noted for sang-froid.

Soames took his leave. All the way down to Reading he debated whether he should tell Fleur of that boy’s father’s death. It did not alter the situation except that he would be independent now, and only have his mother’s opposition to encounter. He would come into a lot of money, no doubt, and perhaps the house — the house built for Irene and himself — the house whose architect had wrought his domestic ruin. His daughter — mistress of that house! That would be poetic justice! Soames uttered a little mirthless laugh. He had designed that house to re-establish his failing union, meant it for the seat of his descendants, if he could have induced Irene to give him one! Her son and Fleur! Their children would be, in some sort, offspring of the union between himself and her!

The theatricality in that thought was repulsive to his sober sense. And yet — it would be the easiest and wealthiest way out of the impasse, now that Jolyon was gone. The juncture of two Forsyte fortunes had a kind of conservative charm. And she — Irene — would be linked to him once more. Nonsense! Absurd! He put the notion from his head.

On reaching home he heard the click of billiard-balls; and through the window saw young Mont sprawling over the table. Fleur, with her cue akimbo, was watching with a smile. How pretty she looked! No wonder that young fellow was out of his mind about her. A title — land! There was little enough in land, these days; perhaps less in a title. The old Forsytes had always had a kind of contempt for titles, rather remote and artificial things — not worth the money they cost, and having to do with the Court. They had all had that feeling in differing measure — Soames remembered. Swithin, indeed, in his most expansive days had once attended a Levee. He had come away saying he shouldn’t go again —“All that small fry!” It was suspected that he had looked too big in knee-breeches. Soames remembered how his own mother had wished to be presented because of the fashionable nature of the performance, and how his father had put his foot down with unwonted decision. What did she want with such peacocking — wasting time and money; there was nothing in it!

The instinct which had made and kept the British Commons the chief power in the State, a feeling that their own world was good enough and a little better than any other because it was THEIR world, had kept the old Forsytes singularly free of “flummery,” as Nicholas had been wont to call it when he had the gout. Soames’ generation, more self-conscious and ironical, had been saved by a sense of Swithin in knee-breeches. While the third and the fourth generation, as it seemed to him, laughed at everything.

However, there was no harm in the young fellow’s being heir to a title and estate — a thing one couldn’t help. He entered quietly, as Mont missed his shot. He noted the young man’s eyes, fixed on Fleur bending over in her turn; and the adoration in them almost touched him.

She paused with the cue poised on the bridge of her slim hand, and shook her crop of short dark chestnut hair.

"I shall never do it."

"'Nothing venture!'"

"All right!" The cue struck, the ball rolled. "There!"

"Bad luck! Never mind!"

Then they saw him, and Soames said: "I'll mark for you."

He sat down on the raised seat beneath the marker, trim and tired, furtively studying those two young faces. When the game was over Mont came up to him. "I've started in, sir. Rum game, business, isn't it? I suppose you saw a lot of human nature as a solicitor."

"I did."

"Shall I tell you what I've noticed: People are quite on the wrong track in offering less than they can afford to give; they ought to offer more, and work backward."

Soames raised his eyebrows. "Suppose the more is accepted?"

"That doesn't matter a little bit," said Mont; "it's much more paying to abate a price than to increase it. For instance, say we offer an author good terms — he naturally takes them. Then we go into it, find we can't publish at a decent profit and tell him so. He's got confidence in us because we've been generous to him, and he comes down like a lamb, and bears us no malice. But if we offer him poor terms at the start, he doesn't take them, so we have to advance them to get him, and he thinks us damned screws into the bargain."

"Try buying pictures on that system"; said Soames, "an offer accepted is a contract — haven't you learned that?"

Young Mont turned his head to where Fleur was standing in the window.

"No," he said, "I wish I had. Then there's another thing. Always let a man off a bargain if he wants to be let off."

"As advertisement?" said Soames dryly.

"Of course it IS; but I meant on principle."

"Does your firm work on those lines?"

"Not yet," said Mont, "but it'll come."

"And they will go."

"No, really, sir. I'm making any number of observations, and they all confirm my theory. Human nature is consistently underrated in business, people do themselves out of an awful lot of pleasure and profit by that. Of course, you must be perfectly genuine and open, but that's easy if you feel it. The more human and generous you are the better chance you've got in business."

Soames rose.

"Are you a partner?"

"Not for six months, yet."

"The rest of the firm had better make haste and retire."

Mont laughed.

"You'll see," he said. "There's going to be a big change. The possessive principle has got its shutters up."

"What?" said Soames.

"The house is to let! Good-bye, sir; I'm off now."

Soames watched his daughter give her hand, saw her wince at the squeeze it received, and distinctly heard the young man's sigh as he passed out. Then she came from the window, trailing her finger along the mahogany edge of the billiard-table. Watching her, Soames knew that she was going to ask him something. Her finger felt round the last pocket, and she looked up.

"Have you done anything to stop Jon writing to me, Father?"

Soames shook his head.

"You haven't seen, then?" he said. "His father died just a week ago today."

“Oh!”

In her startled, frowning face, he saw the instant struggle to apprehend what this would mean.

“Poor Jon! Why didn’t you tell me, Father?”

“I never know!” said Soames slowly; “you don’t confide in me.”

“I would, if you’d help me, dear.”

“Perhaps I shall.”

Fleur clasped her hands. “Oh! darling — when one wants a thing fearfully, one doesn’t think of other people. Don’t be angry with me.”

Soames put out his hand, as if pushing away an aspersion.

“I’m cogitating,” he said. What on earth had made him use a word like that! “Has young Mont been bothering you again?”

Fleur smiled. “Oh! Michael! He’s always bothering; but he’s such a good sort — I don’t mind him.”

“Well,” said Soames, “I’m tired; I shall go and have a nap before dinner.”

He went up to his picture-gallery, lay down on the couch there, and closed his eyes. A terrible responsibility this girl of his — whose mother was — ah! what was she? A terrible responsibility! Help her — how could he help her? He could not alter the fact that he was her father. Or that Irene —! What was it young Mont had said — some nonsense about the possessive instinct — shutters up — To let? Silly!

The sultry air, charged with a scent of meadow-sweet, of river and roses, closed on his senses, drowsing them.

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V

The Fixed Idea

"The fixed idea," which has outrun more constables than any other form of human disorder, has never more speed and stamina than when it takes the avid guise of love. To hedges and ditches, and doors, to humans without ideas fixed or otherwise, to perambulators and the contents sucking their fixed ideas, even to the other sufferers from this fast malady — the fixed idea of love pays no attention. It runs with eyes turned inward to its own light, oblivious of all other stars. Those with the fixed ideas that human happiness depends on their art, on vivisecting dogs, on hating foreigners, on paying supertax, on remaining Ministers, on making wheels go round, on preventing their neighbours from being divorced, on conscientious objection, Greek roots, Church dogma, paradox and superiority to everybody else, with other forms of ego-mania — all are unstable compared with him or her whose fixed idea is the possession of some her or him. And though Fleur, those chilly summer days, pursued the scattered life of a little Forsyte whose frocks are paid for, and whose business is pleasure, she was — as Winifred would have said in the latest fashion of speech — 'honest-to-God' indifferent to it all. She wished and wished for the moon, which sailed in cold skies above the river or the Green Park when she went to Town. She even kept Jon's letters covered with pink silk, on her heart, than which in days when corsets were so low, sentiment so despised, and chests so out of fashion, there could, perhaps, have been no greater proof of the fixity of her idea.

After hearing of his father's death, she had written to Jon, and received his answer three days later on her return from a river picnic. It was his first letter since their meeting at June's. She opened it with misgiving, and read it with dismay.

"Since I saw you I've heard everything about the past. I won't tell it you — I think you knew when we met at June's. She says you did. If you did, Fleur, you ought to have told me. I expect you only heard your father's side of it. I have heard my mother's. It's dreadful. Now that she's so sad I can't do anything to hurt her more. Of course, I long for you all day, but I don't believe now that we shall ever come together — there's something too strong pulling us apart."

Her deception had found her out. But Jon — she felt — had forgiven that. It was what he said of his mother which caused the fluttering in her heart and the weak sensation in her legs.

Her first impulse was to reply — her second, not to reply. These impulses were constantly renewed in the days which followed, while desperation grew within her. She was not her father's child for nothing. The tenacity, which had at once made and undone Soames, was her backbone, too, frilled and embroidered by French grace and quickness. Instinctively she conjugated the verb "to have" always with the pronoun "I." She concealed, however, all signs of her growing desperation, and pursued such river pleasures as the winds and rain of a disagreeable July permitted, as if she had no care in the world; nor did any "sucking baronet" ever neglect the business of a publisher more consistently than her attendant spirit, Michael Mont.

To Soames she was a puzzle. He was almost deceived by this careless gaiety. Almost — because he did not fail to mark her eyes often fixed on nothing, and the film of light shining from her bedroom window late at night. What was she thinking and brooding over into small hours when she ought to have been asleep? But he dared not ask what was in her mind; and, since that one little talk in the billiard-room, she said nothing to him.

In this taciturn condition of affairs it chanced that Winifred invited them to lunch and to go afterwards to "a most amusing little play, 'The Beggar's Opera,'" and would they bring a man to make four? Soames, whose attitude towards theatres was to go to nothing, accepted, because Fleur's attitude was to go to everything. They motored up, taking Michael Mont, who, being in his seventh heaven, was found by Winifred "very amusing." "The Beggar's Opera" puzzled Soames. The people were unpleasant, the whole thing cynical. Winifred was "intrigued"— by the dresses. The music too did not displease her. At the Opera, the night before, she had arrived too early for the Russian Ballet, and found the stage occupied by singers, for a whole hour pale or apoplectic from terror lest by some dreadful inadvertence they might drop into a tune. Michael Mont was enraptured with the whole thing. And all three wondered what Fleur was thinking of it. But Fleur was not thinking of it. Her fixed idea stood on the stage and sang with Polly Peachum, mimed with Filch, danced with Jenny Diver, postured with Lucy Lockit, kissed, trolled, and cuddled with Macheath. Her lips might smile, her hands applaud, but the comic old masterpiece made no more impression on her than if it had been pathetic, like a modern “Revue.” When they embarked in the car to return, she ached because Jon was not sitting next her instead of Michael Mont. When, at some jolt, the young man’s arm touched hers as if by accident, she only thought: ‘If that were Jon’s arm!’ When his cheerful voice, tempered by her proximity, murmured above the sound of the car’s progress, she smiled and answered, thinking: ‘If that were Jon’s voice!’ and when once he said: “Fleur, you look a perfect angel in that dress!” she answered: “Oh, do you like it?” thinking: ‘If only Jon could see it!’

During this drive she took a resolution. She would go to Robin Hill and see him — alone; she would take the car, without word beforehand to him or to her father. It was nine days since his letter, and she could wait no longer. On Monday she would go! The decision made her well disposed towards young Mont. With something to look forward to she could afford to tolerate and respond. He might stay to dinner; propose to her as usual; dance with her, press her hand, sigh — do what he liked. He was only a nuisance when he interfered with her fixed idea. She was even sorry for him so far as it was possible to be sorry for anybody but herself just now. At dinner he seemed to talk more wildly than usual about what he called ‘the death of the close borough’— she paid little attention, but her father seemed paying a good deal, with a smile on his face which meant opposition, if not anger.

“The younger generation doesn’t think as you do, sir; does it, Fleur?”

Fleur shrugged her shoulders — the younger generation was just Jon, and she did not know what he was thinking.

“Young people will think as I do when they’re my age, Mr. Mont. Human nature doesn’t change.”

“I admit that, sir; but the forms of thought change with the times. The pursuit of self-interest is a form of thought that’s going out.”

“Indeed! To mind one’s own business is not a form of thought, Mr. Mont, it’s an instinct.”

Yes, when Jon was the business!

“But what is one’s business, sir? That’s the point, EVERYBODY’S business is going to be one’s business. Isn’t it, Fleur?”

Fleur only smiled.

“If not,” added young Mont, “there’ll be blood.”

“People have talked like that from time immemorial.”

“But you’ll admit, sir, that the sense of property is dying out?”

“I should say increasing among those who have none.”

“Well, look at me! I’m heir to an entailed estate. I don’t want the thing; I’d cut the entail tomorrow.”

“You’re not married, and you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Fleur saw the young man’s eyes turn rather piteously upon her.

“Do you really mean that marriage —?” he began.

“Society is built on marriage,” came from between her father’s close lips; “marriage and its consequences. Do you want to do away with it?”

Young Mont made a distracted gesture. Silence brooded over the dinner-table, covered with spoons bearing the Forsyte crest — a pheasant proper — under the electric light in an alabaster globe. And outside, the river evening darkened, charged with heavy moisture and sweet scents.

‘Monday,’ thought Fleur; ‘Monday!’

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VI

Desperate

The weeks which followed the death of his father were sad and empty to the only Jolyon Forsyte left. The necessary forms and ceremonies — the reading of the Will, valuation of the estate, distribution of the legacies — were enacted over the head, as it were, of one not yet of age. Jolyon was cremated. By his special wish no one attended that ceremony, or wore black for him. The succession of his property, controlled to some extent by old Jolyon's Will, left his widow in possession of Robin Hill, with two thousand five hundred pounds a year for life. Apart from this the two Wills worked together in some complicated way to insure that each of Jolyon's three children should have an equal share in their grandfather's and father's property in the future as in the present, save only that Jon, by virtue of his sex, would have control of his capital when he was twenty-one, while June and Holly would only have the spirit of theirs, in order that their children might have the body after them. If they had no children, it would all come to Jon if he outlived them; and since June was fifty, and Holly nearly forty, it was considered in Lincoln's Inn Fields that but for the cruelty of income tax, young Jon would be as warm a man as his grandfather when he died. All this was nothing to Jon, and little enough to his mother. It was June who did everything needful for one who had left his affairs in perfect order. When she had gone, and those two were alone again in the great house, alone with death drawing them together, and love driving them apart, Jon passed very painful days secretly disgusted and disappointed with himself. His mother would look at him with a patient sadness which yet had in it an instinctive pride, as if she were reserving her defence. If she smiled he was angry that his answering smile should be so grudging and unnatural. He did not judge or condemn her; that was all too remote — indeed, the idea of doing so had never come to him. No! he was grudging and unnatural because he couldn't have what he wanted because of her. There was one alleviation — much to do in connection with his father's career, which could not be safely intrusted to June, though she had offered to undertake it. Both Jon and his mother had felt that if she took his portfolios, unexhibited drawings and unfinished matter, away with her, the work would encounter such icy blasts from Paul Post and other frequenters of her studio, that it would soon be frozen out even of her warm heart. On its old-fashioned plane and of its kind the work was good, and they could not bear the thought of its subjection to ridicule. A one-man exhibition of his work was the least testimony they could pay to one they had loved; and on preparation for this they spent many hours together. Jon came to have a curiously increased respect for his father. The quiet tenacity with which he had converted a mediocre talent into something really individual was disclosed by these researches. There was a great mass of work with a rare continuity of growth in depth and reach of vision. Nothing certainly went very deep, or reached very high — but such as the work was, it was thorough, conscientious, and complete. And, remembering his father's utter absence of "side" or self-assertion, the chaffing humility with which he had always spoken of his own efforts, ever calling himself "an amateur," Jon could not help feeling that he had never really known his father. To take himself seriously, yet never bore others by letting them know that he did so, seemed to have been his ruling principle. There was something in this which appealed to the boy, and made him heartily indorse his mother's comment: "He had true refinement; he couldn't help thinking of others, whatever he did. And when he took a resolution which went counter, he did it with the minimum of defiance — not like the Age, is it? Twice in his life he had to go against everything; and yet it never made him bitter." Jon saw tears running down her face, which she at once turned away from him. She was so quiet about her loss that sometimes he had thought she didn't feel it much. Now, as he looked at her, he felt how far he fell short of the reserve power and dignity in both his father and his mother. And, stealing up to her, he put his arm round her waist. She kissed him swiftly, but with a sort of passion, and went out of the room.

The studio, where they had been sorting and labelling, had once been Holly's schoolroom, devoted to her silk-worms, dried lavender, music, and other forms of instruction. Now, at the end of July, despite its northern and eastern aspects, a warm and slumberous air came in between the long-faded lilac linen curtains. To redeem a little the departed glory, as of a field that is golden and gone, clinging to a room which its master has left, Irene had placed on the paint-stained table a bowl of red roses. This, and Jolyon's favourite cat, who still clung to the deserted habitat, were the pleasant spots in that dishevelled, sad workroom. Jon, at the north window, sniffing air mysteriously scented with warm strawberries, heard a car drive up. The lawyers again about some nonsense! Why did that scent so make one ache? And where did it come from

— there were no strawberry beds on this side of the house. Instinctively he took a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket, and wrote down some broken words. A warmth began spreading in his chest; he rubbed the palms of his hands together. Presently he had jotted this:

> “If I could make a little song —
> A little song to soothe my heart!
> I’d make it all of little things —
> The plash of water, rub of wings,
> The puffing-off of dandie’s crown,
> The hiss of raindrop spilling down,
> The purr of cat, the trill of bird,
> And ev’ry whispering I’ve heard
> From willy wind in leaves and grass,
> And all the distant drones that pass.
> A song, as tender and as light
> As flower, or butterfly in flight;
> And when I saw it opening
> I’d let it fly, and sing!”

He was still muttering it over to himself at the window, when he heard his name called, and, turning round, saw Fleur. At that amazing apparition, he made at first no movement and no sound, while her clear vivid glance ravished his heart. Then he went forward to the table, saying: “How nice of you to come!” and saw her flinch as if he had thrown something at her.

“I asked for you,” she said, “and they showed me up here. But I can go away again.”

Jon clutched the paint-stained table. Her face and figure in its frilly frock, photographed itself with such startling vividness upon his eyes, that if she had sunk through the floor he must still have seen her.

“I know I told you a lie, Jon. But I told it out of love.”

“Oh! yes! That’s nothing!”

“I didn’t answer your letter. What was the use — there wasn’t anything to answer. I wanted to see you instead.” She held out both her hands, and Jon grasped them across the table. He tried to say something, but all his attention was given to trying not to hurt her hands. His own felt so hard and hers so soft. She said almost defiantly:

“That old story — was it so very dreadful?”

“Yes.” In his voice, too, there was a note of defiance.

She dragged her hands away. “I didn’t think in these days boys were tied to their mothers’ apron-strings.”

Jon’s chin went up as if he had been struck.

“Oh! I didn’t mean it, Jon. What a horrible thing to say!” Swiftly she came close to him. “Jon, dear; I didn’t mean it.”

“All right.”

She had put her two hands on his shoulder, and her forehead down on them; the brim of her hat touched his neck, and he felt it quivering. But, in a sort of paralysis, he made no response. She let go of his shoulder and drew away.

“Well, I’ll go, if you don’t want me. But I never thought you’d have given me up.”

“I HAVEN’T,” cried Jon, coming suddenly to life. “I can’t. I’ll try again.”

She swayed towards him. “Jon — I love you! Don’t give me up! If you do, I don’t know what I shall do — I feel so desperate. What does it matter — all that past — compared with THIS?”

She clung to him. He kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. But while he kissed her he saw the sheets of that letter fallen down on the floor of his bedroom — his father’s white dead face — his mother kneeling before it. Fleur’s whisper: “Make her! Promise! Oh! Jon, try!” seemed childish in his ear. He felt curiously old.

“I promise!” he muttered. “Only, you don’t understand.”

“She wants to spoil our lives, just because —”

“Yes, of what?”

Again that challenge in his voice, and she did not answer. Her arms tightened round him, and he returned her kisses; but even while he yielded, the poison worked in him, the poison of the letter. Fleur did not know, she did not understand — she misjudged his mother; she came from the enemy’s camp! So lovely, and he loved her so — yet, even in her embrace, he could not help the memory of Holly’s words: “I think she has a ‘having’ nature,” and his mother’s: “My darling boy; don’t think of me — think of yourself.”

When she was gone like a passionate dream, leaving her image on his eyes, her kisses on his lips, such an ache in his heart, Jon leaned in the window, listening to the car bearing her away. Still the scent as of warm strawberries, still the little summer sounds that should make his song; still all the promise of youth and happiness in sighing, floating, fluttering July — and his heart torn; yearning strong in him; hope high in him, yet with its eyes cast down, as if ashamed. The miserable task before him! If Fleur was desperate, so was he — watching the poplars swaying, the white clouds passing, the sunlight on the grass.

He waited till evening, till after their almost silent dinner, till his mother had played to him — and still he waited, feeling that she knew what he was waiting to say. She kissed him and went up-stairs, and still he lingered, watching the moonlight and the moths, and that unreality of colouring which steals along and stains a summer night. And he would have given anything to be back in the past — barely three months back; or away forward, years, in the future. The present with this stark cruelty of a decision, one way or the other, seemed impossible. He realised now so much more keenly what his mother felt than he had at first; as if the story in that letter had been a poisonous germ producing a kind of fever of partisanship, so that he really felt there were two camps, his mother's and his — Fleur's and her father's. It might be a dead thing, that old tragic ownership and enmity, but dead things were poisonous till Time had cleaned them away. Even his love felt tainted, less illusioned, more of the earth, and with a treacherous lurking doubt lest Fleur, like her father, might want to OWN; not articulate, just a stealing haunt, horribly unworthy, which crept in and about the ardour of his memories, touched with its tarnishing breath the vividness and grace of that charmed face and figure — a doubt, not real enough to convince him of its presence, just real enough to deflower a perfect faith. And perfect faith, to Jon, not yet twenty, was essential. He still had Youth's eagerness to give with both hands, to take with neither — to give lovingly to one who had his own impulsive generosity. Surely she had! He got up from the window-seat and roamed in the big grey ghostly room, whose walls were hung with silvered canvas. This house — his father said in that death-bed letter — had been built for his mother to live in-with Fleur's father! He put out his hand in the half-dark, as if to grasp the shadowy hand of the dead. He clenched, trying to feel the thin vanished fingers of his father; to squeeze them, and reassure him that he — he was on his father's side. Tears, prisoned within him, made his eyes feel dry and hot. He went back to the window. It was warmer, not so eerie, more comforting outside, where the moon hung golden, three days off full; the freedom of the night was comforting. If only Fleur and he had met on some desert island without a past — and Nature for their house! Jon had still his high regard for desert islands, where breadfruit grew, and the water was blue above the coral. The night was deep, was free — there was enticement in it; a lure, a promise, a refuge from entanglement, and love! Milksop tied to his mother's —! His cheeks burned. He shut the window, drew curtains over it, switched off the lighted sconce, and went up-stairs.

The door of his room was open, the light turned up; his mother, still in her evening gown, was standing at the window. She turned, and said:

"Sit down, Jon; let's talk." She sat down on the window-seat, Jon on his bed. She had her profile turned to him, and the beauty and grace of her figure, the delicate line of the brow, the nose, the neck, the strange and as it were remote refinement of her, moved him. His mother never belonged to her surroundings. She came into them from somewhere — as it were! What was she going to say to him, who had in his heart such things to say to her?

"I know Fleur came today. I'm not surprised." It was as though she had added: "She is her father's daughter!" And Jon's heart hardened. Irene went on quietly:

"I have Father's letter. I picked it up that night and kept it. Would you like it back, dear?"

Jon shook his head.

"I had read it, of course, before he gave it to you. It didn't quite do justice to my criminality."

"Mother!" burst from Jon's lips.

"He put it very sweetly, but I know that in marrying Fleur's father without love I did a dreadful thing. An unhappy marriage, Jon, can play such havoc with other lives besides one's own. You are fearfully young, my darling, and fearfully loving. Do you think you can possibly be happy with this girl?"

Staring at her dark eyes, darker now from pain, Jon answered:

"Yes; oh! yes — if YOU could be."

Irene smiled.

"Admiration of beauty, and longing for possession are not love. If yours were another case like mine, Jon — where the deepest things are stifled; the flesh joined, and the spirit at war!"

"Why should it, Mother? You think she must be like her father, but she's not. I've seen him."

Again the smile came on Irene's lips, and in Jon something wavered; there was such irony and experience in that smile.

"You are a giver, Jon; she is a taker."

That unworthy doubt, that haunting uncertainty again! He said with vehemence:

"She isn't — she isn't. It's only because I can't bear to make you unhappy, Mother, now that Father —" He thrust his fists against his forehead.

Irene got up.

"I told you that night, dear, not to mind me. I meant it. Think of yourself and your own happiness! I can stand what's left — I've brought it on myself."

Again the word: "Mother!" burst from Jon's lips.

She came over to him and put her hands over his.

"Do you feel your head, darling?"

Jon shook it. What he felt was in his chest — a sort of tearing asunder of the tissue there, by the two loves.

"I shall always love you the same, Jon, whatever you do. You won't lose anything." She smoothed his hair gently, and walked away.

He heard the door shut; and, rolling over on the bed, lay, stifling his breath, with an awful held-up feeling within him.

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VII

Embassy

Enquiring for her at tea time Soames learned that Fleur had been out in the car since two. Three hours! Where had she gone? Up to London without a word to him? He had never become quite reconciled with cars. He had embraced them in principle — like the born empiricist, or Forsyte, that he was — adopting each symptom of progress as it came along with: "Well, we couldn't do without them now." But in fact he found them tearing, great, smelly things. Obliged by Annette to have one — a Rollhard with pearl-grey cushions, electric light, little mirrors, trays for the ashes of cigarettes, flower vases — all smelling of petrol and stephanotis — he regarded it much as he used to regard his brother-inlaw, Montague Dartie. The thing typified all that was fast, insecure, and subcutaneously oily in modern life. As modern life became faster, looser, younger, Soames was becoming older, slower, tighter, more and more in thought and language like his father James before him. He was almost aware of it himself. Pace and progress pleased him less and less; there was an ostentation, too, about a car which he considered provocative in the prevailing mood of Labour. On one occasion that fellow Sims had driven over the only vested interest of a working man. Soames had not forgotten the behaviour of its master, when not many people would have stopped to put up with it. He had been sorry for the dog, and quite prepared to take its part against the car, if that ruffian hadn't been so outrageous. With four hours fast becoming five, and still no Fleur, all the old car-wise feelings he had experienced in person and by proxy balled within him, and sinking sensations troubled the pit of his stomach. At seven he telephoned to Winifred by trunk call. No! Fleur had not been to Green Street. Then where was she? Visions of his beloved daughter rolled up in her pretty frills, all blood-and-dust-stained, in some hideous catastrophe, began to haunt him. He went to her room and spied among her things. She had taken nothing — no dressing-case, no jewellery. And this, a relief in one sense, increased his fears of an accident. Terrible to be helpless when his loved one was missing, especially when he couldn't bear fuss or publicity of any kind! What should he do, if she were not back by nightfall?

At a quarter to eight he heard the car. A great weight lifted from off his heart; he hurried down. She was getting out — pale and tired-looking, but nothing wrong. He met her in the hall.

"You've frightened me. Where have you been?"

"To Robin Hill. I'm sorry, dear. I had to go; I'll tell you afterwards." And, with a flying kiss, she ran up-stairs.

Soames waited in the drawing-room. To Robin Hill! What did that portend?

It was not a subject they could discuss at dinner — consecrated to the susceptibilities of the butler. The agony of nerves Soames had been through, the relief he felt at her safety, softened his power to condemn what she had done, or resist what she was going to do; he waited in a relaxed stupor for her revelation. Life was a queer business. There he was at sixty-five and no more in command of things than if he had not spent forty years in building up security — always something one couldn't get on terms with! In the pocket of his dinner-jacket was a letter from Annette. She was coming back in a fortnight. He knew nothing of what she had been doing out there. And he was glad that he did not. Her absence had been a relief. Out of sight was out of mind! And now she was coming back. Another worry! And the Bolderby Old Crome was gone — Dumetrius had got it — all because that anonymous letter had put it out of his thoughts. He furtively remarked the strained look on his daughter's face, as if she too were gazing at a picture that she couldn't buy. He almost wished the war back. Worries didn't seem, then, quite so worrying. From the caress in her voice, the look on her face, he became certain that she wanted something from him, uncertain whether it would be wise of him to give it her. He pushed his savoury away uneaten, and even joined her in a cigarette.

After dinner she set the electric piano-player going. And he augured the worst when she sat down on a cushion footstool at his knee, and put her hand on his.

"Darling, be nice to me. I had to see Jon — he wrote to me. He's going to try what he can do with his mother. But I've been thinking. But it's really in YOUR hands, Father. If you'd persuade her that it doesn't mean renewing the past in any way! That I shall stay yours, and Jon will stay hers; that you need never see him or her, and she need never see you or me! Only you could persuade her, dear, because only you could promise. One can't promise for other people. Surely it wouldn't be too awkward for you to see her just this once — now that Jon's father is dead?"

"Too awkward?" Soames repeated. "The whole thing's preposterous."

"You know," said Fleur, without looking up, "you wouldn't mind seeing her, really."

Soames was silent. Her words had expressed a truth too deep for him to admit. She slipped her fingers between his own — hot, slim, eager, they clung there. This child of his would corkscrew her way into a brick wall!

"What am I to do, if you won't, Father?" she said very softly.

"I'll do anything for your happiness," said Soames; "but this isn't for your happiness."

"Oh! it is; it is!"

"It'll only stir things up," he said grimly.

"But they are stirred up. The thing is to quiet them. To make her feel that this is just OUR lives, and has nothing to do with yours or hers. You can do it, Father, I know you can."

"You know a great deal, then," was Soames' glum answer.

"If you will, Jon and I will wait a year — two years if you like."

"It seems to me," murmured Soames, "that you care nothing about what I feel."

Fleur pressed his hand against her cheek.

"I do, darling. But you wouldn't like me to be awfully miserable." How she wheedled to get her ends! And trying with all his might to think she really cared for him — he was not sure — not sure. All she cared for was this boy! Why should he help her to get this boy, who was killing her affection for himself? Why should he? By the laws of the Forsytes it was foolish! There was nothing to be had out of it — nothing! To give her to that boy! To pass her into the enemy's camp, under the influence of the woman who had injured him so deeply! Slowly — inevitably — he would lose this flower of his life! And suddenly he was conscious that his hand was wet. His heart gave a little painful jump. He couldn't bear her to cry. He put his other hand quickly over hers, and a tear dropped on that, too. He couldn't go on like this! "Well, well," he said, "I'll think it over, and do what I can. Come, come!" If she must have it for her happiness — she must; he couldn't refuse to help her. And lest she should begin to thank him he got out of his chair and went up to the piano-player — making that noise! It ran down, as he reached it, with a faint buzz. That musical box of his nursery days: "The Harmonious Blacksmith," "Glorious Port"— the thing had always made him miserable when his mother set it going on Sunday afternoons. Here it was again — the same thing, only larger, more expensive, and now it played: "The Wild Wild Women" and "The Policeman's Holiday," and he was no longer in black velvet with a sky-blue collar. 'Profond's right,' he thought, 'there's nothing in it! We're all progressing to the grave!' And with that surprising mental comment he walked out.

He did not see Fleur again that night. But, at breakfast, her eyes followed him about with an appeal he could not escape — not that he intended to try. No! He had made up his mind to the nerve-racking business. He would go to Robin Hill — to that house of memories. A pleasant memory — the last! Of going down to keep that boy's father and Irene apart by threatening divorce. He had often thought, since, that it had clenched their union. And, now, he was going to clench the union of that boy with his girl. 'I don't know what I've done,' he thought, 'to have such things thrust on me!' He went up by train and down by train, and from the station walked by the long rising lane, still very much as he remembered it over thirty years ago. Funny — so near London! Some one evidently was holding on to the land there. This speculation soothed him, moving between the high hedges slowly, so as not to get overheated, though the day was chill enough. After all was said and done there was something real about land, it didn't shift. Land, and good pictures! The values might fluctuate a bit, but on the whole they were always going up — worth holding on to, in a world where there was such a lot of unreality, cheap building, changing fashions, such a "Here today and gone tomorrow" spirit. The French were right, perhaps, with their peasant proprietorship, though he had no opinion of the French. One's bit of land! Something solid in it! He had heard peasant-proprietors described as a pig-headed lot; had heard young Mont call his father a pig-headed Morning Poster — disrespectful young devil. Well, there were worse things than being pig-headed or reading The Morning Post. There was Profond and his tribe, and all these Labour chaps, and loud-mouthed politicians, and "wild, wild women"! A lot of worse things! And, suddenly, Soames became conscious of feeling weak, and hot, and shaky. Sheer nerves at the meeting before him! As Aunt Juley might have said — quoting "Superior Dosset"— his nerves were "in a proper fantigue." He could see the house now among its trees, the house he had watched being built, intending it for himself and this woman, who, by such strange fate, had lived in it with another after all! He began to think of Dumetrius, Local Loans, and other forms of investment. He could not afford to meet her with his nerves all shaking; he who represented the Day of Judgment for her on earth as it was in heaven; he, legal ownership, personified, meeting lawless beauty, incarnate. His dignity demanded impassivity during this embassy designed to link their offspring, who, if she had behaved herself, would have been brother and sister. That wretched tune: "The Wild Wild Women" kept running in his head, perversely, for tunes did not run there as a rule. Passing the poplars in front of the house, he thought: 'How they've grown; I had them planted!'

A maid answered his ring.

"Will you say — Mr. Forsyte, on a very special matter."

If she realised who he was, quite probably she would not see him. 'By George!' he thought, hardening as the tug came: 'It's a topsyturvy affair!'

The maid came back. Would the gentleman state his business, please?

"Say it concerns Mr. Jon," said Soames.

And once more he was alone in that hall with the pool of grey-white marble designed by her first lover. Ah! she had been a bad lot — had loved two men, and not himself! He must remember that when he came face to face with her once more. And suddenly he saw her in the opening chink between the long heavy purple curtains, swaying, as if in hesitation; the old perfect poise and line, the old startled dark-eyed gravity; the old calm defensive voice: "Will you come in, please?"

He passed through that opening. As in the picture-gallery and the confectioner's shop, she seemed to him still beautiful. And this was the first time — the very first — since he married her five and thirty years ago, that he was speaking to her without the legal right to call her his. She was not wearing black — one of that fellow's radical notions, he supposed.

"I apologise for coming," he said glumly; "but this business must be settled one way or the other."

"Won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you."

Anger at his false position, impatience of ceremony between them, mastered him, and words came tumbling out:

"It's an infernal mischance; I've done my best to discourage it. I consider my daughter crazy, but I've got into the habit of indulging her; that's why I'm here. I suppose you're fond of your son."

"Devotedly."

"Well?"

"It rests with him."

He had a sense of being met and baffled. Always — always she had baffled him, even in those old first married days.

"It's a mad notion," he said.

"It is."

"If you had only —! Well — they might have been —" he did not finish that sentence "brother and sister and all this saved," but he saw her shudder as if he had, and stung by the sight, he crossed over to the window. Out THERE the trees had not grown — they couldn't, they were old!

"So far as I'm concerned," he said, "you may make your mind easy. I desire to see neither you nor your son if this marriage comes about. Young people in these days are — are unaccountable. But I can't bear to see my daughter unhappy. What am I to say to her when I go back?"

"Please say to her, as I said to you, that it rests with Jon."

"You don't oppose it?"

"With all my heart; not with my lips."

Soames stood, biting his finger.

"I remember an evening —" he said suddenly; and was silent. What was there — what was there in this woman that would not fit into the four comers of his hate or condemnation? "Where is he — your son?"

"Up in his father's studio, I think."

"Perhaps you'd have him down."

He watched her ring the bell, he watched the maid come in.

"Please tell Mr. Jon that I want him."

"If it rests with him," said Soames hurriedly, when the maid was gone, "I suppose I may take it for granted that this unnatural marriage will take place: in that case there'll be formalities. Whom do I deal with — Herring's?" Irene nodded.

"You don't propose to live with them?"

Irene shook her head.

"What happens to this house?"

"It will be as Jon wishes."

"This house," said Soames suddenly: "I had hopes when I began it. If THEY live in it — their children! They say there's such a thing as Nemesis. Do you believe in it?"

"Yes."

"Oh! You do!" He had come back from the window, and was standing close to her, who, in the curve of her grand piano, was, as it were, embayed.

"I'm not likely to see you again," he said slowly: "Will you shake hands," his lip quivered, the words came out jerkily, "and let the past die?" He held out his hand. Her pale face grew paler, her eyes so dark, rested immovably on his, but her hands remained clasped in front of her. He heard a sound and turned. That boy was standing in the opening of the curtains. Very queer he looked, hardly recognisable as the young fellow he had seen in the Gallery off Cork Street — very queer; much older, no youth in the face at all — haggard, rigid, his hair ruffled, his eyes deep in his head. Soames made an effort, and said with a lift of his lip, not quite a smile nor quite a sneer:

"Well, young man! I'm here for my daughter; it rests with you, it seems — this matter. Your mother leaves it in your hands."

The boy continued staring at his mother's face, and made no answer.

"For my daughter's sake I've brought myself to come," said Soames. "What am I to say to her when I go back?"

Still looking at his mother, the boy said, quietly:

"Tell Fleur that it's no good, please; I must do as my father wished before he died."

"Jon!"

"It's all right, Mother."

In a kind of stupefaction Soames looked from one to the other; then, taking up hat and umbrella, which he had put down on a chair, he walked towards the curtains. The boy stood aside for him to go by. He passed through and heard the grate of the rings as the curtains were drawn behind him. The sound liberated something in his chest.

'So that's that!' he thought, and passed out of the front door.

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VIII

The Dark Tune

As Soames walked away from the house at Robin Hill the sun broke through the grey of that chill afternoon, in smoky radiance. So absorbed in landscape-painting that he seldom looked seriously for effects of Nature out-of-doors, he was struck by that moody effulgence — it mourned with a triumph suited to his own feeling. Victory in defeat! His embassy had come to naught. But he was rid of those people, had regained his daughter at the expense of — her happiness. What would Fleur say to him? Would she believe he had done his best? And under that sunlight flaring on the elms, hazels, hollies of the lane and those unexploited fields, Soames felt dread. She would be terribly upset! He must appeal to her pride. That boy had given her up, declared part and lot with the woman who so long ago had given her father up! Soames clenched his hands. Given him up, and why? What had been wrong with him? And once more he felt the malaise of one who contemplates himself as seen by another — like a dog who chances on his reflection in a mirror, and is intrigued and anxious at the unseizable thing.

Not in a hurry to get home, he dined in town at the Connoisseurs. While eating a pear it suddenly occurred to him that, if he had not gone down to Robin Hill, the boy might not have so decided. He remembered the expression on his face while his mother was refusing the hand he had held out. A strange, an awkward thought! Had Fleur cooked her own goose by trying to make too sure?

He reached home at half-past nine. While the car was passing in at one drive gate he heard the grinding sputter of a motor-cycle passing out by the other. Young Mont, no doubt, so Fleur had not been lonely. But he went in with a sinking heart. In the cream-panelled drawing-room she was sitting with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her clasped hands, in front of a white camellia plant which filled the fireplace. That glance at her before she saw him renewed his dread. What was she seeing among those white camellias?

“Well, Father!”

Soames shook his head. His tongue failed him. This was murderous work! He saw her eyes dilate, her lips quivering.

“What? What? Quick, Father!”

“My dear,” said Soames, “I— I did my best, but —” And again he shook his head.

Fleur ran to him and put a hand on each of his shoulders.

“She?”

“No,” muttered Soames; “he. I was to tell you that it was no use; he must do what his father wished before he died.” He caught her by the waist. “Come, child, don’t let them hurt you. They’re not worth your little finger.”

Fleur tore herself from his grasp.

“You didn’t — you couldn’t have tried. You — you betrayed me, Father!”

Bitterly wounded, Soames gazed at her passionate figure writhing there in front of him.

“You didn’t try — you didn’t — I was a fool — I won’t believe he could — he ever could! Only yesterday he —! Oh! why did I ask you?”

“Yes,” said Soames quietly, “why did you? I swallowed my feelings; I did my best for you, against my judgment — and this is my reward. Good-night!”

With every nerve in his body twitching he went towards the door.

Fleur darted after him.

“He gives me up? You mean that? Father!”

Soames turned and forced himself to answer:

“Yes.”

“Oh!” cried Fleur. “What did you — what could you have done in those old days?”

The breathless sense of really monstrous injustice cut the power of speech in Soames’ throat. What had HE done! What had they done to him! And with quite unconscious dignity he put his hand on his breast, and looked at her.

“It’s a shame!” cried Fleur passionately.

Soames went out. He mounted, slow and icy, to his picture-gallery, and paced among his treasures. Outrageous! Oh! Outrageous! She was spoiled! Ah! and who had spoiled her? He stood still before the Goya copy. Accustomed to her own way in everything — Flower of his life! And now that she couldn’t have it. He turned to the window for some air. Daylight was dying, the moon rising, gold behind the poplars! What sound was that? Why! That piano thing! A dark tune, with a thrum and a throb! She had set it going — what comfort could she get from that? His eyes caught movement down there beyond the lawn, under the trellis of rambler roses and young acacia-trees, where the moonlight fell. There she was, roaming up and down. His heart gave a little sickening jump. What would she do under this blow? How could he tell? What did he know of her — he had only loved her all his life — looked on her as the apple of his eye! He knew nothing — had no notion. There she was — and that dark tune — and the river gleaming in the moonlight!

‘I must go out,’ he thought. He hastened down to the drawing-room, lighted just as he had left it, with the piano thrumming out that waltz, or fox-trot, or whatever they called it in these days, and passed through on to the verandah. Where could he watch, without her seeing him? And he stole down through the fruit garden to the boat-house. He was between her and the river now, and his heart felt lighter. She was his daughter, and Annette’s — she wouldn’t do anything foolish; but there it was — he didn’t know! From the boat-house window he could see the last acacia and the spin of her skirt when she turned in her restless march. That tune had run down at last — thank goodness! He crossed the floor and looked through the farther window at the water slow-flowing past the lilies. It made little bubbles against them, bright where a moon-streak fell. He remembered suddenly that early morning when he had slept in this boat-house after his father died, and she had just been born — nearly nineteen years ago! Even now he recalled the unaccustomed world when he woke up, the strange feeling it had given him. That day the second passion of his life began — for this girl of his, roaming under the acacias. What a comfort she had been to him! And all the soreness and sense of outrage left him. If he could make her happy again, he didn’t care! An owl flew, queeking, queeking; a bat flitted by; the moonlight brightened and broadened on the water. How long was she going to roam about like this! He went back to the window, and suddenly saw her coming down to the bank. She stood quite close, on the landing-stage. And Soames watched, clenching his hands. Should he speak to her? His excitement was intense. The stillness of her figure, its youth, its absorption in despair, in longing, in-itself. He would always remember it, moonlit like that; and the faint sweet reek of the river and the shivering of the willow leaves. She had everything in the world that he could give her, except the one thing that she could not have because of him! The perversity of things hurt him at that moment, as might a fish-bone in his throat. Then, with an infinite relief, he saw her turn back towards the house. What could he give her to make amends? Pearls, travel, horses, other young men — anything she wanted — that he might lose the memory of her young figure lonely by the water! There! She had set that tune going again! Why — it was a mania! Dark, thrumming, faint, travelling from the house. It was as though she had said: “If I can’t have something to keep me going, I shall die of this!” Soames dimly understood. Well, if it helped her, let her keep it thrumming on all night! And, mousing back through the fruit garden, he regained the verandah. Though he meant to go in and speak to her now, he still hesitated, not knowing what to say, trying hard to recall how it felt to be thwarted in love. He ought to know, ought to remember — and he could not! Gone — all real recollection; except that it had hurt him horribly. In this blankness he stood passing his handkerchief over hands and lips, which were very dry. By craning his head he could just see Fleur, standing with her back to that piano still grinding out its tune, her arms tight crossed on her breast, a lighted cigarette between her lips, whose smoke half veiled her face. The expression on it was strange to Soames, the eyes shone and stared, and every feature was alive with a sort of wretched scorn and anger. Once or twice he had seen Annette look like that — the face was too vivid, too naked, not HIS daughter’s at that moment. And he dared not go in, realising the futility of any attempt at consolation. He sat down in the shadow of the ingle-nook. Monstrous trick, that Fate had played him! Nemesis! That old unhappy marriage! And in God’s name — why? How was he to know, when he wanted Irene so violently, and she consented to be his, that she would never love him? The tune died and was renewed, and died again, and still Soames sat in the shadow, waiting for he knew not what. The fag of Fleur’s cigarette, flung through the window, fell on the grass; he watched it glowing, burning itself out. The moon had freed herself above the poplars, and poured her unreality on the garden. Comfortless light, mysterious, withdrawn — like the beauty of that woman who had never loved him — dappling the nemesias and the stocks with a vesture not of earth. Flowers! And his flower so unhappy! Ah, why could one not put happiness into Local Loans, gild its edges, insure it against going down? Light had ceased to flow out now from the drawing-room window. All was silent and dark in there. Had she gone up? He rose, and, tiptoeing, peered in. It seemed so! He entered. The verandah kept the moonlight out; and at first he could see nothing but the outlines of furniture blacker than the darkness. He groped towards the farther window to shut it. His foot struck a chair, and he heard a gasp. There she was, curled and crushed into the corner of the sofa! His hand hovered. Did she want his consolation? He stood, gazing at that ball of crushed frills and hair and graceful youth, trying to burrow its way out of sorrow. How leave her there? At last he touched her hair, and said: “Come, darling, better go to bed. I’ll make it up to you, somehow.” How fatuous! But what could he have said?

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IX

Under the Oak-Tree

When their visitor had disappeared Jon and his mother stood without speaking, till he said suddenly: “I ought to have seen him out.” But Soames was already walking down the drive, and Jon went up-stairs to his father’s studio, not trusting himself to go back. The expression on his mother’s face confronting the man she had once been married to, had sealed a resolution growing within him ever since she left him the night before. It had put the finishing touch of reality. To marry Fleur would be to hit his mother in the face; to betray his dead father! It was no good! Jon had the least resentful of natures. He bore his parents no grudge in this hour of his distress. For one so young there was a rather strange power in him of seeing things in some sort of proportion. It was worse for Fleur, worse for his mother even, than it was for him. Harder than to give up was to be given up, or to be the cause of some one you loved giving up for you. He must not, would not behave grudgingly! While he stood watching the tardy sunlight, he had again that sudden vision of the world which had come to him the night before. Sea on sea, country on country, millions on millions of people, all with their own lives, energies, joys, griefs, and suffering — all with things they had to give up, and separate struggles for existence. Even though he might be willing to give up all else for the one thing he couldn’t have, he would be a fool to think his feelings mattered much in so vast a world, and to behave like a cry-baby or a cad. He pictured the people who had nothing — the millions who had given up life in the war, the millions whom the war had left with life and little else; the hungry children he had read of, the shattered men; people in prison, every kind of unfortunate. And — they did not help him much. If one had to miss a meal, what comfort in the knowledge that many others had to miss it too? There was more distraction in the thought of getting away out into this vast world of which he knew nothing yet. He could not go on staying here, walled in and sheltered, with everything so slick and comfortable, and nothing to do but brood and think what might have been. He could not go back to Wansdon, and the memories of Fleur. If he saw her again he could not trust himself; and if he stayed here or went back there, he would surely see her. While they were within reach of each other that must happen. To go far away and quickly, was the only thing to do. But, however much he loved his mother, he did not want to go away with her. Then feeling that was brutal, he made up his mind desperately to propose that they should go to Italy. For two hours in that melancholy room he tried to master himself; then dressed solemnly for dinner.

His mother had done the same. They ate little, at some length, and talked of his father’s catalogue. The Show was arranged for October, and beyond clerical detail there was nothing more to do.

After dinner she put on a cloak and they went out; walked a little, talked a little, till they were standing silent at last beneath the oak-tree. Ruled by the thought: ‘If I show anything, I show all,’ Jon put his arm through hers and said quite casually:

“Mother, let’s go to Italy.”

Irene pressed his arm, and said as casually:

“It would be very nice; but I’ve been thinking you ought to see and do more than you would if I were with you.”

“But then you’d be alone.”

“I was once alone for more than twelve years. Besides, I should like to be here for the opening of Father’s show.”

Jon’s grip tightened round her arm; he was not deceived.

“You couldn’t stay here all by yourself; it’s too big.”

“Not here, perhaps. In London, and I might go to Paris, after the show opens. You ought to have a year at least, Jon, and see the world.”

“Yes, I’d like to see the world and rough it. But I don’t want to leave you all alone.”

“My dear, I owe you that at least. If it’s for your good, it’ll be for mine. Why not start tomorrow? You’ve got your passport.”

“Yes; if I’m going it had better be at once. Only — Mother — if — if I wanted to stay out somewhere — America or anywhere, would you mind coming presently?”

"Wherever and whenever you send for me. But don't send until you really want me."

Jon drew a deep breath.

"I feel England's choky."

They stood a few minutes longer under the oak-tree — looking out to where the grand stand at Epsom was veiled in evening. The branches kept the moonlight from them, so that it only fell everywhere else — over the fields and far away, and on the windows of the creepered house behind, which soon would be to let.

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X

Fleur's Wedding

The October paragraphs describing the wedding of Fleur Forsyte to Michael Mont hardly conveyed the symbolic significance of this event. In the union of the great-granddaughter of "Superior Dosset" with the heir of a ninth baronet was the outward and visible sign of that merger of class in class which buttresses the political stability of a realm. The time had come when the Forsytes might resign their natural resentment against a "flummery" not theirs by birth, and accept it as the still more natural due of their possessive instincts. Besides, they really had to mount to make room for all those so much more newly rich. In that quiet but tasteful ceremony in Hanover Square, and afterwards among the furniture in Green Street, it had been impossible for those not in the know to distinguish the Forsyte troop from the Mont contingent — so far away was "Superior Dosset" now. Was there, in the crease of his trousers, the expression of his moustache, his accent, or the shine on his top hat, a pin to choose between Soames and the ninth baronet himself? Was not Fleur as self-possessed, quick, glancing, pretty, and hard as the likeliest Muskham, Mont, or Charwell filly present? If anything, the Forsytes had it in dress and looks and manners. They had become "upper class" and now their name would be formally recorded in the Stud Book, their money joined to land. Whether this was a little late in the day, and those rewards of the possessive instinct, lands and money destined for the melting-pot — was still a question so moot that it was not mooted. After all, Timothy had said Consols were goin' up. Timothy, the last, the missing link; Timothy in extremis on the Bayswater Road — so Francie had reported. It was whispered, too, that this young Mont was a sort of socialist — strangely wise of him, and in the nature of insurance, considering the days they lived in. There was no uneasiness on that score. The landed classes produced that sort of amiable foolishness at times, turned to safe uses and confined to theory. As George remarked to his sister Francie: "They'll soon be having puppies — that'll give him pause."

The church with white flowers and something blue in the middle of the East window, looked extremely chaste, as though endeavouring to counteract the somewhat lurid phraseology of a Service calculated to keep the thoughts of all on puppies. Forsytes, Haymans, Tweetymans, sat in the left aisle; Monts, Charwells, Muskhams in the right; while a sprinkling of Fleur's fellow-sufferers at school, and of Mont's fellow-sufferers in the war, gaped indiscriminately from either side, and three maiden ladies, who had dropped in on their way from Skyward's, brought up the rear, together with two Mont retainers and Fleur's old nurse. In the unsettled state of the country as full a house as could be expected.

Mrs. Val Dartie, who sat with her husband in the third row, squeezed his hand more than once during the performance. To her, who knew the plot of this tragi-comedy, its most dramatic moment was well-nigh painful. 'I wonder if Jon knows by instinct,' she thought — Jon, out in British Columbia. She had received a letter from him only that morning which had made her smile and say:

"Jon's in British Columbia, Val, because he wants to be in California. He thinks it's too nice there."

"Oh!" said Val, "so he's beginning to see a joke again."

"He's bought some land and sent for his mother."

"What on earth will she do out there?"

"All she cares about is Jon. Do you still think it a happy release?"

Val's shrewd eyes narrowed to grey pin-points between their dark lashes.

"Fleur wouldn't have suited him a bit. She's not bred right."

"Poor little Fleur!" sighed Holly. Ah! it was strange — this marriage! The young man, Mont, had caught her on the rebound, of course, in the reckless mood of one whose ship has just gone down. Such a plunge could not but be — as Val put it — an outside chance. There was little to be told from the back view of her young cousin's veil, and Holly's eyes reviewed the general aspect of this Christian wedding. She who had made a love-match which had been successful, had a horror of unhappy marriages. This might not be one in the end — but it was clearly a toss-up; and to consecrate a toss-up in this fashion with manufactured unction before a crowd of fashionable free-thinkers — for who thought otherwise than freely, or not at all, when they were 'dolled' up — seemed to her as near a sin as one could find in an age which had abolished them. Her eyes wandered from the prelate in his robes (a Charwell — the Forsytes had not as yet produced a prelate) to Val, beside her, thinking — she was certain of — the Mayfly filly at fifteen to one for the Cambridgeshire. They passed on and caught the profile of the ninth baronet, in counterfeitment of the kneeling process. She could just see the neat ruck above his knees where he had pulled his trousers up, and thought: 'Val's forgotten to pull up his!' Her eyes passed to the pew in front of her, where Winifred's substantial form was gowned with passion, and on again to Soames and Annette kneeling side by side. A little smile came on her lips — Prosper Profond, back from the South Seas of the Channel, would be kneeling too, about six rows behind. Yes! This was a funny "small" business, however it turned out; still it was in a proper church and would be in the proper papers tomorrow morning.

They had begun a hymn; she could hear the ninth baronet across the aisle, singing of the hosts of Midian. Her little finger touched Val's thumb — they were holding the same hymn-book — and a tiny thrill passed through her, preserved from twenty years ago. He stooped and whispered:

"I say, d'you remember the rat?" The rat at their wedding in Cape Colony, which had cleaned its whiskers behind the table at the Registrar's! And between her little and third finger she squeezed his thumb hard.

The hymn was over, the prelate had begun to deliver his discourse. He told them of the dangerous times they lived in, and the awful conduct of the House of Lords in connection with divorce. They were all soldiers — he said — in the trenches under the poisonous gas of the Prince of Darkness, and must be manful. The purpose of marriage was children, not mere sinful happiness.

An imp danced in Holly's eyes — Val's eyelashes were meeting. Whatever happened, he must NOT snore. Her finger and thumb closed on his thigh; till he stirred uneasily.

The discourse was over, the danger past. They were signing in the vestry; and general relaxation had set in.

A voice behind her said:

"Will she stay the course?"

"Who's that?" she whispered.

"Old George Forsyte!"

Holly demurely scrutinised one of whom she had often heard. Fresh from South Africa, and ignorant of her kith and kin, she never saw one without an almost childish curiosity. He was very big, and very dapper; his eyes gave her a funny feeling of having no particular clothes.

"They're off!" she heard him say.

They came, stepping from the chancel. Holly looked first in young Mont's face. His lips and ears were twitching, his eyes, shifting from his feet to the hand within his arm, stared suddenly before them as if to face a firing party. He gave Holly the feeling that he was spiritually intoxicated. But Fleur! Ah! That was different. The girl was perfectly composed, prettier than ever, in her white robes and veil over her banged dark chestnut hair; her eyelids hovered demure over her dark hazel eyes. Outwardly, she seemed all there. But, inwardly, where was she? As those two passed, Fleur raised her eyelids — the restless glint of those clear whites remained on Holly's vision as might the flutter of a caged bird's wings.

In Green Street Winifred stood to receive, just a little less composed than usual. Soames' request for the use of her house had come on her at a deeply psychological moment. Under the influence of a remark of Prosper Profond, she had begun to exchange her Empire for Expressionistic furniture. There were the most amusing arrangements, with violet, green, and orange blobs and scriggles, to be had at Mealard's. Another month and the change would have been complete. Just now, the very "intriguing" recruits she had enlisted did not march too well with the old guard. It was as if her regiment were half in khaki, half in scarlet and bearskins. But her strong and comfortable character made the best of it in a drawing-room which typified, perhaps, more perfectly than she imagined, the semi-bolshevised imperialism of her country. After all, this was a day of merger, and you couldn't have too much of it! Her eyes travelled indulgently among her guests. Soames had gripped the back of a buhl chair; young Mont was behind that "awfully amusing" screen, which no one as yet had been able to explain to her. The ninth baronet had shied violently at a round scarlet table, inlaid tinder glass with blue Australian butterflies' wings, and was clinging to her Louis-Quinze cabinet; Francie Forsyte had seized the new mantel-board, finely carved with little purple grotesques on an ebony ground; George, over by the old spinet, was holding a little sky-blue book as if about to enter bets; Prosper Profond was twiddling the knob of the open door, black with peacock-blue panels; and Annette's hands, close by, were grasping her own waist; two Muskhams clung to the balcony among the plants, as if feeling ill; Lady Mont, thin and brave-looking, had taken up her long-handled glasses and was gazing at the central light shade, of ivory and orange dashed with deep magenta, as if the heavens had opened. Everybody, in fact, seemed holding on to something. Only Fleur, still in her bridal dress, was detached from all support, flinging her words and glances to left and right.

The room was full of the bubble and the squeak of conversation. Nobody could hear anything that anybody said; which seemed of little consequence, since no one waited for anything so slow as an answer. Modern conversation seemed to Winifred so different from the days of her prime, when a drawl was all the vogue. Still it was diverting, which, of course, was all that mattered. Even the Forsytes were talking with extreme rapidity — Fleur and Christopher, and Imogen, and young Nicholas's youngest, Patrick. Soames, of course, was silent; but George, by the spinet, kept up a running commentary, and Francie, by her mantel-shelf. Winifred drew nearer to the ninth baronet. He seemed to promise a certain repose; his nose was fine and drooped a little, his grey moustaches too; and she said, drawling through her smile;

"It's rather nice, isn't it?"

His reply shot out of his smile like a snipped bread pellet:

"D'you remember, in Frazer, the tribe that buries the bride up to the waist?"

He spoke as fast as anybody! He had dark, lively little eyes, too, all crinkled round like a Catholic priest's. Winifred felt suddenly he might say things she would regret.

"They're always so diverting — weddings," she murmured, and moved on to Soames. He was curiously still, and Winifred saw at once what was dictating his immobility. To his right was George Forsyte, to his left Annette and Prosper Profond. He could not move without either seeing those two together, or the reflection of them in George Forsyte's japing eyes. He was quite right not to be taking notice.

"They say Timothy's sinking," he said glumly.

"Where will you put him, Soames?"

"Highgate." And counted on his fingers. "It'll make twelve of them there, including wives. How do you think Fleur looks?"

"Remarkably well."

Soames nodded. He had never seen her look prettier, yet he could not rid himself of the impression that this business was unnatural — remembering still that crushed figure burrowing into the corner of the sofa. From that night to this day he had received from her no confidences. He knew from his chauffeur that she had made one more attempt on Robin Hill and drawn blank — an empty house, no one at home. He knew that she had received a letter, but not what was in it, except that it had made her hide herself and cry. He had remarked that she looked at him sometimes when she thought he wasn't noticing, as if she were wondering still what he had done — forsooth — to make those people hate him so. Well, there it was! Annette had come back, and things had worn on through the summer — very miserable, till suddenly Fleur had said she was going to marry young Mont. She had shown him a little more affection when she told Soames that. And he had yielded — what was the good of opposing it? God knew that he had never wished to thwart her in anything! And the young man seemed quite delirious about her. No doubt she was in a reckless mood, and she was young, absurdly young. But if he opposed her, he didn't know what she would do; for all he could tell she might want to take up a profession, become a doctor or solicitor, some nonsense. She had no aptitude for painting, writing, music, in his view the legitimate occupations of unmarried women, if they must do something in these days. On the whole, she was safer married, for he could see too well how feverish and restless she was at home. Annette, too, had been in favour of it — Annette, from behind the veil of his refusal to know what she was about, if she was about anything. Annette had said: "Let her marry this young man. He is a nice boy — not so highty-flighty as he seems." Where she got her expressions, he didn't know — but her opinion soothed his doubts. His wife, whatever her conduct, had clear eyes and an almost depressing amount of common sense. He had settled fifty thousand on Fleur, taking care that there was no cross settlement in case it didn't turn out well. Could it turn out well? She had not got over that other boy — he knew. They were to go to Spain for the honeymoon. He would be even lonelier when she was gone. But later, perhaps, she would forget, and turn to him again!

Winifred's voice broke on his reverie.

"Why! Of all wonders — June!"

There, in a djibbah — what things she wore! — with her hair straying from under a fillet, Soames saw his cousin, and Fleur going forward to greet her. The two passed from their view out on to the stairway.

“Really,” said Winifred, “she does the most impossible things! Fancy HER coming!”

“What made you ask her?” muttered Soames.

“Because I thought she wouldn’t accept, of course.”

Winifred had forgotten that behind conduct lies the main trend of character; or, in other words, omitted to remember that Fleur was now a “lame duck.”

On receiving her invitation, June had first thought: ‘I wouldn’t go near them for the world!’ and then, one morning, had awakened from a dream of Fleur waving to her from a boat with a wild unhappy gesture. And she had changed her mind.

When Fleur came forward and said to her:

“Do come up while I’m changing my dress”; she had followed up the stairs. The girl led the way into Imogen’s old bedroom, set ready for her toilet.

June sat down on the bed, thin and upright, like a little spirit in the sere and yellow. Fleur locked the door.

The girl stood before her divested of her wedding-dress. What a pretty thing she was!

“I suppose you think me a fool,” she said, with quivering lips, “when it was to have been Jon. But what does it matter? Michael wants me, and I don’t care. It’ll get me away from home.” Diving her hand into the frills on her breast, she brought out a letter. “Jon wrote me this.”

June read: “Lake Okanagen, British Columbia. I’m not coming back to England. Bless you always. Jon.”

“She’s made safe, you see,” said Fleur.

June handed back the letter.

“That’s not fair to Irene; she always told Jon he could do as he wished.”

Fleur smiled bitterly. “Didn’t she spoil your life too?”

“Nobody can spoil a life, my dear. That’s nonsense. Things happen, but we bob up.”

Then with a sort of terror she saw the girl sink on her knees and bury her face in the djibbah, with a strangled sob.

“It’s all right — all right,” June murmured: “Don’t! There, there!”

But the point of the girl’s chin was pressed ever closer into her thigh, and the sound was dreadful of her sobbing. Well, well! It had to come. She would feel better afterwards! June stroked the short hair of that shapely head and all the scattered mother-sense in her focussed itself and passed through the tips of her fingers into the girl’s brain.

“Don’t sit down under it, my dear,” she said at last. “We can’t control life, but we can fight it. Make the best of things. I’ve had to. I held on, like you; and I cried, as you’re crying now. And look at me!”

Fleur raised her head; a sob merged suddenly into a little choked laugh. In truth it was a thin and rather wild and wasted spirit she was looking at, but it had brave eyes.

“All right!” she said. “I’m sorry. I shall forget him, I suppose, if I fly fast and far enough.”

And, scrambling to her feet, she went over to the washstand.

June watched her removing with cold water the traces of emotion. Save for a little becoming pinkness there was nothing left when she stood before the mirror. June got off the bed and took a pin-cushion in her hand. To put two pins into the wrong places was all the vent she found for sympathy.

“Give me a kiss,” she said when Fleur was ready, and dug her chin into the girl’s warm cheek.

“I want a whiff,” said Fleur; “don’t wait.”

June left her, sitting on the bed with a cigarette between her lips and her eyes half closed, and went down-stairs. In the doorway of the drawing-room stood Soames as if unquiet at his daughter’s tardiness. June tossed her head and passed down on to the half landing. Her cousin Francie was standing there.

“Look!” said June, pointing with her chin at Soames. “That man’s fatal!”

“How do you mean,” said Francie, “fatal?”

June did not answer her. “I shan’t wait to see them off,” she said. “Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!” And Francie’s eyes, of a Celtic grey, goggled. That old feud! Really, it was quite romantic!

Soames, moving to the well of the staircase, saw June go, and drew a breath of satisfaction. But why didn't Fleur come? They would miss their train. That train would bear her away from him, yet he could not help fidgeting at the thought that they would lose it. And then she did come, running down in her tan-coloured frock and black velvet cap, and passed him into the drawing-room. He saw her kiss her mother, her aunt, Val's wife, Imogen, and then come forth, quick and pretty as ever. How would she treat him at this last moment of her girlhood? He couldn't hope for much!

Her lips pressed the middle of his cheek.

"Daddy!" she said, and was past and gone. Daddy! She hadn't called him that for years. He drew a long breath and followed slowly down. There was all the folly with that confetti stuff and the rest of it to go through with, yet. But he would like just to catch her smile, if she leaned out, though they would hit her in the eye with the shoe, if they didn't take care. Young Mont's voice said fervently in his ear:

"Good-bye, sir; and thank you! I'm so fearfully bucked."

"Good-bye," he said; "don't miss your train."

He stood on the bottom step but three, whence he could see above the heads — the silly hats and heads. They were in the car now; and there was that stuff, showering, and there went the shoe. A flood of something welled up in Soames, and — he didn't know — he couldn't see!

❦

XI

THE LAST OF THE FORSYTES

When they came to prepare that terrific symbol Timothy Forsyte — the one pure individualist left, the only man who hadn't heard of the Great War — they found him wonderful — not even death had undermined his soundness.

To Smither and Cook that preparation came like final evidence of what they had never believed possible — the end of the old Forsyte family on earth. Poor Mr. Timothy must now take a harp and sing in the company of Miss Forsyte, Mrs. Julia, Miss Hester; with Mr. Jolyon, Mr. Swithin, Mr. James, Mr. Roger, and Mr. Nicholas of the party. Whether Mrs. Hayman would be there was more doubtful, seeing that she had been cremated. Secretly Cook thought that Mr. Timothy would be upset — he had always been so set against barrel organs. How many times had she not said: "Drat the thing! There it is again! Smither, you'd better run up and see what you can do." And in her heart she would so have enjoyed the tunes, if she hadn't known that Mr. Timothy would ring the bell in a minute and say: "Here, take him a halfpenny and tell him to move on." Often they had been obliged to add threepence of their own before the man would go — Timothy had ever underrated the value of emotion. Luckily he had taken the organs for blue-bottles in his last years, which had been a comfort, and they had been able to enjoy the tunes. But a harp! Cook wondered. It WAS a change! And Mr. Timothy had never liked change. But she did not speak of this to Smither, who did so take a line of her own in regard to heaven that it quite put one about sometimes.

She cried while Timothy was being prepared, and they all had sherry afterwards out of the yearly Christmas bottle, which would not be needed now. Ah! dear! She had been there five-and-forty years and Smither nine-and-thirty! And now they would be going to a tiny house in Tooting, to live on their savings and what Miss Hester had so kindly left them — for to take fresh service after the glorious past — No! But they WOULD like just to see Mr. Soames again, and Mrs. Dartie, and Miss Francie, and Miss Euphemia. And even if they had to take their own cab, they felt they must go to the funeral. For six years Mr. Timothy had been their baby, getting younger and younger every day, till at last he had been too young to live.

They spent the regulation hours of waiting in polishing and dusting, in catching the one mouse left, and asphyxiating the last beetle, so as to leave it nice, discussing with each other what they would buy at the sale. Miss Ann's work-box; Miss Juley's (that is Mrs. Julia's) seaweed album; the fire-screen Miss Hester had crewelled; and Mr. Timothy's hair — little golden curls, glued into a black frame. Oh! they must have those — only the price of things had gone up so!

It fell to Soames to issue invitations for the funeral. He had them drawn up by Gradman in his office — only blood relations, and no flowers. Six carriages were ordered. The Will would be read afterwards at the house.

He arrived at eleven o'clock to see that all was ready. At a quarter past old Gradman came in black gloves and crape on his hat. He and Soames stood in the drawing-room waiting. At half-past eleven the carriages drew up in a long row. But no one else appeared. Gradman said:

"It surprises me, Mr. Soames. I posted them myself."

"I don't know," said Soames; "he'd lost touch with the family."

Soames had often noticed in old days how much more neighbourly his family were to the dead than to the living. But, now, the way they had flocked to Fleur's wedding and abstained from Timothy's funeral, seemed to show some vital change. There might, of course, be another reason; for Soames felt that if he had not known the contents of Timothy's Will, he might have stayed away himself through delicacy. Timothy had left a lot of money, with nobody in particular to leave it to. They mightn't like to seem to expect something.

At twelve o'clock the procession left the door; Timothy alone in the first carriage under glass. Then Soames alone; then Gradman alone; then Cook and Smither together. They started at a walk, but were soon trotting under a bright sky. At the entrance to Highgate Cemetery they were delayed by service in the Chapel. Soames would have liked to stay outside in the sunshine. He didn't believe a word of it; on the other hand, it was a form of insurance which could not safely be neglected, in case there might be something in it after all.

They walked up two and two — he and Gradman, Cook and Smither — to the family vault. It was not very distinguished for the funeral of the last old Forsyte.

He took Gradman into his carriage on the way back to the Bayswater Road with a certain glow in his heart. He had a surprise in pickle for the old chap who had served the Forsytes four-and-fifty years — a treat that was entirely his doing. How well he remembered saying to Timothy the day after Aunt Hester's funeral: "Well, Uncle Timothy, there's Gradman. He's taken a lot of trouble for the family. What do you say to leaving him five thousand?" and his surprise, seeing the difficulty there had been in getting Timothy to leave anything, when Timothy had nodded. And now the old chap would be as pleased as Punch, for Mrs. Gradman, he knew, had a weak heart, and their son had lost a leg in the war. It was extraordinarily gratifying to Soames to have left him five thousand pounds of Timothy's money. They sat down together in the little drawing-room, whose walls — like a vision of heaven — were sky-blue and gold, with every picture-frame unnaturally bright, and every speck of dust removed from every piece of furniture, to read that little masterpiece — the Will of Timothy. With his back to the light in Aunt Hester's chair, Soames faced Gradman with his face to the light on Aunt Ann's sofa; and, crossing his legs, began:

"This is the last Will and Testament of me Timothy Forsyte of The Bower Bayswater Road London I appoint my nephew Soames Forsyte of The Shelter Mapledurham and Thomas Gradman of 159 Folly Road Highgate (hereinafter called my Trustees) to be the trustees and executors of this my Will. To the said Soames Forsyte I leave the sum of one thousand pounds free of legacy duty and to the said Thomas Gradman I leave the sum of five thousand pounds free of legacy duty."

Soames paused. Old Gradman was leaning forward, convulsively gripping a stout black knee with each of his thick hands; his mouth had fallen open so that the gold fillings of three teeth gleamed; his eyes were blinking; two tears rolled slowly out of them. Soames read hastily on.

"All the rest of my property of whatsoever description I bequeath to my Trustees upon Trust to convert and hold the same upon the following trusts namely. To pay thereout all my debts funeral expenses and outgoings of any kind in connection with my Will and to hold the residue thereof in trust for that male lineal descendant of my father Jolyon Forsyte by his marriage with Ann Pierce who after the decease of all lineal descendants whether male or female of my said father by his said marriage in being at the time of my death shall last attain the age of twenty-one years absolutely it being my desire that my property shall be nursed to the extreme limit permitted by the laws of England for the benefit of such male lineal descendant as aforesaid."

Soames read the investment and attestation clauses, and, ceasing, looked at Gradman. The old fellow was wiping his brow with a large handkerchief, whose brilliant colour supplied a sudden festive tinge to the proceedings.

"My word, Mr. Soames!" he said, and it was clear that the lawyer in him had utterly wiped out the man: "My word! Why, there are two babies now, and some quite young children — if one of them lives to be eighty — it's not a great age — and add twenty-one — that's a hundred years; and Mr. Timothy worth a hundred and fifty thousand pound if he's worth a penny. Compound interest at five per cent doubles you in fourteen years. In fourteen years three hundred thousand — six hundred thousand in twenty-eight — twelve hundred thousand in forty-two — twenty-four hundred thousand in fifty-six — four million eight hundred thousand in seventy — nine million six hundred thousand in eighty-four — Why, in a hundred years it'll be twenty million! And we shan't live to see it! It IS a Will!"

Soames said dryly: "Anything may happen. The State might take the lot; they're capable of anything in these days."

"And carry five," said Gradman to himself. "I forgot — Mr. Timothy's in Consols; we shan't get more than two per cent with this income tax. To be on the safe side, say seven million. Still, that's a pretty penny."

Soames rose and handed him the Will. "You're going into the City. Take care of that, and do what's necessary. Advertise; but there are no debts. When's the sale?"

"Tuesday week," said Gradman. "Life or lives in bein' and twenty-one years afterwards — it's a long way off. But I'm glad he's left it in the family." . . .

The sale — not at Jobson's, in view of the Victorian nature of the effects — was far more freely attended than the funeral, though not by Cook and Smither, for Soames had taken it on himself to give them their hearts' desires. Winifred was present, Euphemia, and Francie, and Eustace had come in his car. The miniatures, Barbizons, and J. R. drawings had been bought in by Soames; and relics of no marketable value were set aside in an off-room for members of the family who cared to have mementos. These were the only restrictions upon bidding characterised by an almost tragic langour. Not one piece of furniture, no picture or porcelain figure appealed to modern taste. The humming-birds had fallen like autumn leaves when taken from where they had not hummed for sixty years. It was painful to Soames to see the chairs his aunts had sat on, the little grand piano they had practically never played, the books whose outsides they had gazed at, the china they had dusted, the curtains they had drawn, the hearth-rug which had warmed their feet; above all, the beds they had lain and died in — sold to little dealers, and the housewives of Fulham. And yet — what could one do? Buy them and stick them in a lumber-room? No; they had to go the way of all flesh and furniture, and be worn out. But when they put up Aunt Ann's sofa and were going to knock it down for thirty shillings, he cried out, suddenly: "Five pounds!" The sensation was considerable, and the sofa his.

When that little sale was over in the fusty saleroom, and those Victorian ashes scattered, he went out into the misty October sunshine feeling as if cosiness had died out of the world, and the board "To Let" was up, indeed. Revolutions on the horizon; Fleur in Spain; no comfort in Annette; no Timothy's on the Bayswater Road. In the irritable desolation of his soul he went into the Goupenor Gallery. That chap Jolyon's water-colours were on view there. He went in to look down his nose at them — it might give him some faint satisfaction. The news had trickled through from June to Val's wife, from her to Val, from Val to his mother, from her to Soames, that the house — the fatal house at Robin Hill — was for sale, and Irene going to join her boy out in British Columbia, or some such place. For one wild moment the thought had come to Soames: 'Why shouldn't I buy it back? I meant it for my —!' No sooner come than gone. Too lugubrious a triumph; with two many humiliating memories for himself and Fleur. She would never live there after what had happened. No, the place must go its way to some peer or profiteer. It had been a bone of contention from the first, the shell of the feud and with the woman gone, it was an empty shell. "For Sale or To Let." With his mind's eye he could see that board raised high above the ivied wall which he had built.

He passed through the first of the two rooms in the Gallery. There was certainly a body of work! And now that the fellow was dead it did not seem so trivial. The drawings were pleasing enough, with quite a sense of atmosphere, and something individual in the brush work. 'His father and my father; he and I; his child and mine!' thought Soames. So it had gone on! And all about that woman! Softened by the events of the past week, affected by the melancholy beauty of the autumn day, Soames came nearer than he had ever been to realisation of that truth — passing the understanding of a Forsyte pure — that the body of Beauty has a spiritual essence, uncapturable save by a devotion which thinks not of self. After all, he was near that truth in his devotion to his daughter; perhaps that made him understand a little how he had missed the prize. And there, among the drawings of his kinsman, who had attained to that which he had found beyond his reach, he thought of him and her with a tolerance which surprised him. But he did not buy a drawing.

Just as he passed the seat of custom on his return to the outer air he met with a contingency which had not been entirely absent from his mind when he went into the Gallery — Irene, herself, coming in. So she had not gone yet, and was still paying farewell visits to that fellow's remains! He subdued the little involuntary leap of his subconsciousness, the mechanical reaction of his senses to the charm of this once-owned woman, and passed her with averted eyes. But when he had gone by he could not for the life of him help looking back. This, then, was finality — the heat and stress of his life, the madness and the longing thereof, the long, the only defeat he had known, would be over when she faded from his view this time; even such memories had their own queer aching value. She, too, was looking back. Suddenly she lifted her gloved hand, her lips smiled faintly, her dark eyes seemed to speak. It was the turn of Soames to make no answer to that smile and that little farewell wave; he went out into the fashionable street quivering from head to foot. He knew what she had meant to say: "Now that I am going for ever out of the reach of you and yours — forgive me; I wish you well." That was the meaning; last sign of that terrible reality — passing morality, duty, common sense — her aversion from him who had owned her body but had never touched her spirit or her heart. It hurt; yes — more than if she had kept her mask unmoved, her hand unlifted.

Three days later, in that fast-yellowing October, Soames took a taxi-cab to Highgate Cemetery and mounted through its white forest to the Forsyte vault. Close to the cedar, above catacombs and columbaria, tall, ugly, and individual, it looked like an apex of the competitive system. He could remember a discussion wherein Swithin had advocated the addition to its face of the pheasant proper. The proposal had been rejected in favour of a wreath in stone, above the stark words: "The family vault of Jolyon Forsyte: 1850." It was in good order. All trace of the recent interment had been removed, and its sober grey gloomed reposefully in the sunshine. The whole family lay there now, except old Jolyon's wife, who had gone back under a contract to her own family vault in Suffolk; old Jolyon himself lying at Robin Hill; and Susan

Hayman, cremated so that none knew where she might be. Soames gazed at it with satisfaction — massive, needing little attention; and this was important, for he was well aware that no one would attend to it when he himself was gone, and he would have to be looking out for lodgings soon. He might have twenty years before him, but one never knew. Twenty years without an aunt or uncle, with a wife of whom one had better not know anything, with a daughter gone from home. His mood inclined to melancholy and retrospection. This cemetery was quite full now — of people with extraordinary names, buried in extraordinary taste. Still, they had a fine view up here, right over London. Annette had once given him a story to read by that Frenchman, Maupassant — a most lugubrious concern, where all the skeletons emerged from their graves one night, and all the pious inscriptions on the stones were altered to descriptions of their sins. Not a true story at all. He didn't know about the French, but there was not much real harm in English people except their teeth and their taste, which were certainly deplorable. "The family vault of Jolyon Forsyte, 1850." A lot of people had been buried here since then — a lot of English life crumbled to mould and dust! The boom of an airplane passing under the gold-tinted clouds caused him to lift his eyes. The deuce of a lot of expansion had gone on. But it all came back to a cemetery — to a name and a date on a tomb. And he thought with a curious pride that he and his family had done little or nothing to help this feverish expansion. Good solid middlemen, they had gone to work with dignity to manage and possess. "Superior Dosset," indeed, had built, in a dreadful, and Jolyon painted, in a doubtful period, but so far as he remembered not another of them all had soiled his hands by creating anything — unless you counted Val Dartie and his horse-breeding. Collectors, solicitors, barristers, merchants, publishers, accountants, directors, land agents, even soldiers — there they had been! The country had expanded, as it were, in spite of them. They had checked, controlled, defended, and taken advantage of the process — and when you considered how "Superior Dosset" had begun life with next to nothing, and his lineal descendants already owned what old Gradman estimated at between a million and a million and a half, it was not so bad! And yet he sometimes felt as if the family bolt was shot, their possessive instinct dying out. They seemed unable to make money — this fourth generation; they were going into art, literature, farming, or the army; or just living on what was left them — they had no push and no tenacity. They would die out if they didn't take care.

Soames turned from the vault and faced towards the breeze. The air up here would be delicious if only he could rid his nerves of the feeling that mortality was in it. He gazed restlessly at the crosses and the urns, the angels, the "immortelles," the flowers, gaudy or withering; and suddenly he noticed a spot which seemed so different from anything else up there that he was obliged to walk the few necessary yards and look at it. A sober corner, with a massive queer-shaped cross of grey rough-hewn granite, guarded by four dark yew-trees. The spot was free from the pressure of the other graves, having a little box-hedged garden on the far side, arid in front a goldening birch-tree. This oasis in the desert of conventional graves appealed to the aesthetic sense of Soames, and he sat down there in the sunshine. Through those trembling gold birch leaves he gazed out at London, and yielded to the waves of memory. He thought of Irene in Montpellier Square, when her hair was rusty-golden and her white shoulders his — Irene, the prize of his love — passion, resistant to his ownership. He saw Bosinney's body lying in that white mortuary, and Irene sitting on the sofa looking at her picture with the eyes of a dying bird. Again he thought of her by the little green Niobe in the Bois de Boulogne, once more rejecting him. His fancy took him on beside his drifting river on the November day when Fleur was to be born, took him to the dead leaves floating on the green-tinged water and the snake-headed weed for ever swaying and nosing, sinuous, blind, tethered. And on again to the window opened to the cold starry night above Hyde Park, with his father lying dead. His fancy darted to that picture of "The Future Town," to that boy's and Fleur's first meeting; to the blueish trail of Prosper Profond's cigar, and Fleur in the window pointing down to where the fellow prowled. To the sight of Irene and that dead fellow sitting side by side in the Stand at Lord's. To her and that boy at Robin Hill. To the sofa, where Fleur lay crushed up in the corner; to her lips pressed into his cheek, and her farewell "Daddy." And suddenly he saw again Irene's grey-gloved hand waving its last gesture of release.

He sat there a long time dreaming his career, faithful to the scut of his possessive instinct, warming himself even with its failures.

"To Let"— the Forsyte age and way of life, when a man owned his soul, his investments, and his woman, without check or question. And now the State had, or would have, his investments, his woman had herself, and God knew who had his soul. "To Let"— that sane and simple creed!

The waters of change were foaming in, carrying the promise of new forms only when their destructive flood should have passed its full. He sat there, subconscious of them, but with his thoughts resolutely set on the past — as a man might ride into a wild night with his face to the tail of his galloping horse. Athwart the Victorian dykes the waters were rolling on property, manners, and morals, on melody and the old forms of art — waters bringing to his mouth a salt taste as of blood, lapping to the foot of this Highgate Hill where Victorianism lay buried. And sitting there, high up on its most individual spot, Soames — like a figure of Investment — refused their restless sounds. Instinctively he would not fight them — there was in him too much primeval wisdom, of Man the possessive animal. They would quiet down when they had fulfilled their tidal fever of dispossessing and destroying; when the creations and the properties of others were sufficiently broken and dejected — they would lapse and ebb, and fresh forms would rise based on an instinct older than the fever of change — the instinct of Home.

“Je m’en fiche,” said Prosper Profond. Soames did not say “Je m’en fiche”— it was French, and the fellow was a thorn in his side — but deep down he knew that change was only the interval of death between two forms of life, destruction necessary to make room for fresher property. What though the board was up, and cosiness to let? — some one would come along and take it again some day.

And only one thing really troubled him, sitting there — the melancholy craving in his heart — because the sun was like enchantment on his face and on the clouds and on the golden birch leaves, and the wind’s rustle was so gentle, and the yew-tree green so dark, and the sickle of a moon pale in the sky.

Ah! He might wish and wish and never get it — the beauty and the loving in the world!

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THE WHITE MONKEY

Part I

> *“No retreat, no retreat They must conquer or die Who have no retreat!”*
> *Mr. Gay.*

Chapter I

Promenade

Coming down the steps of ‘Snooks’ Club, so nicknamed by George Forsyte in the late eighties, on that momentous mid-October afternoon of 1922, Sir Lawrence Mont, ninth baronet, set his fine nose towards the east wind, and moved his thin legs with speed. Political by birth rather than by nature, he reviewed the revolution which had restored his Party to power with a detachment not devoid of humour. Passing the Remove Club, he thought: ‘Some sweating into shoes, there! No more confectioned dishes. A woodcock — without trimmings, for a change!’

The captains and the kings had departed from ‘Snooks’ before he entered it, for he was not of ‘that catch-penny crew, now paid off, no sir; fellows who turned their tails on the land the moment the war was over. Pah!’ But for an hour he had listened to echoes, and his lively twisting mind, embedded in deposits of the past, sceptical of the present and of all political protestations and pronouncements, had recorded with amusement the confusion of patriotism and personalities left behind by the fateful gathering. Like most landowners, he distrusted doctrine. If he had a political belief, it was a tax on wheat; and so far as he could see, he was now alone in it — but then he was not seeking election; in other words, his principle was not in danger of extinction from the votes of those who had to pay for bread. Principles — he mused — au fond were pocket; and he wished the deuce people wouldn’t pretend they weren’t! Pocket, in the deep sense of that word, of course, self-interest as member of a definite community. And how the devil was this definite community, the English nation, to exist, when all its land was going out of cultivation, and all its ships and docks in danger of destruction by aeroplanes? He had listened that hour past for a single mention of the land. Not one! It was not practical politics! Confound the fellows! They had to wear their breeches out — keeping seats or getting them. No connection between posteriors and posterity! No, by George! Thus reminded of posterity, it occurred to him rather suddenly that his son’s wife showed no signs as yet. Two years! Time they were thinking about children. It was dangerous to get into the habit of not having them, when a title and estate depended. A smile twisted his lips and eyebrows which resembled spinneys of dark pothooks. A pretty young creature, most taking; and knew it, too! Whom was she not getting to know? Lions and tigers, monkeys and cats — her house was becoming quite a menagerie of more or less celebrities. There was a certain unreality about that sort of thing! And opposite a British lion in Trafalgar Square Sir Lawrence thought: ‘She’ll be getting these to her house next! She’s got the collecting habit. Michael must look out — in a collector’s house there’s always a lumber room for old junk, and husbands are liable to get into it. That reminds me: I promised her a Chinese Minister. Well, she must wait now till after the General Election.’

Down Whitehall, under the grey easterly sky, the towers of Westminster came for a second into view. ‘A certain unreality in that, too,’ he thought. ‘Michael and his fads! Well, it’s the fashion — Socialistic principles and a rich wife. Sacrifice with safety! Peace with plenty! Nostrums — ten a penny!’

Passing the newspaper hubbub of Charing Cross, frenzied by the political crisis, he turned up to the left towards Danby and Winter, publishers, where his son was junior partner. A new theme for a book had just begun to bend a mind which had already produced a ‘Life of Montrose,’ ‘Far Cathay,’ that work of Eastern travel, and a fanciful conversation between the shades of Gladstone and Disraeli — entitled ‘A Duet.’ With every step taken, from ‘Snooks’ eastward, his erect thin figure in Astrakhan-collared coat, his thin grey-moustached face, and tortoise-shell rimmed monocle under the lively dark eyebrow, had seemed more rare. It became almost a phenomenon in this dingy back street, where carts stuck like winter flies, and persons went by with books under their arms, as if educated.

He had nearly reached the door of Danby’s when he encountered two young men. One of them was clearly his son, better dressed since his marriage, and smoking a cigar — thank goodness — instead of those eternal cigarettes; the other — ah! yes — Michael’s sucking poet and best man, head in air, rather a sleek head under a velour hat! He said:

"Ha, Michael!"

"HALLO, Bart! You know my governor, Wilfrid? Wilfrid Desert. 'Copper Coin'— some poet, Bart, I tell you. You must read him. We're going home. Come along!"

Sir Lawrence went along.

"What happened at 'Snooks'?"

"Le roi est mort. Labour can start lying, Michael — election next month."

"Bart was brought up, Wilfrid, in days that knew not Demos."

"Well, Mr. Desert, do you find reality in politics now?"

"Do you find reality in anything, sir?"

"In income tax, perhaps."

Michael grinned.

"Above knighthood," he said, "there's no such thing as simple faith."

"Suppose your friends came into power, Michael — in some ways not a bad thing, help 'em to grow up — what could they do, eh? Could they raise national taste? Abolish the cinema? Teach English people to cook? Prevent other countries from threatening war? Make us grow our own food? Stop the increase of town life? Would they hang dabblers in poison gas? Could they prevent flying in war-time? Could they weaken the possessive instinct — anywhere? Or do anything, in fact, but alter the incidence of possession a little? All party politics are top dressing. We're ruled by the inventors, and human nature; and we live in Queer Street, Mr. Desert."

"Much my sentiments, sir."

Michael flourished his cigar.

"Bad old men, you two!"

And removing their hats, they passed the Cenotaph.

"Curiously symptomatic — that thing," said Sir Lawrence; "monument to the dread of swank — most characteristic. And the dread of swank —"

"Go on, Bart," said Michael.

"The fine, the large, the florid — all off! No far-sighted views, no big schemes, no great principles, no great religion, or great art — aestheticism in cliques and backwaters, small men in small hats."

"As panteth the heart after Byron, Wilberforce, and the Nelson Monument. My poor old Bart! What about it, Wilfrid?"

"Yes, Mr. Desert — what about it?"

Desert's dark face contracted.

"It's an age of paradox," he said. "We all kick up for freedom, and the only institutions gaining strength are Socialism and the Roman Catholic Church. We're frightfully self-conscious about art — and the only art development is the cinema. We're nuts on peace — and all we're doing about it is to perfect poison gas."

Sir Lawrence glanced sideways at a young man so bitter.

"And how's publishing, Michael?"

"Well, 'Copper Coin' is selling like hot cakes; and there's quite a movement in 'A Duet.' What about this for a new ad.: 'A Duet, by Sir Lawrence Mont, Bart. The most distinguished Conversation ever held between the Dead.' That ought to get the psychic. Wilfrid suggested 'G.O.M. and Dizzy — broadcasted from Hell.' Which do you like best?"

They had come, however, to a policeman holding up his hand against the nose of a van horse, so that everything marked time. The engines of the cars whirred idly, their drivers' faces set towards the space withheld from them; a girl on a bicycle looked vacantly about her, grasping the back of the van, where a youth sat sideways with his legs stretched out towards her. Sir Lawrence glanced again at young Desert. A thin, pale-dark face, good-looking, but a hitch in it, as if not properly timed; nothing outre in dress or manner, and yet socially at large; less vivacious than that lively rascal, his own son, but as anchorless, and more sceptical — might feel things pretty deeply, though! The policeman lowered his arm.

"You were in the war, Mr. Desert?"

"Oh, yes."

“Air service?”

“And line. Bit of both.”

“Hard on a poet.”

“Not at all. Poetry’s only possible when you may be blown up at any moment, or when you live in Putney.”

Sir Lawrence’s eyebrow rose. “Yes?”

“Tennyson, Browning, Wordsworth, Swinburne — they could turn it out; ils vivaient, mais si peu.”

“Is there not a third condition favourable?”

“And that, sir?”

“How shall I express it — a certain cerebral agitation in connection with women?”

Desert’s face twitched, and seemed to darken.

Michael put his latchkey into the lock of his front door.

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CHAPTER II

HOME

The house in South Square, Westminster, to which the young Monts had come after their Spanish honeymoon two years before, might have been called ‘emancipated.’ It was the work of an architect whose dream was a new house perfectly old, and an old house perfectly new. It followed, therefore, no recognised style or tradition, and was devoid of structural prejudice; but it soaked up the smuts of the metropolis with such special rapidity that its stone already respectably resembled that of Wren. Its windows and doors had gently rounded tops. The high-sloping roof, of a fine sooty pink, was almost Danish, and two ‘ducky little windows’ looked out of it, giving an impression that very tall servants lived up there. There were rooms on each side of the front door, which was wide and set off by bay trees in black and gold bindings. The house was thick through, and the staircase, of a broad chastity, began at the far end of a hall which had room for quite a number of hats and coats and cards. There were four bathrooms; and not even a cellar underneath. The Forsyte instinct for a house had co-operated in its acquisition. Soames had picked it up for his daughter, undecorated, at that psychological moment when the bubble of inflation was pricked, and the air escaping from the balloon of the world’s trade. Fleur, however, had established immediate contact with the architect — an element which Soames himself had never quite got over — and decided not to have more than three styles in her house: Chinese, Spanish, and her own. The room to the left of the front door, running the breadth of the house, was Chinese, with ivory panels, a copper floor, central heating, and cut glass lustres. It contained four pictures — all Chinese — the only school in which her father had not yet dabbled. The fireplace, wide and open, had Chinese dogs with Chinese tiles for them to stand on. The silk was chiefly of jade green. There were two wonderful old black-tea chests, picked up with Soames’ money at Jobson’s — not a bargain. There was no piano, partly because pianos were too uncompromisingly occidental, and partly because it would have taken up much room. Fleur aimed at space-collecting people rather than furniture or bibelots. The light, admitted by windows at both ends, was unfortunately not Chinese. She would stand sometimes in the centre of this room, thinking — how to ‘bunch’ her guests, how to make her room more Chinese without making it uncomfortable; how to seem to know all about literature and politics; how to accept everything her father gave her, without making him aware that his taste had no sense of the future; how to keep hold of Sibley Swan, the new literary star, and to get hold of Gurdon Minho, the old; of how Wilfrid Desert was getting too fond of her; of what was really her style in dress; of why Michael had such funny ears; and sometimes she stood not thinking at all — just aching a little.

When those three came in she was sitting before a red lacquer tea-table, finishing a very good tea. She always had tea brought in rather early, so that she could have a good quiet preliminary ‘tuck-in’ all by herself, because she was not quite twenty-one, and this was her hour for remembering her youth. By her side Ting-a-ling was standing on his hind feet, his tawny forepaws on a Chinese footstool, his snubbed black and tawny muzzle turned up towards the fruits of his philosophy.

“That’ll do, Ting. No more, ducky! NO MORE!”

The expression of Ting-a-ling answered:

‘Well, then, stop, too! Don’t subject me to torture!’

A year and three months old, he had been bought by Michael out of a Bond Street shop window on Fleur’s twentieth birthday, eleven months ago.

Two years of married life had not lengthened her short dark chestnut hair; had added a little more decision to her quick lips, a little more allurement to her white-lidded, dark-lashed hazel eyes, a little more poise and swing to her carriage, a little more chest and hip measurement; had taken a little from waist and calf measurement, a little colour from cheeks a little less round, and a little sweetness from a voice a little more caressing.

She stood up behind the tray, holding out her white round arm without a word. She avoided unnecessary greetings or farewells. She would have had to say them so often, and their purpose was better served by look, pressure, and slight inclination of head to one side.

With circular movement of her squeezed hand, she said:

“Draw up. Cream, sir? Sugar, Wilfrid? Ting has had too much — don’t feed him! Hand things, Michael. I’ve heard all about the meeting at ‘Snooks.’ You’re not going to canvass for Labour, Michael — canvassing’s so silly. If any one canvassed me, I should vote the other way at once.”

“Yes, darling; but you’re not the average elector.”

Fleur looked at him. Very sweetly put! Conscious of Wilfrid biting his lips, of Sir Lawrence taking that in, of the amount of silk leg she was showing, of her black and cream teacups, she adjusted these matters. A flutter of her white lids — Desert ceased to bite his lips; a movement of her silk legs — Sir Lawrence ceased to look at him. Holding out her cups, she said:

“I suppose I’m not modern enough?”

Desert, moving a bright little spoon round in his magpie cup, said without looking up:

“As much more modern than the moderns, as you are more ancient.”

“‘Ware poetry!” said Michael.

But when he had taken his father to see the new cartoons by Aubrey Greene, she said:

“Kindly tell me what you meant, Wilfrid.”

Desert’s voice seemed to leap from restraint.

“What does it matter? I don’t want to waste time with that.”

“But I want to know. It sounded like a sneer.”

“A sneer? From me? Fleur!”

“Then tell me.”

“I meant that you have all their restlessness and practical get-thereness; but you have what they haven’t, Fleur — power to turn one’s head. And mine is turned. You know it.”

“How would Michael like that — from YOU, his best man?”

Desert moved quickly to the windows.

Fleur took Ting-a-ling on her lap. Such things had been said to her before; but from Wilfrid it was serious. Nice to think she had his heart, of course! Only, where on earth could she put it, where it wouldn’t be seen except by her? He was incalculable — did strange things! She was a little afraid — not of him, but of that quality in him. He came back to the hearth, and said:

“Ugly, isn’t it? Put that dam’ dog down, Fleur; I can’t see your face. If you were really fond of Michael — I swear I wouldn’t; but you’re not, you know.”

Fleur said coldly:

“You know very little; I AM fond of Michael.”

Desert gave his little jerky laugh.

“Oh yes; not the sort that counts.”

Fleur looked up.

“It counts quite enough to make one safe.”

“A flower that I can’t pick.”

Fleur nodded.

“Quite sure, Fleur? Quite, quite sure?”

Fleur stared; her eyes softened a little, her eyelids, so excessively white, drooped over them; she nodded. Desert said slowly:

“The moment I believe that, I shall go East.”

“East?”

“Not so stale as going West, but much the same — you don’t come back.”

Fleur thought: ‘The East? I should love to know the East! Pity one can’t manage that, too. Pity!’

“You won’t keep me in your Zoo, my dear. I shan’t hang around and feed on crumbs. You know what I feel — it means a smash of some sort.”

“It hasn’t been my fault, has it?”

“Yes; you’ve collected me, as you collect everybody that comes near you.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

Desert bent down, and dragged her hand to his lips.

“Don’t be riled with me; I’m too unhappy.”

Fleur let her hand stay against his hot lips.

“Sorry, Wilfrid.”

“All right, dear. I’ll go.”

“But you’re coming to dinner tomorrow?”

Desert said violently:

“TO-MORROW? Good God — no! What d’you think I’m made of?”

He flung her hand away.

“I don’t like violence, Wilfrid.”

“Well, good-bye; I’d better go.”

The words “And you’d better not come again” trembled up to her lips, but were not spoken. Part from Wilfrid — life would lose a little warmth! She waved her hand. He was gone. She heard the door closing. Poor Wilfrid! — nice to think of a flame at which to warm her hands! Nice but rather dreadful! And suddenly, dropping Ting-a-ling, she got up and began to walk about the room. To-morrow! Second anniversary of her wedding-day! Still an ache when she thought of what it had not been. But there was little time to think — and she made less. What good in thinking? Only one life, full of people, of things to do and have, of things wanted — a life only void of — one thing, and that — well, if people had it, they never had it long! On her lids two tears, which had gathered, dried without falling. Sentimentalism! No! The last thing in the world — the unforgivable offence! Whom should she put next whom tomorrow? And whom should she get in place of Wilfrid, if Wilfrid wouldn’t come — silly boy! One day — one night — what difference? Who should sit on her right, and who on her left? Was Aubrey Greene more distinguished, or Sibley Swan? Were they either as distinguished as Walter Nazing or Charles Upshire? Dinner of twelve, exclusively literary and artistic, except for Michael and Alison Charwell. Ah! Could Alison get her Gurdon Minho — just one writer of the old school, one glass of old wine to mellow effervescence? He didn’t publish with Danby and Winter; but he fed out of Alison’s hand. She went quickly to one of the old tea chests, and opened it. Inside was a telephone.

“Can I speak to Lady Alison — Mrs. Michael Mont . . . Yes . . . That you, Alison? . . . Fleur speaking. Wilfrid has fallen through tomorrow night . . . Is there any chance of your bringing Gurdon Minho? I don’t know him, of course; but he might be interested. You’ll try? . . . That’ll be ever so delightful. Isn’t the ‘Snooks’ Club meeting rather exciting? Bart says they’ll eat each other now they’ve split . . . About Mr. Minho. Could you let me know to-night? Thanks — thanks awfully! . . . Goodbye!”

Failing Minho, whom? Her mind hovered over the names in her address book. At so late a minute it must be some one who didn’t stand on ceremony; but except Alison, none of Michael’s relations would be safe from Sibley Swan or Nesta Gorse, and their subversive shafts; as to the Forsytes — out of the question; they had their own sub-acid humour (some of them), but they were not modern, not really modern. Besides, she saw as little of them as she could — they dated, belonged to the dramatic period, had no sense of life without beginning or end. No! If Gurdon Minho was a frost, it would have to be a musician, whose works were hieroglyphical with a dash of surgery; or, better, perhaps, a psycho-analyst. Her fingers turned the pages till she came to those two categories. Hugo Solstis? A possibility; but suppose he wanted to play them something recent? There was only Michael’s upright Grand, and that would mean going to his study. Better Gerald Hanks — he and Nesta Gorse would get off together on dreams; still, if they did, there would be no actual loss of life. Yes, failing Gurdon Minho, Gerald Hanks; he would be free — and put him between Alison and Nesta. She closed the book, and, going back to her jade-green settee, sat gazing at Ting-a-ling. The little dog’s prominent round eyes gazed back; bright, black, very old. Fleur thought: ‘I DON’T want Wilfrid to drop off.’ Among all the crowd who came and went, here, there and everywhere, she cared for nobody. Keep up with them, keep up with everything, of course! It was all frightfully amusing, frightfully necessary! Only — only — what?

Voices! Michael and Bart coming back. Bart had noticed Wilfrid. He WAS a noticing old Bart. She was never very comfortable when he was about — lively and twisting, but with something settled and ancestral in him; a little like Ting-a-ling — something judgmatic, ever telling her that she was fluttering and new. He was anchored, could only move to the length of his old-fashioned cord, but he could drop on to things disconcertingly. Still, he admired her, she felt — oh! yes.

Well! What had he thought of the cartoons? Ought Michael to publish them, and with letterpress or without? Didn't he think that the cubic called 'Still Life'— of the Government, too frightfully funny — especially the 'old bean' representing the Prime? For answer she was conscious of a twisting, rapid noise; Sir Lawrence was telling her of his father's collection of electioneering cartoons. She did wish Bart would not tell her about his father; he had been so distinguished, and he must have been so dull, paying all his calls on horseback, with trousers strapped under his boots. He and Lord Charles Cariboo and the Marquis of Forfar had been the last three 'callers' of that sort. If only they hadn't, they'd have been clean forgot. She had that dress to try, and fourteen things to see to, and Hugo's concert began at eight-fifteen! Why did people of the last generation always have so much time? And, suddenly, she looked down. Ting-a-ling was licking the copper floor. She took him up: "Not that, darling; nasty!" Ah! the spell was broken! Bart was going, reminiscent to the last. She waited at the foot of the stairs till Michael shut the door on him, then flew. Reaching her room, she turned on all the lights. Here was her own style — a bed which did not look like one, and many mirrors. The couch of Ting-a-ling occupied a corner, whence he could see himself in three. She put him down, and said: "Keep quiet, now!" His attitude to the other dogs in the room had long become indifferent; though of his own breed and precisely his colouring, they had no smell and no licking power in their tongues — nothing to be done with them, imitative creatures, incredibly unresponsive.

Stripping off her dress, Fleur held the new frock under her chin.

"May I kiss you?" said a voice, and there was Michael's image behind her own reflection in the glass.

"My dear boy, there isn't time! Help me with this." She slipped the frock over her head. "Do those three top hooks. How do you like it? Oh! and — Michael! Gurdon Minho may be coming to dinner tomorrow — Wilfrid can't. Have you read his things? Sit down and tell me something about them. All novels, aren't they? What sort?"

"Well, he's always had something to say. And his cats are good. He's a bit romantic, of course."

"Oh! Have I made a gaff?"

"Not a bit; jolly good shot. The vice of our lot is, they say it pretty well, but they've nothing to say. They won't last."

"But that's just why they will last. They won't date."

"Won't they? My gum!"

"Wilfrid will last."

"Ah! Wilfrid has emotions, hates, pities, wants; at least, sometimes; when he has, his stuff is jolly good. Otherwise, he just makes a song about nothing — like the rest."

Fleur tucked in the top of her undergarment.

"But, Michael, if that's so, we — I've got the wrong lot."

Michael grinned.

"My dear child! The lot of the hour is always right; only you've got to watch it, and change it quick enough."

"But d'you mean to say that Sibley isn't going to live?"

"Sib? Lord, no!"

"But he's so perfectly sure that almost everybody else is dead or dying. Surely he has critical genius!"

"If I hadn't more judgment than Sib, I'd go out of publishing tomorrow."

"You — more than Sibley Swan?"

"Of course, I've more judgment than Sib. Why! Sib's judgment is just his opinion of Sib — common or garden impatience of any one else. He doesn't even read them. He'll read one specimen of every author and say: 'Oh! that fellow! He's dull, or he's moral, or he's sentimental, or he dates, or he drivels'— I've heard him dozens of times. That's if they're alive. Of course, if they're dead, it's different. He's always digging up and canonising the dead; that's how he's got his name. There's always a Sib in literature. He's a standing example of how people can get taken at their own valuation. But as to lasting — of course he won't; he's never creative, even by mistake."

Fleur had lost the thread. Yes! It suited her — quite a nice line! Off with it! Must write those three notes before she dressed.

Michael had begun again.

“Take my tip, Fleur. The really big people don’t talk — and don’t bunch — they paddle their own canoes in what seem backwaters. But it’s the backwaters that make the main stream. By Jove, that’s a mot, or is it a bull; and are bulls mots or mots bulls?”

“Michael, if you were me, would you tell Frederic Wilmer that he’ll be meeting Hubert Marsland at lunch next week? Would it bring him or would it put him off?”

“Marsland’s rather an old duck, Wilmer’s rather an old goose — I don’t know.”

“Oh! do be serious, Michael — you never give me any help in arranging — No! Don’t maul my shoulders please.”

“Well, darling, I DON’T know. I’ve no genius for such things, like you. Marsland paints windmills, cliffs and things — I doubt if he’s heard of the future. He’s almost a Mathew Mans for keeping out of the swim. If you think he’d like to meet a Vertiginist —”

“I didn’t ask you if he’d like to meet Wilmer; I asked you if Wilmer would like to meet him.”

“Wilmer will just say: ‘I like little Mrs. Mont, she gives deuced good grub’— and so you do, ducky. A Vertiginist wants nourishing, you know, or it wouldn’t go to his head.”

Fleur’s pen resumed its swift strokes, already becoming slightly illegible. She murmured:

“I think Wilfrid would help — you won’t be there; one — two — three. What women?”

“For painters — pretty and plump; no intellect.”

Fleur said crossly:

“I can’t get them plump; they don’t go about now.” And her pen flowed on:

“DEAR WILFRID — Wednesday — lunch; Wilmer, Hubert Marsland, two other women. Do help me live it down.

“Yours ever,

“FLEUR.”

“Michael, your chin is like a bootbrush.”

“Sorry, old thing; your shoulders shouldn’t be so smooth. Bart gave Wilfrid a tip as we were coming along.”

Fleur stopped writing. “Oh!”

“Reminded him that the state of love was a good stunt for poets.”

“A propos of what?”

“Wilfrid was complaining that he couldn’t turn it out now.”

“Nonsense! His last things are his best.”

“Well, that’s what I think. Perhaps he’s forestalled the tip. Has he, d’you know?”

Fleur turned her eyes towards the face behind her shoulder. No, it had its native look — frank, irresponsible, slightly faun-like, with its pointed ears, quick lips, and nostrils.

She said slowly:

“If YOU don’t know, nobody does.”

A snuffle interrupted Michael’s answer. Ting-a-ling, long, low, slightly higher at both ends, was standing between them, with black muzzle upturned. ‘My pedigree is long,’ he seemed to say; ‘but my legs are short — what about it?’

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CHAPTER III

MUSICAL

According to a great and guiding principle, Fleur and Michael Mont attended the Hugo Solstis concert, not because they anticipated pleasure, but because they knew Hugo. They felt, besides, that Solstis, an Englishman of Russo-Dutch extraction, was one of those who were restoring English music, giving to it a wide and spacious freedom from melody and rhythm, while investing it with literary and mathematical charms. And one never could go to a concert given by any of this school without using the word 'interesting' as one was coming away. To sleep to this restored English music, too, was impossible. Fleur, a sound sleeper, had never even tried. Michael had, and complained afterwards that it had been like a nap in Liege railway station. On this occasion they occupied those gangway seats in the front row of the dress circle of which Fleur had a sort of natural monopoly. There Hugo and the rest could see her taking her place in the English restoration movement. It was easy, too, to escape into the corridor and exchange the word 'interesting' with side-whiskered cognoscenti; or, slipping out a cigarette from the little gold case, wedding present of Cousin Imogen Cardigan, get a whiff or two's repose. To speak quite honestly, Fleur had a natural sense of rhythm which caused her discomfort during those long and 'interesting' passages which evidenced, as it were, the composer's rise and fall from his bed of thorns. She secretly loved a tune, and the impossibility of ever confessing this without losing hold of Solstis, Baff, Birdigal, MacLewis, Clorane, and other English restoration composers, sometimes taxed to its limit a nature which had its Spartan side. Even to Michael she would not 'confess'; and it was additionally trying when, with his native disrespect of persons, accentuated by life in the trenches and a publisher's office, he would mutter: "Gad! Get on with it!" or: "Cripes! Ain't he took bad!" especially as she knew that Michael was really putting up with it better than herself, having a more literary disposition, and a less dancing itch in his toes.

The first movement of the new Solstis composition —'Phantasmagoria Piemontesque'— to which they had especially come to listen, began with some drawn-out chords. "What oh!" said Michael's voice in her ear: "Three pieces of furniture moved simultaneously on a parquet floor!"

In Fleur's involuntary smile was the whole secret of why her marriage had not been intolerable. After all, Michael was a dear! Devotion and mercury — jesting and loyalty — combined, they piqued and touched even a heart given away before it was bestowed on him. 'Touch' without 'pique' would have bored; 'pique' without 'touch' would have irritated. At this moment he was at peculiar advantage! Holding on to his knees, with his ears standing up, eyes glassy from loyalty to Hugo, and tongue in cheek, he was listening to that opening in a way which evoked Fleur's admiration. The piece would be 'interesting'— she fell into the state of outer observation and inner calculation very usual with her nowadays. Over there was L.S.D., the greater dramatist; she didn't know him — yet. He looked rather frightening, his hair stood up so straight. And her eye began picturing him on her copper floor against a Chinese picture. And there — yes! Gurdon Minho! Imagine HIS coming to anything so modern! His profile WAS rather Roman — of the Aurelian period! Passing on from that antique, with the pleased thought that by this time tomorrow she might have collected it, she quartered the assembly face by face — she did not want to miss any one important.

"The furniture" had come to a sudden standstill.

"Interesting!" said a voice over her shoulder. Aubrey Greene! Illusive, rather moonlit, with his silky fair hair brushed straight back, and his greenish eyes — his smile always made her feel that he was 'getting' at her. But, after all, he was a cartoonist!

"Yes, isn't it?"

He curled away. He might have stayed a little longer — there wouldn't be time for any one else before those songs of Birdigal's! Here came the singer Charles Powls! How stout and efficient he looked, dragging little Birdigal to the piano.

Charming accompaniment — rippling, melodious!

The stout, efficient man began to sing. How different from the accompaniment! The song hit every note just off the solar plexus. It mathematically prevented her from feeling pleasure. Birdigal must have written it in horror of some one calling it 'vocal.' Vocal! Fleur knew how catching the word was; it would run like a measle round the ring, and Birdigal would be no more! Poor Birdigal! But this was 'interesting.' Only, as Michael was saying: "O, my Gawd!"

Three songs! Powls was wonderful — so loyal! Never one note hit so that it rang out like music! Her mind fluttered off to Wilfrid. To him, of all the younger poets, people accorded the right to say something; it gave him such a position — made him seem to come out of life, instead of literature. Besides, he had done things in the war, was a son of Lord Mullyon, would get the Mercer Prize probably, for 'Copper Coin.' If Wilfrid abandoned her, a star would fall from the firmament above her copper floor. He had no right to leave her in the lurch. He must learn not to be violent — not to think physically. No! she couldn't let Wilfrid slip away; nor could she have any more sob-stuff in her life, searing passions, cul de sacs, aftermaths. She had tasted of that; a dulled ache still warned her.

Birdigal was bowing, Michael saying: "Come out for a whiff! The next thing's a dud!" Oh! ah! Beethoven. Poor old Beethoven! So out of date — one did RATHER enjoy him!

The corridor, and refectory beyond, were swarming with the restoration movement. Young men and women with faces and heads of lively and distorted character, were exchanging the word 'interesting.' Men of more massive type, resembling sedentary matadors, blocked all circulation. Fleur and Michael passed a little way along, stood against the wall, and lighted cigarettes. Fleur smoked hers delicately — a very little one in a tiny amber holder. She had the air of admiring blue smoke rather than of making it; there were spheres to consider beyond this sort of crowd — one never knew who might be about! — the sphere, for instance, in which Alison Charwell moved, politico-literary, catholic in taste, but, as Michael always put it, "Convinced, like a sanitary system, that it's the only sphere in the world; look at the way they all write books of reminiscence about each other!" They might, she always felt, disapprove of women smoking in public halls. Consorting delicately with iconoclasm, Fleur never forgot that her feet were in two worlds at least. Standing there, observant of all to left and right, she noted against the wall one whose face was screened by his programme. 'Wilfrid,' she thought, 'and doesn't mean to see me!' Mortified, as a child from whom a sixpence is filched, she said:

"There's Wilfrid! Fetch him, Michael!"

Michael crossed, and touched his best man's sleeve; Desert's face emerged, frowning. She saw him shrug his shoulders, turn and walk into the throng. Michael came back.

"Wilfrid's got the hump to-night; says he's not fit for human society — queer old son!"

How obtuse men were! Because Wilfrid was his pal, Michael did not see; and that was lucky! So Wilfrid really meant to avoid her! Well, she would see! And she said:

"I'm tired, Michael; let's go home."

His hand slid round her arm.

"Sorry, old thing; come along!"

They stood a moment in a neglected doorway, watching Woomans, the conductor, launched towards his orchestra.

"Look at him," said Michael; "guy hung out of an Italian window, legs and arms all stuffed and flying! And look at the Frapka and her piano — that's a turbulent union!"

There was a strange sound.

"Melody, by George!" said Michael.

An attendant muttered in their ears: "Now, sir, I'm going to shut the door." Fleur had a fleeting view of L.S.D. sitting upright as his hair, with closed eyes. The door was shut — they were outside in the hall.

"Wait here, darling; I'll nick a rickshaw."

Fleur huddled her chin in her fur. It was easterly and cold.

A voice behind her said:

"Well, Fleur, am I going East?"

Wilfrid! His collar up to his ears, a cigarette between his lips, hands in pockets, eyes devouring.

"You're very silly, Wilfrid!"

"Anything you like; am I going East?"

"No; Sunday morning — eleven o'clock at the Tate. We'll talk it out."

"Convenu!" And he was gone.

Alone suddenly, like that, Fleur felt the first shock of reality. Was Wilfrid truly going to be unmanageable? A taxicab ground up; Michael beckoned; Fleur stepped in.

Passing a passionately lighted oasis of young ladies displaying to the interested Londoner the acme of Parisian undress, she felt Michael incline towards her. If she were going to keep Wilfrid, she must be nice to Michael. Only:

“You needn’t kiss me in Piccadilly Circus, Michael!”

“Sorry, duckie! It’s a little previous — I meant to get you opposite the Partheneum.”

Fleur remembered how he had slept on a Spanish sofa for the first fortnight of their honeymoon; how he always insisted that she must not spend anything on him, but must always let him give her what he liked, though she had three thousand a year and he twelve hundred; how jumpy he was when she had a cold — and how he always came home to tea. Yes, he was a dear! But would she break her heart if he went East or West tomorrow?

Snuggled against him, she was surprised at her own cynicism.

A telephone message written out, in the hall, ran: “Please tell Mrs. Mont I’ve got Mr. Gurding Minner. Lady Alisson.”

It was restful. A real antique! She turned on the lights in her room, and stood for a moment admiring it. Truly pretty! A slight snuffle from the corner — Ting-a-ling, tan on a black cushion, lay like a Chinese lion in miniature; pure, remote, fresh from evening communion with the Square railings.

“I see you,” said Fleur.

Ting-a-ling did not stir; his round black eyes watched his mistress undress. When she returned from the bathroom he was curled into a ball. Fleur thought: ‘Queer! How does he know Michael won’t be coming?’ And slipping into her well warmed bed, she too curled herself up and slept.

But in the night, contrary to her custom, she awoke. A cry — long, weird, trailing, from somewhere — the river — the slums at the back — rousing memory — poignant, aching — of her honeymoon — Granada, its roofs below, jet, ivory, gold; the watchman’s cry, the lines in Jon’s letter:

> “Voice in the night crying, down in the old sleeping
> Spanish City darkened under her white stars.
> What says the voice — its clear, lingering anguish?
> Just the watchman, telling his dateless tale of safety?
> Just a road-man, flinging to the moon his song?
> No! ’Tis one deprived, whose lover’s heart is weeping,
> Just his cry: ‘How long?’”

A cry, or had she dreamed it? Jon, Wilfrid, Michael! No use to have a heart!

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CHAPTER IV

DINING

Lady Alison Charwell, born Heathfield, daughter of the first Earl of Campden, and wife to Lionel Charwell, K.C., Michael's somewhat young uncle, was a delightful Englishwoman brought up in a set accepted as the soul of society. Full of brains, energy, taste, money, and tinctured in its politico-legal ancestry by blue blood, this set was linked to, but apart from 'Snooks' and the duller haunts of birth and privilege. It was gay, charming, free-and-easy, and, according to Michael, "Snobbish, old thing, aesthetically and intellectually, but they'll never see it. They think they're the top notch — quick, healthy, up-to-date, well-bred, intelligent; they simply can't imagine their equals. But you see their imagination is deficient. Their really creative energy would go into a pint pot. Look at their books — they're always ON something — philosophy, spiritualism, poetry, fishing, themselves; why, even their sonnets dry up before they're twenty-five. They know everything — except mankind outside their own set. Oh! they work — they run the show — they have to; there's no one else with their brains, and energy, and taste. But they run it round and round in their own blooming circle. It's the world to them — and it might be worse. They've patented their own golden age; but it's a trifle flyblown since the war."

Alison Charwell — in and of this world, so spryly soulful, debonnaire, free, and cosy — lived within a stone's throw of Fleur, in a house pleasant, architecturally, as any in London. Forty years old, she had three children and considerable beauty, wearing a little fine from mental and bodily activity. Something of an enthusiast, she was fond of Michael, in spite of his strange criticisms, so that his matrimonial venture had piqued her from the start. Fleur was dainty, had quick natural intelligence — this new niece was worth cultivation. But, though adaptable and assimilative, Fleur had remained curiously unassimilated; she continued to whet the curiosity of Lady Alison, accustomed to the close borough of choice spirits, and finding a certain poignancy in contact with the New Age on Fleur's copper floor. She met with an irreverence there, which, not taken too seriously, flipped her mind. On that floor she almost felt a back number. It was stimulating.

Receiving Fleur's telephonic enquiry about Gurdon Minho, she had rung up the novelist. She knew him, if not well. Nobody seemed to know him well; amiable, polite, silent, rather dull and austere; but with a disconcerting smile, sometimes ironical, sometimes friendly. His books were now caustic, now sentimental. On both counts it was rather the fashion to run him down, though he still seemed to exist.

She rang him up. Would he come to a dinner tomorrow at her young nephew, Michael Mont's, and meet the younger generation? His answer came, rather high-pitched:

"Rather! Full fig, or dinner jacket?"

"How awfully nice of you! they'll be ever so pleased. Full fig, I believe. It's the second anniversary of their wedding." She hung up the receiver with the thought: 'He must be writing a book about them!'

Conscious of responsibility, she arrived early.

It was a grand night at her husband's Inn, so that she brought nothing with her but the feeling of adventure, pleasant after a day spent in fluttering over the decision at 'Snooks'. She was received only by Ting-a-ling, who had his back to the fire, and took no notice beyond a stare. Sitting down on the jade green settee, she said:

"Well, you funny little creature, don't you know me after all this time?"

Ting-a-ling's black shiny gaze seemed saying: "You recur here, I know; most things recur. There is nothing new about the future."

Lady Alison fell into a train of thought: The new generation! Did she want her own girls to be of it! She would like to talk to Mr. Minho about that — they had had a very nice talk down at Beechgroves before the war. Nine years ago — Sybil only six, Joan only four then! Time went, things changed! A new generation! And what was the difference? "I think we had more tradition!" she said to herself softly.

A slight sound drew her eyes up from contemplation of her feet. Ting-a-ling was moving his tail from side to side on the hearthrug, as if applauding. Fleur's voice, behind her, said:

"Well, darling, I'm awfully late. It WAS good of you to get me Mr. Minho. I do hope they'll all behave. He'll be between you and me, anyway; I'm sticking him at the top, and Michael at the bottom, between Pauline Upshire and Amabel Nazing.

You'll have Sibley on your left, and I'll have Aubrey on my right, then Nesta Gorse and Walter Nazing; opposite them Linda Frewe and Charles Upshire. Twelve. You know them all. Oh! and you mustn't mind if the Nazings and Nesta smoke between the courses. Amabel will do it. She comes from Virginia — it's the reaction. I do hope she'll have some clothes on; Michael always says it's a mistake when she has; but having Mr. Minho makes one a little nervous. Did you see Nesta's skit in 'The Bouquet'? Oh, too frightfully amusing — clearly meant for L.S.D.! Ting, my Ting, are you going to stay and see all these people? Well, then, get up here or you'll be trodden on. Isn't he Chinese? He does so round off the room."

Ting-a-ling laid his nose on his paws, in the centre of a jade green cushion.

"Mr. Gurding Minner!"

The well-known novelist looked pale and composed. Shaking the two extended hands, he gazed at Ting-a-ling, and said:

"How nice! How are YOU, my little man?"

Ting-a-ling did not stir. "You take me for a common English dog, sir!" his silence seemed to say.

"Mr. and Mrs. Walter Nazon, Miss Lenda Frow."

Amabel Nazing came first, clear alabaster from her fair hair down to the six inches of gleaming back above her waist-line, shrouded alabaster from four inches below the knee to the gleaming toes of her shoes; the eminent novelist mechanically ceased to commune with Ting-a-ling. Walter Nazing, who followed a long way up above his wife, had a tiny line of collar emergent from swathes of black, and a face, cut a hundred years ago, that slightly resembled Shelley's. His literary productions were sometimes felt to be like the poetry of that bard, and sometimes like the prose of Marcel Proust. "What oh!" as Michael said.

Linda Frewe, whom Fleur at once introduced to Gurdon Minho, was one about whose work no two people in her drawing-room ever agreed. Her works 'Trifles' and 'The Furious Don' had quite divided all opinion. Genius according to some, drivel according to others, those books always roused an interesting debate whether a slight madness enhanced or diminished the value of art. She herself paid little attention to criticism — she produced.

"THE Mr. Minho? How interesting! I've never read anything of yours."

Fleur gave a little gasp.

"What — don't you know Mr. Minho's cats? But they're wonderful. Mr. Minho, I do want Mrs. Walter Nazing to know you. Amabel — Mr. Gurdon Minho."

"Oh! Mr. Minho — how perfectly lovely! I've wanted to know you ever since my cradle."

Fleur heard the novelist say quietly:

"I could wish it had been longer;" and passed on in doubt to greet Nesta Gorse and Sibley Swan, who came in, as if they lived together, quarrelling over L.S.D., Nesta upholding him because of his 'panache', Sibley maintaining that wit had died with the Restoration; this fellow was alive!

Michael followed with the Upshires and Aubrey Greene, whom he had encountered in the hall. The party was complete.

Fleur loved perfection, and that evening was something of a nightmare. Was it a success? Minho was so clearly the least brilliant person there; even Alison talked better. And yet he had such a fine skull. She did hope he would not go away early. Some one would be almost sure to say 'Dug up!' or 'Thick and bald!' before the door closed behind him. He was pathetically agreeable, as if trying to be liked, or, at least, not despised too much. And there must, of course, be more in him than met the sense of hearing. After the crab souffle he did seem to be talking to Alison, and all about youth. Fleur listened with one ear.

"Youth feels . . . main stream of life . . . not giving it what it wants. Past and future getting haloes . . . Quite! Contemporary life no earthly just now . . . No . . . Only comfort for us — we'll be antiquated, some day, like Congreve, Sterne, Defoe . . . have our chance again . . . WHY? What IS driving them out of the main current? Oh! Probably surfeit . . . newspapers . . . photographs. Don't see life itself, only reports . . . reproductions of it; all seems shoddy, lurid, commercial . . . Youth says 'Away with it, let's have the past or the future!'"

He took some salted almonds, and Fleur saw his eyes stray to the upper part of Amabel Nazing. Down there the conversation was like Association football — no one kept the ball for more than one kick. It shot from head to head. And after every set of passes some one would reach out and take a cigarette, and blow a blue cloud across the unclothed refectory table. Fleur enjoyed the glow of her Spanish room — its tiled floor, richly coloured fruits in porcelain, its tooled leather, copper articles, and Soames' Goya above a Moorish divan. She headed the ball promptly when it came her way, but initiated nothing. Her gift was to be aware of everything at once. "Mrs. Michael Mont presented" the brilliant irrelevancies of Linda Frewe, the pricks and stimulations of Nesta Gorse, the moonlit sliding innuendoes of Aubrey Greene, the upturning strokes of Sibley Swan, Amabel Nazing's little cool American audacities, Charles Upshire's curious bits of lore, Walter Nazing's subversive contradictions, the critical intricacies of Pauline Upshire; Michael's happy-go-lucky slings and arrows, even Alison's knowledgeable quickness, and Gurdon Minho's silences — she presented them all, showed them off, keeping her eyes and ears on the ball of talk lest it should touch earth and rest. Brilliant evening; but — a success?

On the jade green settee, when the last of them had gone and Michael was seeing Alison home, she thought of Minho's 'Youth — not getting what it wants.' No! Things didn't fit. "They don't fit, do they, Ting!" But Ting-a-ling was tired, only the tip of one ear quivered. Fleur leaned back and sighed. Ting-a-ling uncurled himself, and putting his forepaws on her thigh, looked up in her face. "Look at me," he seemed to say, "I'm all right. I get what I want, and I want what I get. At present I want to go to bed."

"But I don't," said Fleur, without moving.

"Just take me up!" said Ting-a-ling.

"Well," said Fleur, "I suppose — It's a nice person, but not the right person, Ting."

Ting-a-ling settled himself on her bare arms.

"It's all right," he seemed to say. "There's a great deal too much sentiment and all that, out of China. Come on!"

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CHAPTER V

EVE

The Honourable Wilfrid Desert's rooms were opposite a picture gallery off Cork Street. The only male member of the aristocracy writing verse that any one would print, he had chosen them for seclusion rather than for comfort. His 'junk,' however, was not devoid of the taste and luxury which overflows from the greater houses of England. Furniture from the Hampshire seat of the Cornish nobleman, Lord Mullyon, had oozed into two vans, when Wilfrid settled in. He was seldom to be found, however, in his nest, and was felt to be a rare bird, owing his rather unique position among the younger writers partly to his migratory reputation. He himself hardly, perhaps, knew where he spent his time, or did his work, having a sort of mental claustrophobia, a dread of being hemmed in by people. When the war broke out he had just left Eton; when the war was over he was twenty-three, as old a young man as ever turned a stave. His friendship with Michael, begun in hospital, had languished and renewed itself suddenly, when in 1920 Michael joined Danby and Winter, publishers, of Blake Street, Covent Garden. The scattery enthusiasm of the sucking publisher had been roused by Wilfrid's verse. Hob-nobbing lunches over the poems of one in need of literary anchorage, had been capped by the firm's surrender to Michael's insistence. The mutual intoxication of the first book Wilfrid had written and the first book Michael had sponsored was crowned at Michael's wedding. Best man! Since then, so far as Desert could be tied to anything, he had been tied to those two; nor, to do him justice, had he realised till a month ago that the attraction was not Michael, but Fleur. Desert never spoke of the war, it was not possible to learn from his own mouth an effect which he might have summed up thus: "I lived so long with horror and death; I saw men so in the raw; I put hope of anything out of my mind so utterly, that I can never more have the faintest respect for theories, promises, conventions, moralities, and principles. I have hated too much the men who wallowed in them while I was wallowing in mud and blood. Illusion is off. No religion and no philosophy will satisfy me — words, all words. I have still my senses — no thanks to them; am still capable — I find — of passion; can still grit my teeth and grin; have still some feeling of trench loyalty, but whether real or just a complex, I don't yet know. I am dangerous, but not so dangerous as those who trade in words, principles, theories, and all manner of fanatical idiocy to be worked out in the blood and sweat of other men. The war's done one thing for me — converted life to comedy. Laugh at it — there's nothing else to do!"

Leaving the concert hall on the Friday night, he had walked straight home to his rooms. And lying down full length on a monk's seat of the fifteenth century, restored with down cushions and silk of the twentieth, he crossed his hands behind his head and delivered himself to these thoughts: 'I am not going on like this. She has bewitched me. It doesn't mean anything to her. But it means hell to me. I'll finish with it on Sunday — Persia's a good place. Arabia's a good place — plenty of blood and sand! She's incapable of giving anything up. How has she hooked herself into me! By trick of eyes, and hair, by her walk, by the sound of her voice — by trick of warmth, scent, colour. Fling her cap over the windmill — not she! What then? Am I to hang about her Chinese fireside and her little Chinese dog; and have this ache and this fever because I can't be kissing her? I'd rather be flying again in the middle of Boche whiz-bangs! Sunday! How women like to drag out agonies! It'll be just this afternoon all over again. "How unkind of you to go, when your friendship is so precious to me! Stay, and be my tame cat, Wilfrid!" No, my dear, for once you're up against it! And — so am I, by the Lord! . . .'

When in that gallery which extends asylum to British art, those two young people met so accidentally on Sunday morning in front of Eve smelling at the flowers of the Garden of Eden, there were present also six mechanics in various stages of decomposition, a custodian and a couple from the provinces, none of whom seemed capable of observing anything whatever. And, indeed, that meeting was inexpressive. Two young people, of the disillusioned class, exchanging condemnations of the past. Desert with his off-hand speech, his smile, his well-tailored informality, suggested no aching heart. Of the two Fleur was the paler and more interesting. Desert kept saying to himself: "No melodrama — that's all it would be!" And Fleur was thinking: 'If I can keep him ordinary like this, I shan't lose him, because he'll never go away without a proper outburst.'

It was not until they found themselves a second time before the Eve, that he said:

"I don't know why you asked me to come, Fleur. It's playing the goat for no earthly reason. I quite understand your feeling. I'm a bit of 'Ming' that you don't want to lose. But it's not good enough, my dear; and that's all about it."

“How horrible of you, Wilfrid!”

“Well! Here we part! Give us your flipper.”

His eyes — rather beautiful — looked dark and tragic above the smile on his lips, and she said stammering:

“Wilfrid — I— I don’t know. I want time. I can’t bear you to be unhappy. Don’t go away! Perhaps I— I shall be unhappy, too; I— I don’t know.”

Through Desert passed the bitter thought: ‘She CAN’T let go — she doesn’t know how.’ But he said quite softly: “Cheer up, my child; you’ll be over all that in a fortnight. I’ll send you something to make up. Why shouldn’t I make it China — one place is as good as another? I’ll send you a bit of real ‘Ming,’ of a better period than this.”

Fleur said passionately:

“You’re insulting! Don’t!”

“I beg your pardon. I don’t want to leave you angry.”

“What is it you want of me?”

“Oh! no — come! This is going over it twice. Besides, since Friday I’ve been thinking. I want nothing, Fleur, except a blessing and your hand. Give it me! Come on!”

Fleur put her hand behind her back. It was too mortifying! He took her for a cold-blooded, collecting little cat — clutching and playing with mice that she didn’t want to eat!

“You think I’m made of ice,” she said, and her teeth caught her upper lip: “Well, I’m not!”

Desert looked at her; his eyes were very wretched. “I didn’t mean to play up your pride,” he said. “Let’s drop it, Fleur. It isn’t any good.”

Fleur turned and fixed her eyes on the Eve — rumbustious-looking female, care-free, avid, taking her fill of flower perfume! Why not be care-free, take anything that came along? Not so much love in the world that one could afford to pass, leaving it unsmelled, unplucked. Run away! Go to the East! Of course, she couldn’t do anything extravagant like that! But, perhaps — What did it matter? one man or another, when neither did you really love!

From under her drooped, white, dark-lashed eyelids she saw the expression on his face, and that he was standing stiller than the statues. And suddenly she said: “You will be a fool to go. Wait!” And without another word or look, she walked away, leaving Desert breathless before the avid Eve.

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CHAPTER VI

‘OLD FORSYTE’ AND ‘OLD MONT’

Moving away, in the confusion of her mood, Fleur almost trod on the toes of a too-familiar figure standing before an Alma Tadema with a sort of grey anxiety, as if lost in the mutability of market values.

“Father! YOU up in town? Come along to lunch, I have to get home quick.”

Hooking his arm and keeping between him and Eve, she guided him away, thinking: ‘Did he see us? Could he have seen us?’

“Have you got enough on?” muttered Soames.

“Heaps!”

“That’s what you women always say. East wind, and your neck like that! Well, I don’t know.”

“No, dear, but I do.”

The grey eyes appraised her from head to foot.

“What are you doing here?” he said. And Flour thought: ‘Thank God he didn’t see. He’d never have asked if he had.’ And she answered:

“I take an interest in art, darling, as well as you.”

“Well, I’m staying with your aunt in Green Street. This east wind has touched my liver. How’s your — how’s Michael?”

“Oh, he’s all right — a little cheap. We had a dinner last night.”

Anniversary! The realism of a Forsyte stirred in him, and he looked under her eyes. Thrusting his hand into his overcoat pocket, he said:

“I was bringing you this.”

Fleur saw a flat substance wrapped in pink tissue paper.

“Darling, what is it?”

Soames put it back into his pocket.

“We’ll see later. Anybody to lunch?”

“Only Bart.”

“Old Mont! Oh, Lord!”

“Don’t you like Bart, dear?”

“Like him? He and I have nothing in common.”

“I thought you fraternised rather over the state of things.”

“He’s a reactionary,” said Soames.

“And what are you, ducky?”

“I? What should *I* be?” With these words he affirmed that policy of non-commitment which, the older he grew, the more he perceived to be the only attitude for a sensible man.

“How is Mother?”

“Looks well. I see nothing of her — she’s got her own mother down — they go gadding about.”

He never alluded to Madame Lamotte as Fleur’s grandmother — the less his daughter had to do with her French side, the better.

“Oh!” said Fleur. “There’s Ting and a cat!” Ting-a-ling, out for a breath of air, and tethered by a lead in the hands of a maid, was snuffling horribly and trying to climb a railing whereon was perched a black cat, all hunch and eyes.

“Give him to me, Ellen. Come with Mother, darling!”

Ting-a-ling came, indeed, but only because he couldn’t go, bristling and snuffling and turning his head back.

“I like to see him natural,” said Fleur.

"Waste of money, a dog like that," Soames commented. "You should have had a bull-dog and let him sleep in the hall. No end of burglaries. Your aunt had her knocker stolen."

"I wouldn't part with Ting for a hundred knockers."

"One of these days you'll be having HIM stolen — fashionable breed."

Fleur opened her front door. "Oh!" she said, "Bart's here, already!"

A shiny hat was reposing on a marble coffer, present from Soames, intended to hold coats and discourage moth. Placing his hat alongside the other, Soames looked at them. They were too similar for words, tall, high, shiny, and with the same name inside. He had resumed the 'tall hat' habit after the failure of the general and coal strikes in 1921, his instinct having told him that revolution would be at a discount for some considerable period.

"About this thing," he said, taking out the pink parcel, "I don't know what you'll do with it, but here it is."

It was a curiously carved and coloured bit of opal in a ring of tiny brilliants.

"Oh!" Fleur cried: "What a delicious thing!"

"Venus floating on the waves, or something," murmured Soames. "Uncommon. You want a strong light on it."

"But it's lovely. I shall put it on at once."

Venus! If Dad had known! She put her arms round his neck to disguise her sense of a propos. Soames received the rub of her cheek against his own well-shaved face with his usual stillness. Why demonstrate when they were both aware that his affection was double hers?

"Put it on then," he said, "and let's see."

Fleur pinned it at her neck before an old lacquered mirror.

"It's a jewel. Thank you, darling! Yes, your tie is straight. I like that white piping. You ought always to wear it with black. Now, come along!" And she drew him into her Chinese room. It was empty.

"Bart must be up with Michael, talking about his new book."

"Writing at his age?" said Soames.

"Well, ducky, he's a year younger than you."

"I don't write. Not such a fool. Got any more newfangled friends?"

"Just one — Gurdon Minho, the novelist."

"Another of the new school?"

"Oh, no, dear! Surely you've heard of Gurdon Minho; he's older than the hills."

"They're all alike to me," muttered Soames. "Is he well thought of?"

"I should think his income is larger than yours. He's almost a classic — only waiting to die."

"I'll get one of his books and read it. What name did you say?"

"Get 'Big and Little Fishes,' by Gurdon Minho. You can remember that, can't you? Oh! here they are! Michael, look at what Father's given me."

Taking his hand, she put it up to the opal at her neck. 'Let them both see,' she thought, 'what good terms we're on.' Though her father had not seen her with Wilfrid in the gallery, her conscience still said: "Strengthen your respectability, you don't quite know how much support you'll need for it in future."

And out of the corner of her eye she watched those two. The meetings between 'Old Mont' and 'Old Forsyte'— as she knew Bart called her father when speaking of him to Michael — always made her want to laugh, but she never quite knew why. Bart knew everything, but his knowledge was beautifully bound, strictly edited by a mind tethered to the 'eighteenth century.' Her father only knew what was of advantage to him, but the knowledge was unbound, and subject to no editorship. If he WAS late Victorian, he was not above profiting if necessary by even later periods. 'Old Mont' had faith in tradition; 'Old Forsyte' none. Fleur's acuteness had long perceived a difference which favoured her father. Yet 'Old Mont's' talk was so much more up-to-date, rapid, glancing, garrulous, redolent of precise information; and 'Old Forsyte's' was constricted, matter-of-fact. Really impossible to tell which of the two was the better museum specimen; and both so well-preserved!

They did not precisely shake hands; but Soames mentioned the weather. And almost at once they all four sought that

Sunday food which by a sustained effort of will Fleur had at last deprived of reference to the British character. They partook, in fact, of lobster cocktails, and a mere risotto of chickens' livers, an omelette au rhum, and dessert trying to look as Spanish as it could.

"I've been in the Tate," Fleur said; "I do think it's touching."

"Touching?" queried Soames with a sniff.

"Fleur means, sir, that to see so much old English art together is like looking at a baby show."

"I don't follow," said Soames stiffly. "There's some very good work there."

"But not grown-up, sir."

"Ah! You young people mistake all this crazy cleverness for maturity."

"That's not what Michael means, Father. It's quite true that English painting has no wisdom teeth. You can see the difference in a moment, between it and any Continental painting."

"And thank God for it!" broke in Sir Lawrence. "The beauty of this country's art is its innocence. We're the oldest country in the world politically, and the youngest aesthetically. What do you say, Forsyte?"

"Turner is old and wise enough for me," said Soames curtly. "Are you coming to the P.P.R.S. Board on Tuesday?"

"Tuesday? We were going to shoot the spinneys, weren't we, Michael?"

Soames grunted. "I should let them wait," he said. "We settle the report."

It was through 'Old Mont's' influence that he had received a seat on the Board of that flourishing concern, the Providential Premium Reassurance Society, and, truth to tell, he was not sitting very easily in it. Though the law of averages was, perhaps, the most reliable thing in the world, there were circumstances which had begun to cause him disquietude. He looked round his nose. Light weight, this narrow-headed, twisting-eyebrowed baronet of a chap — like his son before him! And he added suddenly: "I'm not easy. If I'd realised how that chap Elderson ruled the roost, I doubt if I should have come on to that Board."

One side of 'Old Mont's' face seemed to try to leave the other.

"Elderson!" he said. "His grandfather was my grandfather's parliamentary agent at the time of the Reform Bill; he put him through the most corrupt election ever fought — bought every vote — used to kiss all the farmer's wives. Great days, Forsyte, great days!"

"And over," said Soames. "I don't believe in trusting a man's judgment as far as we trust Elderson's; I don't like this foreign insurance."

"My dear Forsyte — first-rate head, Elderson; I've known him all my life, we were at Winchester together."

Soames uttered a deep sound. In that answer of 'Old Mont's' lay much of the reason for his disquietude. On the Board they had all, as it were, been at Winchester together! It was the very deuce! They were all so honourable that they dared not scrutinise each other, or even their own collective policy. Worse than their dread of mistake or fraud was their dread of seeming to distrust each other. And this was natural, for to distrust each other was an immediate evil. And, as Soames knew, immediate evils are those which one avoids. Indeed, only that tendency, inherited from his father, James, to lie awake between the hours of two and four, when the chrysalis of faint misgiving becomes so readily the butterfly of panic, had developed his uneasiness. The P.P.R.S. was so imposing a concern, and he had been connected with it so short a time, that it seemed presumptuous to smell a rat; especially as he would have to leave the Board and the thousand a year he earned on it if he raised smell of rat without rat or reason. But what if there were a rat? That was the trouble! And here sat 'Old Mont' talking of his spinneys and his grandfather. The fellow's head was too small! And visited by the cheerless thought: 'There's nobody here, not even my own daughter, capable of taking a thing seriously,' he kept silence. A sound at his elbow roused him. That marmoset of a dog, on a chair between him and his daughter, was sitting up! Did it expect him to give it something? Its eyes would drop out one of these days. And he said: "Well, what do YOU want?" The way the little beast stared with those boot-buttons! "Here," he said, offering it a salted almond. "You don't eat these."

Ting-a-ling did.

"He has a passion for them, Dad. Haven't you, darling?"

Ting-a-ling turned his eyes up at Soames, through whom a queer sensation passed. 'Believe the little brute likes me,' he thought, 'he's always looking at me.' He touched the dog's nose with the tip of his finger. Ting-a-ling gave it a slight lick with his curly blackish tongue.

"Poor fellow!" muttered Soames involuntarily, and turned to 'Old Mont.'

"Don't mention what I said."

"My dear Forsyte, what was that?"

Good Heavens! And he was on a Board with a man like this! What had made him come on, when he didn't want the money, or any more worries — goodness knew. As soon as he had become a director, Winifred and others of his family had begun to acquire shares to neutralise their income tax — seven per cent, preference — nine per cent, ordinary — instead of the steady five they ought to be content with. There it was, he couldn't move without people following him. He had always been so safe, so perfect a guide in the money maze! To be worried at his time of life! His eyes sought comfort from the opal at his daughter's neck — pretty thing, pretty neck! Well! She seemed happy enough — had forgotten her infatuation of two years ago! That was something to be thankful for. What she wanted now was a child to steady her in all this modern scrimmage of twopenny-ha'penny writers and painters and musicians. A loose lot, but she had a good little head on her. If she had a child, he would put another twenty thousand into her settlement. That was one thing about her mother — steady in money matters, good French method. And Fleur — so far as he knew — cut her coat according to her cloth. What was that? The word 'Goya' had caught his ear. New life of him coming out? H'm! That confirmed his slowly growing conviction that Goya had reached top point again.

"Think I shall part with that," he said, pointing to the picture. "There's an Argentine over here."

"Sell your Goya, sir?" It was Michael speaking. "Think of the envy with which you're now regarded!"

"One can't have everything," said Soames.

"That reproduction we've got for 'The New Life' has turned out first-rate. 'Property of Soames Forsyte, Esquire.' Let's get the book out first, sir, anyway."

"Shadow or substance, eh, Forsyte?"

Narrow-headed baronet chap — was he mocking?

"I'VE no family place," he said.

"No, but we have, sir," murmured Michael; "you could leave it to Fleur, you know."

"Well," said Soames, "we shall see if that's worth while." And he looked at his daughter.

Fleur seldom blushed, but she picked up Ting-a-ling and rose from the Spanish table. Michael followed suit. "Coffee in the other room," he said. 'Old Forsyte' and 'Old Mont' stood up, wiping their moustaches.

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Chapter VII

'Old Mont' and 'Old Forsyte'

The offices of the P.P.R.S. were not far from the College of Arms. Soames, who knew that 'three dexter buckles on a sable ground gules' and a 'pheasant proper' had been obtained there at some expense by his Uncle Swithin in the 'sixties of the last century, had always pooh-poohed the building, until, about a year ago, he had been struck by the name Golding in a book which he had absently taken up at the Connoisseurs' Club. The affair purported to prove that William Shakespeare was really Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. The mother of the earl was a Golding — so was the mother of Soames! The coincidence struck him; and he went on reading. The tome left him with judgment suspended over the main issue, but a distinct curiosity as to whether he was not of the same blood as Shakespeare. Even if the earl were not the bard, he felt that the connection could only be creditable, though, so far as he could make out, Oxford was a shady fellow. Recently appointed on the Board of the P.P.R.S., so that he passed the college every other Tuesday, he had thought: 'Shan't go spending a lot of money on it, but might look in one day.' Having looked in, it was astonishing how taken he had been by the whole thing. Tracing his mother had been quite like a criminal investigation, nearly as ramified and fully as expensive. Having begun, the tenacity of a Forsyte could hardly bear to leave him short of the mother of Shakespeare de Vere, even though she would be collateral; unfortunately, he could not get past a certain William Gouldyng, Ingerer — whatever that might be, and he was almost afraid to enquire — of the time of Oliver Cromwell. There were still four generations to be unravelled, and he was losing money and the hope of getting anything for it. This it was which caused him to gaze askance at the retired building while passing it on his way to the Board on the Tuesday after the lunch at Fleur's. Two more wakeful early mornings had screwed him to the pitch of bringing his doubts to a head and knowing where he stood in the matter of the P.P.R.S.; and this sudden reminder that he was spending money here, there and everywhere, when there was a possibility, however remote, of financial liability somewhere else, sharpened the edge of a nerve already stropped by misgivings. Neglecting the lift and walking slowly up the two flights of stairs, he 'went over' his fellow-directors for the fifteenth time. Old Lord Fontenoy was there for his name, of course; seldom attended, and was what they called 'a dud'— h'm! — nowadays; the chairman, Sir Luke Sharman, seemed always to be occupied in not being taken for a Jew. His nose was straight, but his eyelids gave cause for doubt. His surname was impeccable, but his Christian dubious; his voice was reassuringly roughened, but his clothes had a suspicious tendency towards gloss. Altogether a man who, though shrewd, could not be trusted — Soames felt — to be giving his whole mind to other business. As for 'Old Mont'— what was the good of a ninth baronet on a Board? Guy Meyricke, King's Counsel, last of the three who had been 'together,' was a good man in court, no doubt, but with no time for business and no real sense of it! Remained that converted Quaker, old Cuthbert Mothergill — whose family name had been a by-word for successful integrity throughout the last century, so that people still put Mothergills on to boards almost mechanically — rather deaf, nice clean old chap, and quite bland, but nothing more. A perfectly honest lot, no doubt, but perfunctory. None of them really giving their minds to the thing! In Elderson's pocket, too, except perhaps Sharman, and he on the wobble. And Elderson himself — clever chap, bit of an artist, perhaps; managing director from the start, with everything at his finger-tips! Yes! That was the mischief! Prestige of superior knowledge, and years of success — they all kowtowed to him, and no wonder! Trouble with a man like that was that if he once admitted to having made a mistake he destroyed the legend of his infallibility. Soames had enough infallibility of his own to realise how powerful was its impetus towards admitting nothing. Ten months ago, when he had come on to the Board, everything had seemed in full sail; exchanges had reached bottom, so they all thought — the 'reassurance of foreign contracts' policy, which Elderson had initiated about a year before, had seemed, with rising exchanges, perhaps the brightest feather in the cap of possibility. And now, a twelvemonth later, Soames suspected darkly that they did not know where they were — and the general meeting only six weeks off! Probably not even Elderson knew; or, if he did, he was keeping knowledge which ought to belong to the whole directorate severely to himself.

He entered the board room without a smile. All there — even Lord Fontenoy and 'Old Mont'— given up his spinneys, had he! Soames took his seat at the end on the fireside. Staring at Elderson, he saw, with sudden clearness, the strength of the fellow's position; and, with equal clearness, the weakness of the P.P.R.S. With this rising and falling currency, they could never know exactly their liability — they were just gambling. Listening to the minutes and other routine business, with his chin clasped in his hand, he let his eyes move from face to face — old Mothergill, Elderson, Mont opposite; Sharman at the head; Fontenoy, Meyricke, back to himself — decisive board of the year. He could not, must not, be placed in any dubious position! At his first general meeting on this concern, he must not face the shareholders without knowing exactly where he stood. He looked again at Elderson — sweetish face, bald head rather like Julius Caesar's, nothing to suggest irregularity or excessive optimism — in fact, somewhat resembling that of old Uncle Nicholas Forsyte, whose affairs had been such an example to the last generation but one. The managing director having completed his exposition, Soames directed his gaze at the pink face of dosey old Mothergill, and said:

"I'm not satisfied that these accounts disclose our true position. I want the Board adjourned to this day week, Mr. Chairman, and during the week I want every member of the Board furnished with exact details of the foreign contract commitments which do NOT mature during the present financial year. I notice that those are lumped under a general estimate of liability. I am not satisfied with that. They ought to be separately treated." Shifting his gaze past Elderson to the face of 'Old Mont,' he went on: "Unless there's a material change for the better on the Continent, which I don't anticipate (quite the contrary), I fully expect those commitments will put us in Queer Street next year."

The scraping of feet, shifting of legs, clearing of throats which accompany a slight sense of outrage greeted the words 'Queer Street'; and a sort of satisfaction swelled in Soames; he had rattled their complacency, made them feel a touch of the misgiving from which he himself was suffering.

"We have always treated our commitments under one general estimate, Mr. Forsyte."

Plausible chap!

"And to my mind wrongly. This foreign contract business is a new policy. For all I can tell, instead of paying a dividend, we ought to be setting this year's profits against a certain loss next year."

Again that scrape and rustle.

"My dear sir, absurd!"

The bulldog in Soames snuffled.

"So you say!" he said. "Am I to have those details?"

"The Board can have what details it likes, of course. But permit me to remark on the general question that it CAN only be a matter of estimate. A conservative basis has always been adopted."

"That is a matter of opinion," said Soames; "and in my view it should be the Board's opinion after very careful discussion of the actual figures."

'Old Mont' was speaking.

"My dear Forsyte, to go into every contract would take us a week, and then get us no further; we can but average it out."

"What we have not got in these accounts," said Soames, "is the relative proportion of foreign risk to home risk — in the present state of things a vital matter."

The Chairman spoke.

"There will be no difficulty about that, I imagine, Elderson! But in any case, Mr. Forsyte, we should hardly be justified in penalising the present year for the sake of eventualities which we hope will not arise."

"I don't know," said Soames. "We are here to decide policy according to our common sense, and we must have the fullest opportunity of exercising it. That is my point. We have not enough information."

That 'plausible chap' was speaking again:

"Mr. Forsyte seems to be indicating a lack of confidence in the management." Taking the bull by the horns — was he?

"Am I to have that information?"

The voice of old Mothergill rose cosy in the silence.

"The Board could be adjourned, perhaps, Mr. Chairman; I could come up myself at a pinch. Possibly we could all attend. The times are very peculiar — we mustn't take any unnecessary risks. The policy of foreign contracts is undoubtedly somewhat new to us. We have no reason so far to complain of the results. And I am sure we have the utmost confidence in the judgment of our managing director. Still, as Mr. Forsyte has asked for this information, I think perhaps we ought to have it. What do you say, my lord?"

"I can't come up next week. I agree with the chairman that on these accounts we couldn't burke this year's dividend. No good getting the wind up before we must. When do the accounts go out, Elderson?"

"Normally at the end of this week."

"These are not normal times," said Soames. "To be quite plain, unless I have that information I must tender my resignation." He saw very well what was passing in their minds. A newcomer making himself a nuisance — they would take his resignation readily — only it would look awkward just before a general meeting unless they could announce "wife's ill-health" or something satisfactory, which he would take very good care they didn't.

The chairman said coldly:

"Well, we will adjourn the Board to this day week; you will be able to get us those figures, Elderson?"

"Certainly."

Into Soames' mind flashed the thought: 'Ought to ask for an independent scrutiny.' But he looked round. Going too far — perhaps — if he intended to remain on the Board — and he had no wish to resign — after all, it was a big thing, and a thousand a year! No! Mustn't overdo it!

Walking away, he savoured his triumph doubtfully, by no means sure that he had done any good. His attitude had only closed the 'all together' attitude round Elderson. The weakness of his position was that he had nothing to go on, save an uneasiness, which when examined was found to be simply a feeling that he hadn't enough control himself. And yet, there couldn't be two managers — you must trust your manager!

A voice behind him tittupped: "Well, Forsyte, you gave us quite a shock with your alternative. First time I remember anything of the sort on that Board."

"Sleepy hollow," said Soames.

"Yes, I generally have a nap. It gets very hot in there. Wish I'd stuck to my spinneys. They come high, even as early as this."

Incurably frivolous, this tittupping baronet!

"By the way, Forsyte, I wanted to say: With all this modern birth control and the rest of it, one gets uneasy. We're not the royal family; but don't you feel with me it's time there was a movement in heirs?"

Soames did, but he was not going to confess to anything so indelicate about his own daughter.

"Plenty of time," he muttered.

"I don't like that dog, Forsyte."

Soames stared.

"Dog!" he said. "What's that to do with it?"

"I like a baby to come before a dog. Dogs and poets distract young women. My grandmother had five babies before she was twenty-seven. She was a Montjoy; wonderful breeders, you remember them — the seven Montjoy sisters — all pretty. Old Montjoy had forty-seven grandchildren. You don't get it nowadays, Forsyte."

"Country's over-populated," said Soames grimly.

"By the wrong sort — less of them, more of ourselves. It's almost a matter for legislation."

"Talk to your son," said Soames.

"Ah! but they think us fogeys, you know. If we could only point to a reason for existence. But it's difficult, Forsyte, it's difficult."

"They've got everything they want," said Soames.

"Not enough, my dear Forsyte, not enough; the condition of the world is on the nerves of the young. England's dished, they say, Europe's dished. Heaven's dished, and so is Hell! No future in anything but the air. You can't breed in the air; at least, I doubt it — the difficulties are considerable."

Soames sniffed.

"If only the journalists would hold their confounded pens," he said; for, more and more of late, with the decrescendo of scare in the daily Press, he was regaining the old sound Forsyte feeling of security. "We've only to keep clear of Europe," he added.

“Keep clear and keep the ring! Forsyte, I believe you’ve hit it. Good friendly terms with Scandinavia, Holland, Spain, Italy, Turkey — all the outlying countries that we can get at by sea. And let the others dree their weirds. It’s an idea!” How the chap rattled on!

“I’m no politician,” said Soames.

“Keep the ring! The new formula. It’s what we’ve been coming to unconsciously! And as to trade — to say we can’t do without trading with this country or with that — bunkum, my dear Forsyte. The world’s large — we can.”

“I don’t know anything about that,” said Soames. “I only know we must drop this foreign contract assurance.”

“Why not confine it to the ring countries? Instead of ‘balance of power,’ ‘keep the ring’! Really, it’s an inspiration!”

Thus charged with inspiration, Soames said hastily:

“I leave you here, I’m going to my daughter’s.”

“Ah! I’m going to my son’s. Look at these poor devils!”

Down by the Embankment at Blackfriars a band of unemployed were trailing dismally with money-boxes.

“Revolution in the bud! There’s one thing that’s always forgotten, Forsyte, it’s a great pity.”

“What’s that?” said Soames, with gloom. The fellow would tittup all the way to Fleur’s!

“Wash the working-class, put them in clean, pleasant-coloured jeans, teach ’em to speak like you and me, and there’d be an end of class feeling. It’s all a matter of the senses. Wouldn’t you rather share a bedroom with a clean, neat-clothed plumber’s assistant who spoke and smelled like you than with a profiteer who dropped his aitches and reeked of opoponax? Of course you would.”

“Never tried,” said Soames, “so don’t know.”

“Pragmatist! But believe me, Forsyte — if the working class would concentrate on baths and accent instead of on their political and economic tosh, equality would be here in no time.”

“I don’t want equality,” said Soames, taking his ticket to Westminster.

The ‘tittupping’ voice pursued him entering the tube lift.

“Aesthetic equality, Forsyte, if we had it, would remove the wish for any other. Did you ever catch an impecunious professor wishing he was the King?”

“No,” said Soames, opening his paper.

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CHAPTER VIII

BICKET

Beneath its veneer of cheerful irresponsibility, the character of Michael Mont had deepened during two years of anchorage and continuity. He had been obliged to think of others; and his time was occupied. Conscious, from the fall of the flag, that he was on sufferance with Fleur, admitting as whole the half-truth: ‘Il y a toujours un qui baise, et l’autre qui tend la joue,’ he had developed real powers of domestic consideration; and yet he did not seem to redress the balance in his public or publishing existence. He found the human side of his business too strong for the monetary. Danby and Winter, however, were bearing up against him, and showed, so far, no signs of the bankruptcy prophesied for them by Soames on being told of the principles which his son-inlaw intended to introduce. No more in publishing than in any other walk of life was Michael finding it possible to work too much on principle. The field of action was so strewn with facts — human, vegetable and mineral.

On this same Tuesday afternoon, having long tussled with the price of those vegetable facts, paper and linen, he was listening with his pointed ears to the plaint of a packer discovered with five copies of ‘Copper Coin’ in his overcoat pocket, and the too obvious intention of converting them to his own use.

Mr. Danby had ‘given him the sack’— he didn’t deny that he was going to sell them, but what would Mr. Mont have done? He owed rent — and his wife wanted nourishing after pneumonia — wanted it bad. ‘Dash it!’ thought Michael, ‘I’d snoop an edition to nourish Fleur after pneumonia!’

“And I can’t live on my wages with prices what they are. I can’t, Mr. Mont, so help me!”

Michael swivelled. “But look here, Bicket, if we let you snoop copies, all the packers will snoop copies; and if they do, where are Danby and Winter? In the cart. And, if they’re in the cart, where are all of you? In the street. It’s better that one of you should be in the street than that all of you should, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir, I quite see your point — it’s reason; but I can’t live on reason, the least thing knocks you out, when you’re on the bread line. Ask Mr. Danby to give me another chance.”

“Mr. Danby always says that a packer’s work is particularly confidential, because it’s almost impossible to keep a check on it.”

“Yes, sir, I should feel that in future; but with all this unemployment and no reference, I’ll never get another job. What about my wife?”

To Michael it was as if he had said “What about Fleur?” He began to pace the room; and the young man Bicket looked at him with large dolorous eyes. Presently he came to a standstill, with his hands deep plunged into his pockets and his shoulders hunched.

“I’ll ask him,” he said; “but I don’t believe he will; he’ll say it isn’t fair on the others. You had five copies; it’s pretty stiff, you know — means you’ve had ’em before, doesn’t it? What?”

“Well, Mr. Mont, anything that’ll give me a chance, I don’t mind confessin’. I have ‘ad a few previous, and it’s just about kept my wife alive. You’ve no idea what that pneumonia’s like for poor people.”

Michael pushed his fingers through his hair.

“How old’s your wife?”

“Only a girl — twenty.”

Twenty! Just Fleur’s age!

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Bicket; I’ll put it up to Mr. Desert; if he speaks for you, perhaps it may move Mr. Danby.”

“Well, Mr. Mont, thank you — you’re a gentleman, we all sy that.”

“Oh! hang it! But look here, Bicket, you were reckoning on those five copies. Take this to make up, and get your wife what’s necessary. Only for goodness’ sake don’t tell Mr. Danby.”

“Mr. Mont, I wouldn’t deceive you for the world — I won’t sy a word, sir. And my wife — well!”

A sniff, a shuffle — Michael was alone, with his hands plunged deeper, his shoulders hunched higher. And suddenly he laughed. Pity! Pity was pop! It was all dam' funny. Here he was rewarding Bicket for snooping 'Copper Coin!' A sudden longing possessed him to follow the little packer and see what he did with the two pounds — see whether 'the pneumonia' was real or a figment of the brain behind those dolorous eyes. Impossible, though! Instead he must ring up Wilfrid and ask him to put in a word with old Danby. His own word was no earthly. He had put it in too often! Bicket! Little one knew of anybody, life was deep and dark, and upside down! What was honesty? Pressure of life versus power of resistance — the result of that fight, when the latter won, was honesty! But why resist? Love thy neighbour as thyself — but not more! And wasn't it a darned sight harder for Bicket on two pounds a week to love him, than for him on twenty-four pounds a week to love Bicket? . . .

"Hallo! . . . That you, Wilfrid? . . . Michael speaking. . . . One of our packers has been sneaking copies of 'Copper Coin.' He's 'got the sack'— poor devil! I wondered if you'd mind putting in a word for him — old Dan won't listen to me . . . yes, got a wife — Fleur's age; pneumonia, so he says. Won't do it again with yours anyway, insurance by common gratitude — what! . . . Thanks, old man, awfully good of you — will you bob in, then? We can go round home together . . . Oh! Well! You'll bob in anyway. Aurev!"

Good chap, old Wilfrid! Real good chap — underneath! Underneath — what?

Replacing the receiver, Michael saw a sudden great cloud of sights and scents and sounds, so foreign to the principles of his firm that he was in the habit of rejecting instantaneously every manuscript which dealt with them. The war might be 'off '; but it was still 'on' within Wilfrid, and himself. Taking up a tube, he spoke:

"Mr. Danby in his room? Right! If he shows any signs of flitting, let me know at once." . . .

Between Michael and his senior partner a gulf was fixed, not less deep than that between two epochs, though partially filled in by Winter's middle-age and accommodating temperament. Michael had almost nothing against Mr. Danby except that he was always right — Philip Norman Danby, of Sky House, Campden Hill, a man of sixty and some family, with a tall forehead, a preponderance of body to leg, and an expression both steady and reflective. His eyes were perhaps rather close together, and his nose rather thin, but he looked a handsome piece in his well-proportioned room. He glanced up from the formation of a correct judgment on a matter of advertisement when Wilfrid Desert came in.

"Well, Mr. Desert, what can I do for you? Sit down!"

Desert did not sit down, but looked at the engravings, at his fingers, at Mr. Danby, and said:

"Fact is, I want you to let that packer chap off, Mr. Danby."

"Packer chap. Oh! Ah! Bicket. Mont told you, I suppose?"

"Yes; he's got a young wife down with pneumonia."

"They all go to our friend Mont with some tale or other, Mr. Desert — he has a very soft heart. But I'm afraid I can't keep this man. It's a most insidious thing. We've been trying to trace a leak for some time."

Desert leaned against the mantelpiece and stared into the fire.

"Well, Mr. Danby," he said, "your generation may like the soft in literature, but you're precious hard in life. Ours won't look at softness in literature, but we're a deuced sight less hard in life."

"I don't think it's hard," said Mr. Danby, "only just."

"Are you a judge of justice?"

"I hope so."

"Try four years' hell, and have another go."

"I really don't see the connection. The experience you've been through, Mr. Desert, was bound to be warping."

Wilfrid turned and stared at him.

"Forgive my saying so, but sitting here and being just is much more warping. Life is pretty good purgatory, to all except about thirty per cent. of grown-up people."

Mr. Danby smiled.

"We simply couldn't conduct our business, my dear young man, without scrupulous honesty in everybody. To make no distinction between honesty and dishonesty would be quite unfair. You know that perfectly well."

"I don't know anything perfectly well, Mr. Danby; and I mistrust those who say they do."

"Well, let us put it that there are rules of the game which must be observed, if society is to function at all."

Desert smiled, too: "Oh! hang rules! Do it as a favour to me. I wrote the rotten book."

No trace of struggle showed in Mr. Danby's face; but his deep-set, close-together eyes shone a little.

"I should be only too glad, but it's a matter — well, of conscience, if you like. I'm not prosecuting the man. He must leave — that's all."

Desert shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, good-bye!" and he went out.

On the mat was Michael in two minds.

"Well?"

"No go. The old blighter's too just."

Michael stivered his hair.

"Wait in my room five minutes while I let the poor beggar know, then I'll come along."

"No," said Desert, "I'm going the other way."

Not the fact that Wilfrid was going the other way — he almost always was — but something in the tone of his voice and the look on his face obsessed Michael's imagination while he went downstairs to seek Bicket. Wilfrid was a rum chap — he went "dark" so suddenly!

In the nether regions he asked:

"Bicket gone?"

"No, sir, there he is."

There he was, in his shabby overcoat, with his pale narrow face, and his disproportionately large eyes, and his sloping shoulders.

"Sorry, Bicket, Mr. Desert has been in, but it's no go."

"No, sir?"

"Keep your pecker up, you'll get something."

"I'm afryde not, sir. Well, I thank you very 'eartily; and I thank Mr. Desert. Good-night, sir; and good-bye!"

Michael watched him down the corridor, saw him waver into the dusky street.

"Jolly!" he said, and laughed . . . .

The natural suspicions of Michael and his senior partner that a tale was being pitched were not in fact justified. Neither the wife nor the pneumonia had been exaggerated; and wavering away in the direction of Blackfriars Bridge, Bicket thought not of his turpitude nor of how just Mr. Danby had been, but of what he should say to her. He should not, of course, tell her that he had been detected in stealing; he must say he had 'got the sack for cheeking the foreman'; but what would she think of him for doing that, when everything as it were depended on his not cheeking the foreman? This was one of those melancholy cases of such affection that he had been coming to his work day after day feeling as if he had 'left half his guts' behind him in the room where she lay, and when at last the doctor said to him:

"She'll get on now, but it's left her very run down — you must feed her up," his anxiety had hardened into a resolution to have no more. In the next three weeks he had 'pinched' eighteen 'Copper Coins,' including the five found in his overcoat. He had only 'pitched on' Mr. Desert's book because it was 'easy sold,' and he was sorry now that he hadn't pitched on some one else's. Mr. Desert had been very decent. He stopped at the corner of the Strand, and went over his money. With the two pounds given him by Michael and his wages he had seventy-five shillings in the world, and going into the Stores he bought a meat jelly and a tin of Benger's food that could be made with water. With pockets bulging he took a 'bus, which dropped him at the corner of his little street on the Surrey side. His wife and he occupied the two ground floor rooms, at eight shillings a week, and he owed for three weeks. 'Py that!' he thought, 'and have a roof until she's well.' It would help him over the news, too, to show her a receipt for the rent and some good food. How lucky they had been careful to have no baby! He sought the basement. His landlady was doing the week's washing. She paused, in sheer surprise at such full and voluntary payment, and inquired after his wife.

"Doing nicely, thank you."

"Well, I'm glad of that, it must be a relief to your mind."

"It is," said Bicket.

The landlady thought: 'He's a thread-paper — reminds me of a shrimp before you bile it, with those eyes.'

"Here's your receipt, and thank you. Sorry to 'ave seemed nervous about it, but times are 'ard."

"They are," said Bicket. "So long!"

With the receipt and the meat jelly in his left hand, he opened the door of his front room.

His wife was sitting before a very little fire. Her bobbed black hair, crinkly towards the ends, had grown during her illness; it shook when she turned her head and smiled. To Bicket — not for the first time — that smile seemed queer, 'pathetic-like,' mysterious — as if she saw things that one didn't see oneself. Her name was Victorine, and he said: "Well, Vic.? This jelly's a bit of all right, and I've pyde the rent." He sat on the arm of the chair and she put her hand on his knee — her thin arm emerging blue-white from the dark dressing-gown.

"Well, Tony?"

Her face — thin and pale with those large dark eyes and beautifully formed eyebrows — was one that "looked at you from somewhere; and when it looked at you — well! it got you right inside!"

It got him now and he said: "How've you been breathin'?"

"All right — much better. I'll soon be out now."

Bicket twisted himself round and joined his lips to hers. The kiss lasted some time, because all the feelings which he had not been able to express during the past three weeks to her or to anybody, got into it. He sat up again, "sort of exhausted," staring at the fire, and said: "News isn't bright — lost my job, Vic."

"Oh! Tony! Why?"

Bicket swallowed.

"Fact is, things are slack, and they're reducin'."

There had surged into his mind the certainty that sooner than tell her the truth he would put his head under the gas!

"Oh! dear! What shall we do, then?"

Bicket's voice hardened.

"Don't you worry — I'll get something"; and he whistled.

"But you liked that job."

"Did I? I liked some o' the fellers; but as for the job — why, what was it? Wrappin' books up in a bysement all dy long. Let's have something to eat and get to bed early — I feel as if I could sleep for a week, now I'm shut of it."

Getting their supper ready with her help, he carefully did not look at her face for fear it might "get him agyne inside!" They had only been married a year, having made acquaintance on a tram, and Bicket often wondered what had made her take to him, eight years her senior and C3 during the war! And yet she must be fond of him, or she'd never look at him as she did.

"Sit down and try this jelly."

He himself ate bread and margarine and drank cocoa, he seldom had any particular appetite.

"Shall I tell you what I'd like?" he said; "I'd like Central Austrylia. We had a book in there about it; they sy there's quite a movement. I'd like some sun. I believe if we 'ad sun we'd both be twice the size we are. I'd like to see colour in your cheeks, Vic."

"How much does it cost to get out there?"

"A lot more than we can ly hands on, that's the trouble. But I've been thinkin'. England's about done. There's too many like me."

"No," said Victorine; "there aren't enough."

Bicket looked at her face, then quickly at his plate.

"What myde you take a fancy to me?"

"Because you don't think first of yourself, that's why."

"Used to before I knew you. But I'd do anything for you, Vic."

"Have some of this jelly, then, it's awful good."

Bicket shook his head.

"If we could wyke up in Central Austrylia," he said. "But there's only one thing certain, we'll wyke up in this blighted little room. Never mind, I'll get a job and earn the money yet."

"Could we win it on a race?"

"Well, I've only got forty-seven bob all told, and if we lose it, where'll you be? You've got to feed up, you know. No, I must get a job."

"They'll give you a good recommend, won't they?"

Bicket rose and stacked his plate and cup.

"They would, but that job's off — overstocked."

Tell her the truth? Never! So help him!

In their bed, one of those just too wide for one and just not wide enough for two, he lay, with her hair almost in his mouth, thinking what to say to his Union, and how to go to work to get a job. And in his thoughts as the hours drew on he burned his boats. To draw his unemployment money he would have to tell his Union what the trouble was. Blow the Union! He wasn't going to be accountable to them! HE knew why he'd pinched the books; but it was nobody else's business, nobody else could understand his feelings, watching her so breathless, pale and thin. Strike out for himself! And a million and a half out o' work! Well, he had a fortnight's keep, and something would turn up — and he might risk a bob or two and win some money, you never knew. She turned in her sleep. 'Yes,' he thought, 'I'd do it agyne . . .'

Next day, after some hours on foot, he stood under the grey easterly sky in the grey street, before a plate-glass window protecting an assortment of fruits and sheaves of corn, lumps of metal, and brilliant blue butterflies, in the carefully golden light of advertised Australia. To Bicket, who had never been out of England, not often out of London, it was like standing outside Paradise. The atmosphere within the office itself was not so golden, and the money required considerable; but it brought Paradise nearer to take away pamphlets which almost burned his hands, they were so warm.

Later, he and she, sitting in the one armchair — advantage of being thin — pored over these alchemised pages and inhaled their glamour.

"D'you think it's true, Tony?"

"If it's thirty per cent. true it's good enough for me. We just must get there somehow. Kiss me."

From around the corner in the main road the rumbling of the trams and carts, and the rattling of their window-pane in the draughty dry easterly wind increased their feeling of escape into a gas-lit Paradise.

❦

Chapter IX

Confusion

Two hours behind Bicket, Michael wavered towards home. Old Danby was right as usual — if you couldn't trust your packers, you might shut up shop! Away from Bicket's eyes, he doubted. Perhaps the chap hadn't a wife at all! Then Wilfrid's manner usurped the place of Bicket's morals. Old Wilfrid had been abrupt and queer the last three times of meeting. Was he boiling-up for verse?

He found Ting-a-ling at the foot of the stairs in a conservative attitude. "I am not going up," he seemed saying, "until some one carries me — at the same time it is later than usual!"

"Where's your mistress, you heraldic little beast?"

Ting-a-ling snuffled. "I could put up with it," he implied, "if YOU carried me — these stairs are laborious!"

Michael took him up. "Let's go and find her."

Squeezed under an arm harder than his mistress', Ting-a-ling stared as if with black-glass eyes; and the plume of his emergent tail quivered.

In the bedroom Michael dropped him so absent-mindedly that he went to his corner plume pendent, and couched there in dudgeon.

Nearly dinner time and Fleur not in! Michael went over his sketchy recollection of her plans. To-day she had been having Hubert Marsland and that Vertiginist — what was his name? — to lunch. There would have been fumes to clear off. Vertiginists — like milk — made carbonic acid gas in the lungs! Still! Half-past seven! What was happening to-night? Weren't they going to that play of L.S.D.'s? No — that was tomorrow! Was there conceivably nothing? If so, of course she would shorten her unoccupied time as much as possible. He made that reflection humbly. Michael had no illusions, he knew himself to be commonplace, with only a certain redeeming liveliness, and, of course, his affection for her. He even recognised that his affection was a weakness, tempting him to fussy anxieties, which on principle he restrained. To enquire, for instance, of Coaker or Philps — their man and their maid — when she had gone out, would be thoroughly against that principle. The condition of the world was such that Michael constantly wondered if his own affairs were worth paying attention to; but then the condition of the world was also such that sometimes one's own affairs seemed all that were worth paying attention to. And yet his affairs were, practically speaking, Fleur; and if he paid too much attention to them, he was afraid of annoying her.

He went into his dressing-room and undid his waistcoat.

'But no!' he thought; 'if she finds me "dressed" already, it'll put too much point on it.' So he did up his waistcoat and went downstairs again. Coaker was in the hall.

"Mr. Forsyte and Sir Lawrence looked in about six, sir. Mrs. Mont was out. What time shall I serve dinner?"

"Oh! about a quarter past eight. I don't think we're going out."

He went into the drawing-room and passing down its Chinese emptiness, drew aside the curtain. The square looked cold and dark and draughty; and he thought: 'Bicket — pneumonia — I hope she's got her fur coat.' He took out a cigarette and put it back. If she saw him at the window she would think him fussy; and he went up again to see if she had put on her fur!

Ting-a-ling, still couchant, greeted him plume dansetti arrested as at disappointment. Michael opened a wardrobe. She had! Good! He was taking a sniff round, when Ting-a-ling passed him trottant, and her voice said: "Well, my darling!" Wishing that he was, Michael emerged from behind the wardrobe door. Heaven! She looked pretty, coloured by the wind! He stood rather wistfully silent.

"Hallo, Michael! I'm rather late. Been to the Club and walked home."

Michael had a quite unaccountable feeling that there was suppression in that statement. He also suppressed, and said: "I was just looking to see that you'd got your fur, it's beastly cold. Your dad and Bart have been and went away fasting."

Fleur shed her coat and dropped into a chair. "I'm tired. Your ears are sticking up so nicely to-night, Michael."

Michael went on his knees and joined his hands behind her waist. Her eyes had a strange look, a scrutiny which held him in suspense, a little startled.

"If YOU got pneumonia," he said, "I should go clean out of curl."

"Why on earth should I?"

"You don't know the connection — never mind, it wouldn't interest you. We're not going out, are we?"

"Of course we are. It's Alison's monthly."

"Oh! Lord! If you're tired we could cut that."

"My dear! Impos.! She's got all sorts of people coming."

Stifling a disparagement, he sighed out: "Right-o! War-paint?"

"Yes, white waistcoat. I like you in white waistcoats."

Cunning little wretch? He squeezed her waist and rose. Fleur laid a light stroke on his hand, and he went into his dressing-room comforted . . . .

But Fleur sat still for at least five minutes — not precisely 'a prey to conflicting emotions,' but the victim of very considerable confusion. TWO men within the last hour had done this thing — knelt at her knees and joined their fingers behind her waist. Undoubtedly she had been rash to go to Wilfrid's rooms. The moment she got there she had perceived how entirely unprepared she really was to commit herself to what was physical. True he had done no more than Michael. But — Goodness! — she had seen the fire she was playing with, realised what torment he was in. She had strictly forbidden him to say a word to Michael, but intuitively she knew that in his struggle between loyalties she could rely on nothing. Confused, startled, touched, she could not help a pleasant warmth in being so much loved by two men at once, nor an itch of curiosity about the upshot. And she sighed. She had added to her collection of experiences — but how to add further without breaking up the collection, and even perhaps the collector, she could not see.

After her words to Wilfrid before the Eve: "You will be a fool to go — wait!" she had known he would expect something before long. Often he had asked her to come and pass judgment on his 'junk.' A month, even a week, ago she would have gone without thinking more than twice about it, and discussed his 'junk' with Michael afterwards! But now she thought it over many times, and but for the fumes of lunch, and the feeling, engendered by the society of the 'Vertiginist,' of Amabel Nazing, of Linda Frewe, that scruples of any kind were 'stuffy,' sensations of all sorts 'the thing,' she would probably still have been thinking it over now. When they departed, she had taken a deep breath and her telephone receiver from the Chinese tea chest.

If Wilfrid were going to be in at half-past five, she would come and see his 'junk.'

His answer: "My God! Will you?" almost gave her pause. But dismissing hesitation with the thought: 'I WILL be Parisian — Proust!' she had started for her Club. Three-quarters of an hour, with no more stimulant than three cups of China tea, three back numbers of the 'Glass of Fashion,' three back views of country members 'dead in chairs,' had sent her forth a careful quarter of an hour behind her time.

On the top floor Wilfrid was standing in his open doorway, pale as a soul in purgatory. He took her hand gently, and drew her in. Fleur thought with a little thrill: 'Is this what it's like? Du cote de chez Swann!' Freeing her hand, she began at once to flutter round the 'junk,' clinging to it piece by piece.

Old English 'junk' rather manorial, with here and there an eastern or First Empire bit, collected by some bygone Desert, nomadic, or attached to the French court. She was afraid to sit down, for fear that he might begin to follow the authorities; nor did she want to resume the intense talk of the Tate Gallery. 'Junk' was safe, and she only looked at him in those brief intervals when he was not looking at her. She knew she was not playing the game according to 'La Garconne' and Amabel Nazing; that, indeed, she was in danger of going away without having added to her sensations. And she couldn't help being sorry for Wilfrid; his eyes yearned after her, his lips were bitter to look at. When at last from sheer exhaustion of 'junk' she sat down, he had flung himself at her feet. Half hypnotised, with her knees against his chest, as safe as she could hope for, she really felt the tragedy of it — his horror of himself, his passion for herself. It was painful, deep; it did not fit in with what she had been led to expect; it was not in the period, and how — how was she to get away without more pain to him and to herself? When she HAD got away, with one kiss received but not answered, she realised that she had passed through a quarter of an hour of real life, and was not at all sure that she liked it. . . . But now, safe in her own room, undressing for Alison's monthly, she felt curious as to what she would have been feeling if things had gone as far as was proper according to the authorities. Surely she had not experienced one-tenth of the thoughts or sensations that would have been assigned to her in any advanced piece of literature! It had been disillusioning, or else she was deficient, and Fleur, could not bear to feel deficient. And, lightly powdering her shoulders, she bent her thoughts towards Alison's monthly.

* * * * * *

Though Lady Alison enjoyed an occasional encounter with the younger generation, the Aubrey Greenes and Linda Frewes of this life were not conspicuous by their presence at her gatherings. Nesta Gorse, indeed, had once attended, but one legal and two literary politicos who had been in contact with her, had complained of it afterwards. She had, it seemed, rent little spiked holes in the garments of their self-esteem. Sibley Swan would have been welcome, for his championship of the past, but he seemed, so far, to have turned up his nose and looked down it. So it was not the intelligentsia, but just intellectual society, which was gathered there when Fleur and Michael entered, and the conversation had all the sparkle and all the 'savoir faire' incidental to talk about art and letters by those who — as Michael put it —"fortunately had not to faire"

"All the same, these are the guys," he muttered in Fleur's ear, "who make the names of artists and writers. What's the stunt, to-night?"

It appeared to be the London debut of a lady who sang Balkan folk songs. But in a refuge to the right were four tables set out for bridge. They were already filled. Among those who still stood listening, were, here and there, a Gurdon Minho, a society painter and his wife, a sculptor looking for a job. Fleur, wedged between Lady Feynte, the painter's wife, and Gurdon Minho himself, began planning an evasion. There — yes, there was Mr. Chalfont! At Lady Alison's, Fleur, an excellent judge of 'milieu' never wasted her time on artists and writers — she could meet THEM anywhere. Here she intuitively picked out the biggest 'bug,' politico-literary, and waited to pin him. Absorbed in the idea of pinning Mr. Chalfont, she overlooked a piece of drama passing without.

Michael had clung to the top of the stairway, in no mood for talk and skirmish; and, leaning against the balustrade, wasp-thin in his long white waistcoat, with hands deep thrust into his trousers' pockets, he watched the turns and twists of Fleur's white neck, and listened to the Balkan songs, with a sort of blankness in his brain. The word: "Mont!" startled him. Wilfrid was standing just below. Mont? He had not been that to Wilfrid for two years!

"Come down here."

On that half-landing was a bust of Lionel Charwell, K.C., by Boris Strumolowski, in the genre he had cynically adopted when June Forsyte gave up supporting his authentic but unrewarded genius. It had been almost indistinguishable from any of the other busts in that year's Academy, and was used by the young Charwells to chalk moustaches on.

Beside this object Desert leaned against the wall with his eyes closed. His face was a study to Michael.

"What's wrong, Wilfrid?"

Desert did not move. "You've got to know — I'm in love with Fleur."

"What!"

"I'm not going to play the snake. You're up against me. Sorry, but there it is! You can let fly!" His face was death-pale, and its muscles twitched. In Michael, it was the mind, the heart that twitched. What a very horrible, strange, "too beastly" moment! His best friend — his best man! Instinctively he dived for his cigarette case — instinctively handed it to Desert. Instinctively they both took cigarettes, and lighted each other's. Then Michael said:

"Fleur — knows?"

Desert nodded: "She doesn't know I'm telling you — wouldn't have let me. You've nothing against her — yet." And, still with closed eyes, he added: "I couldn't help it."

It was Michael's own subconscious thought! Natural! Natural! Fool not to see how natural! Then something shut-to within him, and he said: "Decent of you to tell me; but — aren't you going to clear out?"

Desert's shoulders writhed against the wall.

"I thought so; but it seems not."

"Seems? I don't understand."

"If I knew for certain I'd no chance — but I don't," and he suddenly looked at Michael: "Look here, it's no good keeping gloves on. I'm desperate, and I'll take her from you if I can."

"Good God!" said Michael. "It's the limit!"

"Yes! Rub it in! But, I tell you, when I think of you going home with her, and of myself," he gave a dreadful little laugh, "I advise you NOT to rub it in."

"Well," said Michael, "as this isn't a Dostoievsky novel, I suppose there's no more to be said."

Desert moved from the wall and laid his hand on the bust of Lionel Charwell.

"You realise, at least, that I've gone out of my way — perhaps dished myself — by telling you. I've not bombed without declaring war."

"No," said Michael dully.

"You can chuck my books over to some other publisher." Michael shrugged.

"Good-night, then," said Desert. "Sorry for being so primitive."

Michael looked straight into his 'best man's' face. There was no mistaking its expression of bitter despair. He made a half-movement with his hand, uttered half the word "Wilfrid," and, as Desert went down, he went upstairs.

Back in his place against the balustrade, he tried to realise that life was a laughing matter, and couldn't. His position required a serpent's cunning, a lion's courage, a dove's gentleness: he was not conscious of possessing such proverbial qualities. If Fleur had loved him as he loved her, he would have had for Wilfrid a real compassion. It was so natural to fall in love with Fleur! But she didn't — oh! no, she didn't! Michael had one virtue — if virtue it be — a moderate opinion of himself, a disposition to think highly of his friends. He had thought highly of Desert; and — odd! — he still did not think lowly of him. Here was his friend trying to do him mortal injury, to alienate the affection — more honestly, the toleration — of his wife; and yet he did not think him a cad. Such leniency, he knew, was hopeless; but the doctrines of free-will, and free contract, were not to him mere literary conceptions, they were part of his nature. To apply duress, however desirable, would not be on his cards. And something like despair ravaged the heart of him, watching Fleur's ingratiating little tricks with the great Gerald Chalfont. If she left him for Wilfrid! But surely — no — her father, her house, her dog, her friends, her — her collection of — of — she would not — could not give THEM up? But suppose she kept everything, Wilfrid included! No, no! She wouldn't! Only for a second did that possibility blur the natural loyalty of his mind.

Well, what to do? Tell her — talk the thing out? Or wait and watch? For what? Without deliberate spying, he could not watch. Desert would come to their house no more. No! Either complete frankness; or complete ignoring — and that meant living with the sword of Damocles above his head! No! Complete frankness! And not do anything that seemed like laying a trap! He passed his hand across a forehead that was wet. If only they were at home, away from that squalling and these cultivated jackanapes! Could he go in and hook her out? Impossible without some reason! Only his brain-storm for a reason! He must just bite on it. The singing ceased. Fleur was looking round. Now she would beckon! On the contrary, she came towards him. He could not help the cynical thought: 'She's hooked old Chalfont!' He loved her, but he knew her little weaknesses. She came up and took hold of his sleeve.

"I've had enough, Michael, let's slip off; d'you mind?"

"Quick!" he said, "before they spot us!"

In the cold air outside he thought: 'Now? Or in her room?'

"I think," said Fleur, "that Mr. Chalfont is overrated — he's nothing but a mental yawn. He's coming to lunch tomorrow week."

Not now — in her room!

"Whom do you think to meet him, besides Alison?"

"Nothing jazzy."

"Of course not; but it must be somebody intriguing, Michael. Bother! sometimes I think it isn't worth it."

Michael's heart stood still. Was that a portent — sign of 'the primitive' rising within his adored practitioner of social arts? An hour ago he would have said:

"You're right, my child; it jolly well isn't!" But now — any sign of change was ominous! He slipped his arm in hers.

"Don't worry, we'll snare the just-right cuckoos, somehow."

“A Chinese Minister would be perfect,” mused Fleur, “with Minho and Bart — four men — two women — cosy. I’ll talk to Bart.”

Michael had opened their front door. She passed him; he lingered to see the stars, the plane trees, a man’s figure motionless, collared to the eyes, hatted down to them. ‘Wilfrid!’ he thought: ‘Spain! Why Spain? And all poor devils who are in distress — the heart — oh! darn the heart!’ He closed the door.

But soon he had another to open, and never with less enthusiasm. Fleur was sitting on the arm of a chair, in the dim lavender pyjamas she sometimes wore just to keep in with things, staring at the fire. Michael stood, looking at her and at his own reflection beyond in one of the five mirrors — white and black, the pierrot pyjamas she had bought him. ‘Figures in a play,’ he thought, ‘figures in a play! Is it real?’ He moved forward and sat on the chair’s other arm.

“Hang it!” he muttered. “Wish I were Antinous!” And he slipped from the arm into the chair, to be behind her face, if she wanted to hide it from him.

“Wilfrid’s been telling me,” he said, quietly.

Off his chest! What now? He saw the blood come flushing into her neck and cheek.

“Oh! What business — how do you mean ‘telling you’?”

“Just that he’s in love with you — nothing more — there’s nothing more to tell, is there?” And drawing his feet up on to the chair, he clasped his hands hard round his knees. Already — already he had asked a question! Bite on it! Bite on it! And he shut his eyes.

“Of course,” said Fleur, very slowly, “there’s nothing more. If Wilfrid chooses to be so silly.”

Chooses! The word seemed unjust to one whose own ‘silliness’ was so recent — so enduring! And — curious! his heart wouldn’t bound. Surely it ought to have bounded at her words!

“Is that the end of Wilfrid, then?”

“The end? I don’t know.”

Ah! Who knew anything — when passion was about?

“Well,” he said, holding himself hard together, “don’t forget I love you awfully!”

He saw her eyelids flicker, her shoulders shrugging.

“Am I likely to?”

Bitter, cordial, simple — which? Suddenly her hands came round and took him by the ears. Holding them fast she looked down at him, and laughed. And again his heart WOULD not bound. If she did not lead him by the nose, she —! But he clutched her to him in the chair. Lavender and white and black confused — she returned his kiss. But from the heart? Who knew? Not Michael.

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CHAPTER X

PASSING OF A SPORTSMAN

Soames, disappointed of his daughter, said: “I’ll wait,” and took his seat in the centre of the jade green settee, oblivious of Ting-a-ling before the fire, sleeping off the attentions of Amabel Nazing, who had found him ‘just too cunning.’ Grey and composed, with one knee over the other, and a line between his eyes, he thought of Elderson and the condition of the world, and of how there was always something. And the more he thought, the more he wondered why he had ever been such a flat as to go on to a Board which had anything to do with foreign contracts. All the old wisdom that in the nineteenth century had consolidated British wealth, all the Forsyte philosophy of attending to one’s own business, and taking no risks, the close-fibred national individualism which refused to commit the country to chasing this wild goose or that, held within him silent demonstration. Britain was on the wrong tack politically to try and influence the Continent, and the P.P.R.S. on the wrong tack monetarily to insure business outside Britain. The special instinct of his breed yearned for resumption of the straight and private path. Never meddle with what you couldn’t control! ‘Old Mont’ had said: “Keep the ring!” Nothing of the sort: Mind one’s own business! That was the real ‘formula.’ He became conscious of his calf — Ting-a-ling was sniffing at his trousers.

“Oh!” said Soames. “It’s you!”

Placing his forepaws against the settee, Ting-a-ling licked the air.

“Pick you up?” said Soames. “You’re too long.” And again he felt that faint warmth of being liked.

‘There’s something about me that appeals to him,’ he thought, taking him by the scruff and lifting him on to a cushion. “You and I,” the little dog seemed saying with his stare — Chinese little object! The Chinese knew what they were about, they had minded their own business for five thousand years!

‘I shall resign,’ thought Soames. But what about Winifred, and Imogen, and some of the Rogers and Nicholases who had been putting money into this thing because he was a director? He wished they wouldn’t follow him like a lot of sheep! He rose from the settee. It was no good waiting, he would walk on to Green Street and talk to Winifred at once. She would have to sell again, though the shares had dropped a bit. And without taking leave of Ting-a-ling, he went out.

All this last year he had almost enjoyed life. Having somewhere to come and sit and receive a certain sympathy once at least a week, as in old days at Timothy’s, was of incalculable advantage to his spirit. In going from home Fleur had taken most of his heart with her; but Soames had found it almost an advantage to visit his heart once a week rather than to have it always about. There were other reasons conducing to light-heartedness. That diabolical foreign chap, Prosper Profond, had long been gone he didn’t know where, and his wife had been decidedly less restive and sarcastic ever since. She had taken up a thing they called Coue, and grown stouter. She used the car a great deal. Altogether she was more domestic. Then, too, he had become reconciled to Gauguin — a little slump in that painter had convinced him that he was still worth attention, and he had bought three more. Gauguin would rise again! Soames almost regretted his intuition of that second coming, for he had quite taken to the chap. His colour, once you got used to it, was very attractive. One picture, especially, which meant nothing so far as he could see, had a way of making you keep your eyes on it. He even felt uneasy when he thought of having to part with the thing at an enhanced price. But, most of all, he had been feeling so well, enjoying a recrudescence of youth in regard to Annette, taking more pleasure in what he ate, while his mind dwelt almost complacently on the state of money. The pound going up in value; Labour quiet! And now they had got rid of that Jack-o’-lantern, they might look for some years of solid Conservative administration. And to think, as he did, stepping across St. James’ Park towards Green Street, that he had gone and put his foot into a concern which he could not control, made him feel — well, as if the devil had been in it!

In Piccadilly he moused along on the Park side, taking his customary look up at the ‘Iseeum’ Club. The curtains were drawn, and chinks of light glowed, long and cosy. And that reminded him — some one had said George Forsyte was ill. Certainly he had not seen him in the bay window for months past. Well, George had always eaten and drunk too much. He crossed over and passed beneath the Club; and a sudden feeling — he didn’t know what — a longing for his own past, a sort of nostalgia — made him stop and mount the steps.

"Mr. George Forsyte in the Club?"

The janitor stared, a grey-haired, long-faced chap, whom he had known from away back in the 'eighties.

"Mr. Forsyte, sir," he said, "is very ill indeed. They say he won't recover, sir."

"What?" said Soames. "Nobody told me that."

"He's very bad — VERY bad indeed. It's the heart."

"The heart! Where is he?"

"At his rooms, sir; just round the corner. They say the doctors have given him up. He WILL be missed here. Forty years I've known him. One of the old school, and a wonderful judge of wine and horses. We none of us last for ever, they say, but I never thought to see HIM out. Bit too full-blooded, sir, and that's a fact."

With a slight shock Soames realised that he had never known where George lived, so utterly anchored had he seemed to that bay window above.

"Just give me the number of his rooms," he said.

"Belville Row — No. 11, sir; I'm sure I hope you'll find him better. I shall miss his jokes — I shall, indeed."

Turning the corner into Belville Row, Soames made a rapid calculation. George was sixty-six, only one year younger than himself! If George was really in extremis it would be quite unnatural! 'Comes of not leading a careful life,' he thought; 'always rackety — George! When was it I made his will?' So far as he remembered, George had left his money to his brothers and sisters — no one else to leave it to. The feeling of kinship stirred in Soames, the instinct of family adjustment. George and he had never got on — opposite poles of temperament — still he would have to be buried, and who would see to it if not Soames, who had seen to so many Forsyte burials in his time? He recalled the nickname George had once given him, 'the undertaker!' H'm! Here was poetical justice! Belville Row! Ah! No. 11 — regular bachelor-looking place! And putting his hand up to the bell, he thought: 'Women!' What had George done about women all his life?

His ring was answered by a man in a black cut-away coat with a certain speechless reticence.

"My cousin, Mr. George Forsyte? How is he?"

The man compressed his lips.

"Not expected to last the night, sir."

Soames felt a little clutch beneath his Jaeger vest.

"Conscious?"

"Yes, sir."

"Could you show him my card? He might possibly like to see me."

"Will you wait in here, sir?" Soames passed into a low room panelled up to the level of a man's chest, and above that line decorated with prints. George — a collector! Soames had never supposed he had it in him! On those walls, wherever the eye roved, were prints coloured and uncoloured, old and new, depicting the sports of racing and prize-fighting! Hardly an inch of the red wall space visible! About to examine them for marks of value, Soames saw that he was not alone. A woman — age uncertain in the shaded light — was sitting in a very high-backed chair before the fire with her elbow on the arm of it, and a handkerchief held to her face. Soames looked at her, and his nostrils moved in a stealthy sniff. 'Not a lady,' he thought. 'Ten to one but there'll be complications.' The muffled voice of the cut-away man said:

"I'm to take you in, sir." Soames passed his hand over his face and followed.

The bedroom he now entered was in curious contrast. The whole of one wall was occupied by an immense piece of furniture, all cupboards and drawers. Otherwise there was nothing in the room but a dressing-table with silver accoutrements, an electric radiator alight in the fireplace, and a bed opposite. Over the fireplace was a single picture, at which Soames glanced mechanically. What! Chinese! A large whitish sidelong monkey, holding the rind of a squeezed fruit in its outstretched paw. Its whiskered face looked back at him with brown, almost human eyes. What on earth had made his inartistic cousin buy a thing like that and put it up to face his bed? He turned and looked at the bed's occupant. "The only sportsman of the lot," as Montague Dartie in his prime had called him, lay with his swollen form outlined beneath a thin quilt. It gave Soames quite a turn to see that familiar beef-coloured face pale and puffy as a moon, with dark corrugated circles round eyes which still had their japing stare. A voice, hoarse and subdued, but with the old Forsyte timbre, said:

"Hallo, Soames! Come to measure me for my coffin?"

Soames put the suggestion away with a movement of his hand; he felt queer looking at that travesty of George. They had never got on, but —!

And in his flat, unemotional voice he said:

"Well, George! You'll pick up yet. You're no age. Is there anything I can do for you?"

A grin twitched George's pallid lips.

"Make me a codicil. You'll find paper in the dressing table drawer."

Soames took out a sheet of 'Iseeum' Club notepaper. Standing at the table, he inscribed the opening words of a codicil with his stylographic pen, and looked round at George. The words came with a hoarse relish.

"My three screws to young Val Dartie, because he's the only Forsyte that knows a horse from a donkey." A throaty chuckle sounded ghastly in the ears of Soames. "What have you said?"

Soames read: "I hereby leave my three racehorses to my kinsman, Valerius Dartie, of Wansdon, Sussex, because he has special knowledge of horses."

Again the throaty chuckle. "You're a dry file, Soames. Go on. To Milly Moyle, of 12, Claremont Grove, twelve thousand pounds, free of legacy duty."

Soames paused on the verge of a whistle.

The woman in the next room!

The japing in George's eyes had turned to brooding gloom.

"It's a lot of money," Soames could not help saying.

George made a faint choleric sound.

"Write it down, or I'll leave her the lot."

Soames wrote. "Is that all?"

"Yes. Read it!"

Soames read. Again he heard that throaty chuckle. "That's a pill. You won't let THAT into the papers. Get that chap in, and you and he can witness."

Before Soames reached the door, it was opened and the man himself came in.

"The — er — vicar, sir," he said in a deprecating voice, "has called. He wants to know if you would like to see him."

George turned his face, his fleshy grey eyes rolled.

"Give him my compliments," he said, "and say I'll see him at the funeral."

With a bow the man went out, and there was silence.

"Now," said George, "get him in again. I don't know when the flag'll fall."

Soames beckoned the man in. When the codicil was signed and the man gone, George spoke:

"Take it, and see she gets it. I can trust you, that's one thing about you, Soames."

Soames pocketed the codicil with a very queer sensation.

"Would you like to see her again?" he said.

George stared up at him a long time before he answered.

"No. What's the good? Give me a cigar from that drawer."

Soames opened the drawer.

"Ought you?" he said.

George grinned. "Never in my life done what I ought; not going to begin now. Cut it for me."

Soames nipped the end of the cigar. 'Shan't give him a match,' he thought. 'Can't take the responsibility.' But George did not ask for a match. He lay quite still, the unlighted cigar between his pale lips, the curved lids down over his eyes.

"Good-bye," he said, "I'm going to have a snooze."

"Good-bye," said Soames. "I— I hope — you — you'll soon —"

George reopened his eyes — fixed, sad, jesting, they seemed to quench the shams of hope and consolation. Soames turned hastily and went out. He felt bad, and almost unconsciously turned again into the sitting-room. The woman was still in the same attitude; the same florid scent was in the air. Soames took up the umbrella he had left there, and went out.

“This is my telephone number,” he said to the servant waiting in the corridor; “let me know.”

The man bowed.

Soames turned out of Belville Row. Never had he left George’s presence without the sense of being laughed at. Had he been laughed at now? Was that codicil George’s last joke? If he had not gone in this afternoon, would George ever have made it, leaving a third of his property away from his family to that florid woman in the high-backed chair? Soames was beset by a sense of mystery. How could a man joke at death’s door? It was, in a way, heroic. Where would he be buried? Somebody would know — Francie or Eustace. And what would they think when they came to know about that woman in the chair — twelve thousand pounds! ‘If I can get hold of that white monkey, I will,’ he thought suddenly. ‘It’s a good thing.’ The monkey’s eyes, the squeezed-out fruit — was life all a bitter jest and George deeper than himself? He rang the Green Street bell.

Mrs. Dartie was very sorry, but Mrs. Cardigan had called for her to dine and make a fourth at the play.

Soames went in to dinner alone. At the polished board below which Montague Dartie had now and again slipped, if not quite slept, he dined and brooded. “I can trust you, that’s one thing about you, Soames.” The words flattered and yet stung him. The depths of that sardonic joke! To give him a family shock and trust him to carry the shock out! George had never cared twelve thousand pounds for a woman who smelled of patchouli. No! It was a final gibe at his family, the Forsytes, at Soames himself! Well! one by one those who had injured or gibed at him — Irene, Bosinney, old and young Jolyon, and now George, had met their fates. Dead, dying, or in British Columbia! He saw again his cousin’s eyes above that unlighted cigar, fixed, sad, jesting — poor devil! He got up from the table, and nervously drew aside the curtains. The night was fine and cold. What happened to one — after? George used to say that he had been Charles the Second’s cook in a former existence! But reincarnation was all nonsense, weak-minded theorising! Still, one would be glad to hold on if one could, after one was gone. Hold on, and be near Fleur! What noise was that? Gramophone going in the kitchen! When the cat was away, the mice —! People were all alike — take what they could get, and give as little as they could for it. Well! he would smoke a cigarette. Lighting it at a candle — Winifred dined by candle-light, it was the ‘mode’ again — he thought: ‘Has he still got that cigar between his teeth?’ A funny fellow, George — all his days a funny fellow! He watched a ring of smoke he had made without intending to — very blue, he never inhaled! Yes! George had lived too fast, or he would not have been dying twenty years before his lime — too fast! Well, there it was, and he wished he had a cat to talk to! He took a little monster off the mantelboard. Picked up by his nephew Benedict in an Eastern bazaar the year after the War, it had green eyes —‘Not emeralds,’ thought Soames, ‘some cheap stone!’

“The telephone for you, sir.”

He went into the hall and took up the receiver.

“Yes?”

“Mr. Forsyte has passed away, sir — in his sleep, the doctor says.”

“Oh!” said Soames: “Had he a cig —? Many thanks.” He hung up the receiver.

Passed away! And, with a nervous movement, he felt for the codicil in his breast pocket.

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Chapter XI

Venture

For a week Bicket had seen 'the job,' slippery as an eel, evasive as a swallow, for ever passing out of reach. A pound for keep, and three shillings invested on a horse, and he was down to twenty-four bob. The weather had turned sou'-westerly and Victorine had gone out for the first time. That was something off his mind, but the cramp of the unemployed sensation, that fearful craving for the means of mere existence, a protesting, agonising anxiety, was biting into the very flesh of his spirit. If he didn't get a job within a week or two, there would be nothing for it but the workhouse, or the gas. 'The gas,' thought Bicket, 'if she will, I will. I'm fed up. After all, what is it? In her arms I wouldn't mind.' Instinct, however, that it was not so easy as all that to put one's head under the gas, gave him a brainwave that Monday night. Balloons — that chap in Oxford Street today! Why not? He still had the capital for a flutter in them, and no hawker's licence needed. His brain, working like a squirrel in the small hours, grasped the great, the incalculable advantage of coloured balloons over all other forms of commerce. You couldn't miss the man who sold them — there he was for every eye to see, with his many radiant circumferences dangling in front of him! Not much profit in them, he had gathered — a penny on a sixpenny globe of coloured air, a penny on every three small twopenny globes; still their salesman was alive, and probably had pitched him a poor tale for fear of making his profession seem too attractive. Over the Bridge, just where the traffic — no, up by St. Paul's! He knew a passage where he could stand back a yard or two, like that chap in Oxford Street! But to the girl sleeping beside him he said nothing. No word to her till he had thrown the die. It meant gambling with his last penny. For a bare living he would have to sell — why, three dozen big and four dozen small balloons a day would only be twenty-six shillings a week profit, unless that chap was kidding. Not much towards 'Austrylia' out of that! And not a career — Victorine would have a shock! But it was neck or nothing now — he must try it, and in off hours go on looking for a job.

Our thin capitalist, then, with four dozen big and seven dozen small on a tray, two shillings in his pocket, and little in his stomach, took his stand off St. Paul's at two o'clock next day. Slowly he blew up and tied the necks of two large and three small, magenta, green and blue, till they dangled before him. Then with the smell of rubber in his nostrils, and protruding eyes, he stood back on the kerb and watched the stream go by. It gratified him to see that most people turned to look at him. But the first person to address him was a policeman, with:

"I'm not sure you can stand there."

Bicket did not answer, his throat felt too dry. He had heard of the police. Had he gone the wrong way to work? Suddenly he gulped, and said: "Give us a chance, constable; I'm right on my bones. If I'm in the way, I'll stand anywhere you like. This is new to me, and two bob's all I've got left in the world besides a wife."

The constable, a big man, looked him up and down. "Well, we'll see. I shan't make trouble for you if no one objects."

Bicket's gaze deepened thankfully.

"I'm much obliged," he said; "tyke one for your little girl — to please me."

"I'll buy one," said the policeman, "and give you a start. I go off duty in an hour, you 'ave it ready — a big one, magenta."

He moved away. Bicket could see him watching. Edging into the gutter, he stood quite still; his large eyes clung to every face that passed; and, now and then, his thin fingers nervously touched his wares. If Victorine could see him! All the spirit within him mounted. By Golly! he would get out of this somehow into the sun, into a life that was a life!

He had been standing there nearly two hours, shifting from foot to unaccustomed foot, and had sold four big and five small — sixpenny worth of profit — when Soames, who had changed his route to spite those fellows who couldn't get past William Gouldyng Ingerer, came by on his way to the P.P.R.S. board. Startled by a timid murmur: "Balloon, sir, best quality," he looked round from that contemplation of St. Paul's which had been his lifelong habit, and stopped in sheer surprise.

"Balloon!" he said. "What should I want with a balloon?"

Bicket smiled. Between those green and blue and orange globes and Soames' grey self-containment there was incongruity which even he could appreciate.

“Children like ’em — no weight, sir, waistcoat pocket.”

“I daresay,” said Soames, “but I’ve no children.”

“Grandchildren, sir.”

“Nor any grandchildren.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Soames gave him one of those rapid glances with which he was accustomed to gauge the character of the impecunious. ‘A poor, harmless little rat!’ he thought “Here, give me two — how much?”

“A shilling, sir, and much obliged.”

“You can keep the change,” said Soames hurriedly, and passed on, astonished. Why on earth he had bought the things, and for more than double their price, he could not conceive. He did not recollect such a thing having happened to him before. Extremely peculiar! And suddenly he realised why. The fellow had been humble, mild — to be encouraged, in these days of Communistic bravura. After all, the little chap was — was on the side of Capital, had invested in those balloons! Trade! And, raising his eyes towards St. Paul’s again, he stuffed the nasty-feeling things down into his overcoat pocket. Somebody would be taking them out, and wondering what was the matter with him! Well, he had other things to think of! . . .

Bicket, however, stared after him, elated. Two hundred and fifty odd per cent. profit on those two — that was something like. The feeling, that not enough women were passing him here, became less poignant — after all, women knew the value of money, no extra shillings out of them! If only some more of these shiny-hatted old millionaires would come along!

At six o’clock, with a profit of three and eightpence, to which Soames had contributed just half, he began to add the sighs of deflating balloons to his own; untying them with passionate care he watched his coloured hopes one by one collapse, and stored them in the drawer of his tray. Taking it under his arm, he moved his tired legs in the direction of the Bridge. In a full day he might make four to five shillings — Well, it would just keep them alive, and something might turn up! He was his own master, anyway, accountable neither to employer nor to union. That knowledge gave him a curious lightness inside, together with the fact that he had eaten nothing since breakfast.

‘Wonder if he was an alderman,’ he thought; ‘they say those aldermen live on turtle soup.’ Nearing home, he considered nervously what to do with the tray? How prevent Victorine from knowing that he had joined the ranks of Capital, and spent his day in the gutter? Ill luck! She was at the window! He must put a good face on it. And he went in whistling.

“What’s that, Tony?” she said, pointing to the tray.

“Ah! ha! Great stunt — this! Look ’ere!”

Taking a balloon out from the tray, he blew. He blew with a desperation he had not yet put into the process. They said the things would swell to five feet in circumference. He felt somehow that if he could get it to attain those proportions, it would soften everything. Under his breath the thing blotted out Victorine, and the room, till there was just the globe of coloured air. Nipping its neck between thumb and finger, he held it up, and said:

“There you are; not bad value for sixpence, old girl!” and he peered round it. Lord, she was crying! He let the ‘blymed’ thing go; it floated down, the air slowly evaporating till a little crinkled wreck rested on the dingy carpet. Clasping her heaving shoulders, he said desperately:

“Cheerio, my dear, don’t quarrel with bread and butter. I shall get a job, this is just to tide us over. I’d do a lot worse than that for you. Come on, and get my tea, I’m hungry, blowin’ up those things.”

She stopped crying, looked up, said nothing — mysterious with those big eyes! You’d say she had thoughts! But what they were Bicket could not tell. Under the stimulus of tea, he achieved a certain bravado about his new profession. To be your own master! Go out when you liked, come home when you liked — lie in bed with Vic if he jolly well pleased. A lot in that! And there rose in Bicket something truly national, something free and happy-go-lucky, resenting regular work, enjoying a spurt, and a laze-off, craving independence — something that accounted for the national life, the crowds of little shops, of middlemen, casual workers, tramps, owning their own souls in their own good time, and damning the consequences — something inherent in the land, the race, before the Saxons and their conscience and their industry came in-something that believed in swelling and collapsing coloured air, demanded pickles and high flavours without nourishment — yes, all that something exulted above Bicket's kipper and his tea, good and strong. He would rather sell balloons than be a packer any day, and don't let Vic forget it! And when she was able to take a job, they would get on fine, and not be long before they'd saved enough to get out of it to where those blue butterflies came from. And he spoke of Soames. A few more aldermen without children — say two a day, fifteen bob a week outside legitimate trade. Why, in under a year they'd have the money! And once away, Vic would blow out like one of those balloons; she'd be twice the size, and a colour in her cheeks to lay over that orange and magenta. Bicket became full of air. And the girl, his wife, watched with her large eyes and spoke little; but she did not cry again, or, indeed, throw any water, warm or cold, on him who sold balloons.

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Chapter XII

Figures and Facts

With the exception of old Fontenoy — in absence as in presence ornamental — the Board was again full; Soames, conscious of special ingratiation in the manner of 'that chap' Elderson, prepared himself for the worst. The figures were before them; a somewhat colourless show, appearing to disclose a state of things which would pass muster, if within the next six months there were no further violent disturbances of currency exchange. The proportion of foreign business to home business was duly expressed in terms of two to seven; German business, which constituted the bulk of the foreign, had been lumped — Soames noted — in the middle section, of countries only half bankrupt, and taken at what might be called a conservative estimate.

During the silence which reigned while each member of the Board digested the figures, Soames perceived more clearly than ever the quandary he was in. Certainly, these figures would hardly justify the foregoing of the dividend earned on the past year's business. But suppose there were another Continental crash and they became liable on the great bulk of their foreign business, it might swamp all profits on home business next year, and more besides. And then his uneasiness about Elderson himself — founded he could not tell on what, intuitive, perhaps silly.

"Well, Mr. Forsyte," the chairman was speaking; "there are the figures. Are you satisfied?"

Soames looked up; he had taken a resolution.

"I will agree to this year's dividend on condition that we drop this foreign business in future, lock, stock and barrel." The manager's eyes hard and bright, met his, then turned towards the chairman.

"That appears to savour of the panicky," he said; "the foreign business is responsible for a good third of our profit this year."

The chairman seemed to garner the expressions of his fellow-directors, before he said:

"There is nothing in the foreign situation at the moment, Mr. Forsyte, which gives particular cause for alarm. I admit that we should watch it closely —"

"You can't," interjected Soames. "Here we are four years from the Armistice, and we know no more where we stand than we did then. If I'd realised our commitment to this policy, I should never have come on the Board. We must drop it."

"Rather an extreme view. And hardly a matter we can decide in a moment."

The murmur of assent, the expression, faintly ironical, of 'that chap's' lips, jolted the tenacity in Soames.

"Very well! Unless you're prepared to tell the shareholders in the report that we are dropping foreign business, you drop me. I must be free to raise the question myself at the general meeting." He did not miss the shift and blink in the manager's eyes. That shot had gone home!

The Chairman said:

"You put a pistol to our heads."

"I am responsible to the shareholders," said Soames, "and I shall do my duty by them."

"So we all are, Mr. Forsyte; and I hope we shall all do our duty."

"Why not confine the foreign business to the small countries — their currency is safe enough?"

'Old Mont,' and his precious 'ring!'

"No," said Soames, "we must go back to safety."

"Splendid isolation, Forsyte?"

"Meddling was all very well in the war, but in peace — politics or business — this half-and-half interference is no good. We can't control the foreign situation."

He looked around him, and was instantly conscious that with those words he had struck a chord. 'I'm going through with this!' he thought.

"I should be glad, Mr. Chairman"— the manager was speaking —"if I might say a word. The policy was of my initiation, and I think I may claim that it has been of substantial benefit to the Society so far. When, however, a member of the Board takes so strong a view against its continuance, I certainly don't press the Board to continue it. The times ARE uncertain, and a risk, of course, is involved, however conservative our estimates."

'Now why?' thought Soames: 'What's he ratting for?'

"That's very handsome of you, Elderson; Mr. Chairman, I think we may say that is very handsome of our manager."

Old Dosey Cosey! Handsome! The old woman!

The Chairman's rather harsh voice broke a silence.

"This is a very serious point of policy. I should have been glad to have Lord Fontenoy present."

"If I am to endorse the report," said Soames shortly, "it must be decided today. I have made up my mind. But please yourselves."

He threw in those last three words from a sort of fellow feeling — it was unpleasant to be dragooned! A moment's silence, and then discussion assumed that random volubility which softens a decision already forced on one. A quarter of an hour thus passed before the Chairman said:

"We are agreed then, gentlemen, that the report shall contain the announcement that, in view of Continental uncertainty, we are abandoning foreign risks for the present."

Soames had won. Relieved and puzzled, he walked away alone.

He had shown character; their respect for him had gone up, he could see; their liking for him down, if they'd ever had any — he didn't know! But why had Elderson veered round? He recalled the shift and blink of the fellow's steely eyes at the idea of the question being raised at the general meeting.

That had done it! But why? Were the figures faked? Surely not! That would be too difficult, in the face of the accountants. If Soames had faith, it was in chartered accountants. Sandis and Jevon were tip-top people. It couldn't be that! He glanced up from the pavement. The dome of St. Paul's was dim already in evening sky — nothing to be had out of it! He felt badly in need of some one to talk to; but there was nobody; and he quickened his pace among the hurrying crowd. His hand, driven deep into his overcoat pocket, came into sudden contact with some foreign sticky substance. 'Gracious!' he thought: 'those things!' Should he drop them in the gutter? If only there were a child he could take them home to! He must get Annette to speak to Fleur. He knew what came of bad habits from his own experience of long ago. Why shouldn't he speak to her himself? He was staying the night there! But there came on him a helpless sense of ignorance. These young people! What did they really think and feel? Was old Mont right? Had they given up interest in everything except the moment, abandoned all belief in continuity, and progress? True enough that Europe was in Queer Street. But look at the state of things after the Napoleonic Wars. He couldn't remember his grandfather 'Superior Dosset,' the old chap had died five years before he was born, but he perfectly remembered how Aunt Ann, born in 1799, used to talk about "that dreadful Bonaparte — we used to call him Boney, my dear;" of how her father could get eight or ten per cent. for his money; and of what an impression 'those Chartists' had made on Aunts Juley and Hester, and that was long afterwards. Yet, in spite of all that, look at the Victorian era — a golden age, things worth collecting, children worth having! Why not again! Consols had risen almost continuously since Timothy died. Even if Heaven and Hell had gone, they couldn't be the reason; none of his uncles had believed in either, and yet had all made fortunes, and all had families, except Timothy and Swithin. No! It couldn't be the want of Heaven and Hell! What, then, was the reason of the change — if change there really were? And suddenly it was revealed to Soames. They talked too much — too much and too fast! They got to the end of interest in this and that and the other. They ate life and threw away the rind, and — and —. By the way, he must buy that picture of George's! . . . Had these young folk more mind than his own generation? And if so — why? Was it diet? That lobster cocktail Fleur had given him the Sunday before last. He had eaten the thing — very nasty! But it hadn't made him want to talk. No! He didn't think it could be diet. Besides — Mind! Where were the minds now that equalled the Victorians — Darwin, Huxley, Dickens, Disraeli, even old Gladstone? Why, he remembered judges and advocates who seemed giants compared with those of the present day, just as he remembered that the judges of James his father's youth had seemed giants to James compared with those of Soames' prime. According to that, mind was steadily declining. It must be something else. There was a thing they called psycho-analysis, which so far as he could understand attributed people's action not to what they ate at breakfast, or the leg they got out of bed with, as in the good old days, but to some shock they had received in the remote past and entirely forgotten. The subconscious mind! Fads! Fads and microbes! The fact was this generation had no digestion. His father and his uncles had all complained of liver, but they had never had anything the matter with them — no need of any of these vitamins, false teeth, mental healing, newspapers, psychoanalysis, spiritualism, birth control, osteopathy, broadcasting, and what not. 'Machines!' thought Soames. 'That's it — I shouldn't wonder!' How could you believe in anything when everything was going round so fast? When you couldn't count your chickens — they ran about so? But Fleur had got a good little head on her! 'Yes,' he mused, 'and French teeth, she can digest anything. Two years! I'll speak to her before she gets the habit confirmed. Her mother was quick enough about it!' And perceiving the Connoisseurs' Club in front of him, he went in.

The hall porter came out of his box. A gentleman was waiting.

"What gentleman?" said Soames, sidelong.

"I think he's your nephew, sir, Mr. Dartie."

"Val Dartie! H'm! Where?"

"In the little room, sir."

The little room — all the accommodation considered worthy of such as were not Connoisseurs — was at the end of a passage, and in no taste at all, as if the Club were saying: "See what it is not to be one of us!" Soames entered it, and saw Val Dartie smoking a cigarette and gazing with absorption at the only object of interest, his own reflection in the glass above the fire.

He never saw his nephew without wondering when he would say: "Look here, Uncle Soames, I'm up a stump." Breeding race horses! There could only be one end to that!

"Well?" he said, "how are YOU?"

The face in the glass turned round, and became the back of a clipped sandyish head.

"Oh! bobbish, thanks! YOU look all right, Uncle Soames. I just wanted to ask you: Must I take these screws of old George Forsyte's? They're dashed bad."

"Gift horse in the mouth?" said Soames.

"Well," said Val, "but they're SO dashed bad; by the time I've paid legacy duty, boxed them to a sale, and sold them, there won't be a sixpence. One of them falls down when you look at it. And the other two are broken-winded. The poor old boy kept them, because he couldn't get rid of them. They're about five hundred years old."

"Thought you were fond of horses," said Soames. "Can't you turn them out?"

"Yes," said Val, drily; "but I've got my living to make. I haven't told my wife, for fear she should suggest that. I'm afraid I might see them in my dreams if I sold them. They're only fit for the kennels. Can I write to the executors and say I'm not rich enough to take them?"

"You can," said Soames, and the words: "How's your wife?" died unspoken on his lips. She was the daughter of his enemy, young Jolyon. That fellow was dead, but the fact remained.

"I will, then," said Val. "How did his funeral go off?"

"Very simple affair — I had nothing to do with it." The days of funerals were over. No flowers, no horses, no plumes — a motor hearse, a couple of cars or so, was all the attention paid nowadays to the dead. Another sign of the times!

"I'm staying the night at Green Street," said Val. "I suppose you're not there, are you?"

"No," said Soames, and did not miss the relief in his nephew's countenance.

"Oh! by the way, Uncle Soames — do you advise me to buy P.P.R.S. shares?"

"On the contrary. I'm going to advise your mother to sell. Tell her I'm coming in tomorrow."

"Why? I thought —"

"Never mind my reasons!" said Soames shortly.

"So long, then!"

Exchanging a chilly hand-shake, he watched his nephew withdraw.

So long! An expression, old as the Boer war, that he had never got used to — meant nothing so far as he could see! He entered the reading-room. A number of Connoisseurs were sitting and standing about, and Soames, least clubbable of men, sought the solitude of an embrasured window. He sat there polishing the nail of one forefinger against the back of the other, and chewing the cud of life. After all, what was the point of anything. There was George! He had had an easy life — never done any work! And here was himself, who had done a lot of work! And sooner or later they would bury him too, with a motor hearse probably! And there was his son-inlaw, young Mont, full of talk about goodness knew what — and that thin-cheeked chap who had sold him the balloons this afternoon. And old Fontenoy, and that waiter over there; and the out-of-works and the inworks; and those chaps in Parliament, and the parsons in their pulpits — what were they all for? There was the old gardener down at Mapledurham pushing his roller over and over the lawn, week after week, and if he didn't, what would the lawn be like? That was life — gardener rolling lawn! Put it that there was another life — he didn't believe it, but for the sake of argument — that life must be just the same. Rolling lawn — to keep it lawn! What point in lawn? Conscious of pessimism, he rose. He had better be getting back to Fleur's — they dressed for dinner! He supposed there was something in dressing for dinner, but it was like lawn — you came unrolled — undressed again, and so it went on! Over and over and over to keep up to a pitch, that was — ah! what WAS the pitch for?

Turning into South Square, he cannoned into a young man, whose head was craned back as if looking after some one he had parted from. Uncertain whether to apologise or to wait for an apology, Soames stood still.

The young man said abruptly: "Sorry, sir," and moved on; dark, neat-looking chap with a hungry look obviously unconnected with his stomach. Murmuring: "Not at all!" Soames moved forward and rang his daughter's bell. She opened to him herself. She was in hat and furs — just in. The young man recurred to Soames. Had he left her there? What a pretty face it was! He should certainly speak to her. If she once took to gadding about!

He put it off, however, till he was about to say "Goodnight"— Michael having gone to the political meeting of a Labour candidate, as if he couldn't find something better to do!

"Now you've been married two years, my child, I suppose you'll be looking towards the future. There's a great deal of nonsense talked about children. The whole thing's much simpler. I hope you feel that."

Flour was leaning back among the cushions of the settee, swinging her foot. Her eyes became a little restless, but her colour did not change.

"Of course!" she said; "only there's no hurry, Dad."

"Well, I don't know," Soames murmured. "The French and the royal family have a very sound habit of getting it over early. There's many a slip and it keeps them out of mischief. You're very attractive, my child — I don't want to see you take too much to gad-about ways. You've got all sorts of friends."

"Yes," said Fleur.

"You get on well with Michael, don't you?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well, then, why not? You must remember that your son will be a what-you-call-it."

In those words he compromised with his instinctive dislike of titles and flummery of that nature.

"It mightn't be a son," said Fleur.

"At your age that's easily remedied."

"Oh, I don't want a lot, Dad. One, perhaps, or two."

"Well," said Soames, "I should almost prefer a daughter, something like — well, something like you."

Her softened eyes flew, restive, from his face to her foot, to the dog, all over the room.

"I don't know, it's a tie — like digging your own grave in a way."

"I shouldn't put it as high as that," murmured Soames, persuasively.

"No man would, Dad."

"Your mother wouldn't have got on at all without you," and recollection of how near her mother had been to not getting on at all with her — of how, but for him, she would have made a mess of it, reduced him to silent contemplation of the restive foot.

"Well," he said, at last, "I thought I'd mention it. I— I've got your happiness at heart."

Fleur rose and kissed his forehead.

"I know, Dad," she said: "I'm a selfish pig. I'll think about it. In fact, I— I have thought about it."

“That’s right,” said Soames; “that’s right! You’ve a good head on you — it’s a great consolation to me. Goodnight, my dear!”

And he went up to his bed. If there was point in anything, it was in perpetuation of oneself, though, of course, that begged the question. ‘Wonder,’ he thought, ‘if I ought to have asked her whether that young man —!’ But young people were best left alone. The fact was, he didn’t understand them. His eye lighted on the paper bag containing those — those things he had bought. He had brought them up from his overcoat to get rid of them — but how? Put into the fire, they would make a smell. He stood at his dressing-table, took one up and looked at it. Good Lord! And, suddenly, rubbing the mouthpiece with his handkerchief, he began to blow the thing up. He blew until his cheeks were tired, and then, nipping the aperture, took a bit of the dental cotton he used on his teeth every night and tied it up. There the thing was! With a pettish gesture he batted the balloon. Off it flew — purple and extravagant, alighting on his bed. H’m! He took up the other, and did the same to it. Purple and green! The deuce! If any one came in and saw! He threw up the window, batted them, balloon after balloon, into the night, and shut the window down. There they’d be in the dark, floating about. His lips contracted in a nervous grin. People would see them in the morning. Well! What else could you do with things like that?

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Chapter XIII

Tenterhooks

Michael had gone to the Labour candidate's meeting partly because he wanted to, and partly out of fellow feeling for 'old Forsyte,' whom he was always conscious of having robbed. His father-inlaw had been very decent about Fleur, and he liked the 'old man' to have her to himself when he could.

In a constituency which had much casual and no trades-union labour to speak of, the meeting would be one of those which enabled the intellectuals of the Party to get it 'off their chests.' Sentiment being 'slop,' and championship mere condescension, one might look for sound economic speeches which left out discredited factors, such as human nature. Michael was accustomed to hearing people disparaged for deprecating change because human nature was constant; he was accustomed to hearing people despised for feeling compassion; he knew that one ought to be purely economic. And anyway that kind of speech was preferable to the tub-thumpings of the North or of the Park, which provoked a nasty underlying class spirit in himself.

The meeting was in full swing when he arrived, the candidate pitilessly exposing the fallacies of a capitalism which, in his view, had brought on the war. For fear that it should bring on another, it must be changed for a system which would ensure that nations should not want anything too much. The individual — said the candidate — was in every respect superior to the nation of which he formed a part; and the problem before them was to secure an economic condition which would enable the individual to function freely in his native superiority. In that way alone, he said, would they lose those mass movements and emotions which imperilled the sanity of the world. He spoke well. Michael listened, purring almost audibly, till he found that he was thinking of himself, Wilfrid and Fleur. Would he ever function so freely in a native superiority that he did not want Fleur too much? And did he wish to? He did not. That seemed to introduce human nature into the speaker's argument. Didn't everybody want something too much? Wasn't it natural? And if so, wouldn't there always be a collective wanting too much — poolings of primary desire, such as the desire of keeping your own head above water? The candidate's argument seemed to him suddenly to leave out heat, to omit friction, to be that of a man in an armchair after a poor lunch. He looked attentively at the speaker's shrewd, dry, doubting face. 'No juice!' he thought. And when 'the chap' sat down, he got up and left the hall.

This Wilfrid business had upset him horribly. Try as he had to put it out of his mind, try as he would to laugh it off, it continued to eat into his sense of security and happiness. Wife and best friend! A hundred times a day he assured himself that he trusted Fleur. Only, Wilfrid was so much more attractive than himself, and Fleur deserved the best of everything. Besides, Wilfrid was going through torture, and it was not a pleasant thought! How end the thing, restore peace of mind to himself, to him, to her? She had told him nothing; and it simply was impossible to ask. No way even of showing his anxiety! The whole thing was just 'dark,' and, so far as he could see, would have to stay so; nothing to be done but screw the lid on tighter, be as nice as he could to her, try not to feel bitter about him. Hades!

He turned down Chelsea Embankment. Here the sky was dark and wide and streaming with stars. The river wide, dark and gleaming with oily rays from the Embankment lamps. The width of it all gave him relief. Dash the dumps! A jolly, queer, muddled, sweet and bitter world; an immensely intriguing game of chance, no matter how the cards were falling at the moment! In the trenches he had thought: 'Get out of this, and I'll never mind anything again!' How seldom now he remembered thinking that! The human body renewed itself — they said — in seven years. In three years' time his body would not be the body of the trenches, but a whole-time peace body with a fading complex. If only Fleur would tell him quite openly what she felt, what she was doing about Wilfrid, for she must be doing something! And Wilfrid's verse? Would his confounded passion — as Bart suggested — flow in poetry? And if so, who would publish it? A miserable business! Well the night was beautiful, and the great thing not to be a pig. Beauty and not being a pig! Nothing much else to it — except laughter — the comic side! Keep one's sense of humour, anyway! And Michael searched, while he strode beneath plane trees half-stripped of leaves and plume-like in the dark, for the fun in his position. He failed to find it. There seemed absolutely nothing funny about love. Possibly he might fall out of love again some day, but not so long as she kept him on her tenterhooks. Did she do it on purpose? Never! Fleur simply could not be like those women who kept their husbands hungry and fed them when they wanted dresses, furs, jewels. Revolting!

He came in sight of Westminster. Only half-past ten! Suppose he took a cab to Wilfrid’s rooms, and tried to have it out with him. It would be like trying to make the hands of a clock move backwards to its ticking. What use in saying: “You love Fleur — well, don’t!” or in Wilfrid saying it to him. ‘After all, I was first with Fleur,’ he thought. Pure chance, perhaps, but fact! Ah! And wasn’t that just the danger? He was no longer a novelty to her — nothing unexpected about him now! And he and she had agreed times without number that novelty was the salt of life, the essence of interest and drama. Novelty now lay with Wilfrid! Lord! Lord! Possession appeared far from being nine points of the law! He rounded-in from the Embankment towards home — jolly part of London, jolly Square; everything jolly except just this infernal complication. Something, soft as a large leaf, tapped twice against his ear. He turned, astonished; he was in empty space, no tree near. Floating in the darkness, a round thing — he grabbed, it bobbed. What? A child’s balloon! He secured it between his hands, took it beneath a lamp-post — green, he judged. Queer! He looked up. Two windows lighted, one of them Fleur’s! Was this the bubble of his own happiness expelled? Morbid! Silly ass! Some gust of wind — a child’s plaything lodged and loosened! He held the balloon gingerly. He would take it in and show it to her. He put his latch-key in the door. Dark in the hall — gone up! He mounted, swinging the balloon on his finger. Fleur was standing before a mirror.

“What on earth’s that?” she said.

The blood returned to Michael’s heart. Curious how he had dreaded its having anything to do with her!

“Don’t know, darling; fell on my hat — must belong to heaven.” And he batted it.

The balloon floated, dropped, bounded twice, wobbled and came to rest.

“You ARE a baby, Michael. I believe you bought it.”

Michael came closer, and stood quite still.

“My hat! What a misfortune to be in love!”

“You think so!”

“Il y a toujours un qui baise, et l’autre qui ne tend pas la joue.”

“But I do.”

“Fleur!”

Fleur smiled.

“Baise away.”

Embracing her, Michael thought: ‘She holds me — does with me what she likes; I know nothing of her!’

And there arose a small sound — from Ting-a-ling smelling the balloon.

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PART II

CHAPTER I

THE MARK FALLS

The state of the world had been getting more and more on Soames' nerves ever since the general meeting of the P. P. R. S. It had gone off with that fatuity long associated by him with such gatherings — a watertight rigmarole from the chairman; butter from two reliable shareholders; vinegar from shareholders not so reliable; and the usual 'gup' over the dividend. He had gone there glum, come away glummer. From a notion once taken into his head Soames parted more slowly than a cheese parts from its mites. Two-sevenths of foreign business, nearly all German! And the mark falling! It had begun to fall from the moment that he decided to support the dividend. And why? What was in the wind? Contrary to his custom, he had taken to sniffing closely the political columns of his paper. The French — he had always mistrusted them, especially since his second marriage — the French were going to play old Harry, if he was not greatly mistaken! Their papers, he noticed, never lost a chance of having a dab at English policy; seemed to think they could always call the tune for England to pipe to! And the mark and the franc, and every other sort of money, falling. And, though in Soames was that which rejoiced in the thought that one of his country's bits of paper could buy a great quantity of other countries' bits of paper, there was also that which felt the whole thing silly and unreal, with an ever-growing consciousness that the P. P. R. S. would pay no dividend next year. The P. P. R. S. was a big concern; no dividend would be a sign, no small one, of bad management. Assurance was one of the few things on God's earth which could and should be conducted without real risk. But for that he would never have gone on the Board. And to find assurance had not been so conducted and that by himself, was — well! He had caused Winifred to sell, anyway, though the shares had already fallen slightly. "I thought it was such a good thing, Soames," she had said plaintively: "it's rather a bore, losin' money on the shares." He had answered without mercy: "If you don't sell, you'll lose more." And she had done it. If the Rogers and Nicholases who had followed him into it hadn't sold too — well, it was their look out! He had made Winifred warn them. As for himself, he had nothing but his qualifying shares, and the missing of a dividend or two would not hurt one whose director's fees more than compensated. It was not, therefore, private uneasiness so much as resentment at a state of things connected with foreigners and the slur on his infallibility.

Christmas had gone off quietly at Mapledurham. He abominated Christmas, and only observed it because his wife was French, and her national festival New Year's Day. One could not go so far as to observe that, encouraging a foreign notion. But Christmas with no child about — he still remembered the holly and snapdragons of Park Lane in his own childhood — the family parties; and how disgusted he had been if he got anything symbolic — the thimble, or the ring — instead of the shilling. They had never gone in for Santa Claus at Park Lane, partly because they could see through the old gentleman, and partly because he was not at all a late thing. Emily, his mother, had seen to that. Yes; and, by the way, that William Gouldyng, Ingerer, had so stumped those fellows at the Heralds' College, that Soames had dropped the enquiry — it was just encouraging them to spend his money for a sentimental satisfaction which did not materialise. That narrow-headed chap, 'Old Mont,' peacocked about his ancestry; all the more reason for having no ancestry to peacock about. The Forsytes and the Goldings were good English country stock — that was what mattered. And if Fleur and her child, if one came, had French blood in them — well, he couldn't help it now.

In regard to the coming of a grandchild, Soames knew no more than in October. Fleur had spent Christmas with the Monts; she was promised to him, however, before long, and her mother must ask her a question or two!

The weather was extremely mild; Soames had even been out in a punt fishing. In a heavy coat he trailed a line for perch and dace, and caught now and then a roach — precious little good, the servants wouldn't eat them, nowadays! His grey eyes would brood over the grey water under the grey sky; and in his mind the mark would fall. It fell with a bump on that eleventh of January when the French went and occupied the Ruhr. He said to Annette at breakfast: "Your country's cracked! Look at the mark now!"

"What do I care about the mark?" she had answered over her coffee. "I care that they shall not come again into my country. I hope they will suffer a little what we have suffered."

"You," said Soames; "you never suffered anything."

Annette put her hand where Soames sometimes doubted the existence of a heart.

"I suffered here," she said.

"I didn't notice it. You never went without butter. What do you suppose Europe's going to be like now for the next thirty years! How about British trade?"

"We French see before our noses," said Annette with warmth. "We see that the beaten must be kept the beaten, or he will take revenge. You English are so sloppy."

"Sloppy, are we?" said Soames. "You're talking like a child. Could a sloppy people ever have reached our position in the world?"

"That is your selfishness. You are cold and selfish."

"Cold, selfish and sloppy — they don't go together. Try again."

"Your slop is in your thought and your talk; it is your instinct that gives you your success, and your English instinct is cold and selfish, Soames. You are a mixture, all of you, of hypocrisy, stupidity and egoism."

Soames took some marmalade.

"Well," he said, "and what are the French? — cynical, avaricious and revengeful. And the Germans are sentimental, heady and brutal. We can all abuse each other. There's nothing for it but to keep clear. And that's what you French won't do."

Annette's handsome person stiffened.

"When you are tied to a person, as I am tied to you, Soames, or as we French are tied to the Germans, it is necessary to be top dog, or to be bottom dog."

Soames stayed his toast.

"Do you suppose yourself top dog in this house?"

"Yes, Soames."

"Oh! Then you can go back to France tomorrow."

Annette's eyebrows rose quizzically.

"I would wait a little longer, my friend; you are still too young."

But Soames had already regretted his remark; he did not wish any such disturbance at his time of life, and he said more calmly:

"Compromise is the essence of any reasonable existence between individuals or nations. We can't have the fat thrown into the fire every few years."

"That is so English," murmured Annette. "We others never know what you English will do. You always wait to see which way the cat jumps."

However deeply sympathetic with such a reasonable characteristic, Soames would have denied it at any ordinary moment — to confess to temporising was not, as it were, done. But, with the mark falling like a cartload of bricks, he was heated to the point of standing by his nature.

"And why shouldn't we? Rushing into things that you'll have to rush out of! I don't want to argue. French and English never did get on, and never will."

Annette rose. "You speak the truth, my friend. Entente, mais pas cordiale. What are you doing today?"

"Going up to town," said Soames glumly. "Your precious Government has put business into Queer Street with a vengeance."

"Do you stay the night?"

"I don't know."

"Adieu, then, jusqu' au revoir!" And she got up.

Soames remained brooding above his marmalade — with the mark falling in his mind — glad to see the last of her handsome figure, having no patience at the moment for French tantrums. An irritable longing to say to somebody "I told you so" possessed him. He would have to wait, however, till he found somebody to say it to.

A beautiful day, quite warm; and, taking his umbrella as an assurance against change, he set out for the station.

In the carriage going up they were talking about the Ruhr. Averse from discussion in public, Soames listened from behind his paper. The general sentiment was surprisingly like his own. In so far as it was unpleasant for the Huns — all right; in so far as it was unpleasant for British trade — all wrong; in so far as love of British trade was active and hate of Huns now passive — more wrong than right. A Francophil remark that the French were justified in making themselves safe at all costs, was coldly received. At Maidenhead a man got in whom Soames connected automatically with disturbance. He had much grey hair, a sanguine face, lively eyes, twisting eyebrows, and within five minutes had asked in a breezy voice whether anyone had heard of the League of Nations. Confirmed in his estimate, Soames looked round the corner of his paper. Yes, that chap would get off on some hobby-horse or other! And there he went! The question — said the newcomer — was not whether the Germans should get one in the eye, the British one in the pocket, or the French one in the heart, but whether the world should get peace and goodwill. Soames lowered his paper. If — this fellow said — they wanted peace, they must sink their individual interests, and think in terms of collective interest. The good of all was the good of one! Soames saw the flaw at once. That might be, but the good of one was not the good of all. He felt that if he did not take care he would be pointing this out. The man was a perfect stranger to him, and no good ever came of argument. Unfortunately his silence amid the general opinion that the League of Nations was 'no earthly,' seemed to cause the newcomer to regard him as a sympathiser; the fellow kept on throwing his eyebrows at him! To put up his paper again seemed too pointed, and his position was getting more and more false when the train ran in at Paddington. He hastened to a cab. A voice behind him said:

"Hopeless lot, sir, eh! Glad to see YOU saw my point."

"Quite!" said Soames. "Taxi!"

"Unless the League of Nations functions, we're all for Gehenna."

Soames turned the handle of the cab door.

"Quite!" he said again. "Poultry!" and got in. He was not going to be drawn. The fellow was clearly a firebrand!

In the cab the measure of his disturbance was revealed. He had said 'Poultry,' an address that 'Forsyte, Bustard and Forsyte' had abandoned two-and-twenty years ago when, merged with 'Cuthcott, Holliday and Kingson,' they became 'Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte.' Rectifying the error, he sat forward, brooding. Fall of the mark! The country was sound about it, yes — but when they failed to pay the next dividend, could they rely on resentment against the French instead of against the directors? Doubtful! The directors ought to have seen it coming! That might be said of the other directors, but not of himself — here was a policy that he personally never would have touched. If only he could discuss the whole thing with some one — but old Gradman would be out of his depth in a matter of this sort. And, on arrival at his office, he gazed with a certain impatience at that changeless old fellow, sitting in his swivel chair.

"Ah! Mr. Soames, I was hopin' you might come in this morning. There's a young man been round to see you from the P. P. R. S. Wouldn't give his business, said he wanted to see you privately. Left his number on the 'phone."

"Oh!" said Soames.

"Quite a young feller — in the office."

"What did he look like?"

"Nice, clean young man. I was quite favourably impressed — name of Butterfield."

"Well, ring him up, and let him know I'm here." And going over to the window, he stood looking out on to a perfectly blank wall.

Suited to a sleeping partner, his room was at the back, free from disturbance. Young man! The call was somewhat singular! And he said over his shoulder: "Don't go when he comes, Gradman, I know nothing of him."

The world changed, people died off, the mark fell, but Gradman was there — embodiment, faithful and grey, of service and integrity — an anchor.

Gradman's voice, grating, ingratiating, rose.

"This French news — it's not nice, Mr. Soames. They're a hasty lot. I remember your father, Mr. James, coming into the office the morning the Franco-Prussian war was declared — quite in his prime then, hardly more than sixty, I should say. Why, I recall his very words: 'There,' he said, 'I told them so.' And here they are — at it still. The fact is, they're cat and dog.”

Soames, who had half turned, resumed his contemplation of a void. Poor old Gradman dated! What would he say when he heard that they had been insuring foreign business? Stimulated by the old-time quality of Gradman’s presence, his mind ranged with sudden freedom. He himself had another twenty years, perhaps. What would he see in that time? Where would old England be at the end of it? ‘In spite of the papers, we’re not such fools as we look,’ he thought. ‘If only we can steer clear of flibberty-gibberting, and pay our way!’

“Mr. Butterfield, sir.” H’m! The young man had been very spry. Covered by Gradman’s bluff and greasy greeting, he “took a lunar,” as his Uncle Roger used to call it. The young fellow, in a neat suit, a turndown collar, with his hat in his hand, was a medium modest-looking chap. Soames nodded.

“You want to see me?”

“Alone, if I might, sir.”

“Mr. Gradman here is my right-hand man.”

Gradman’s voice purred gratingly: “You can state your business. Nothing goes outside these walls, young man.”

“I’m in the office of the P.P.R.S., sir. The fact is, accident has just put some information in my hands, and I’m not easy in my mind. Knowing you to be a solicitor, sir, I preferred to come to you, rather than go to the chairman. As a lawyer, would you tell me: Is my first duty to the Society, being in their employ?”

“Certainly,” said Soames.

“I don’t like this job, sir, and I hope you’ll understand that I’m not here for any personal motive — it’s just because I feel I ought to.”

Soames regarded him steadily. Though large and rather swimming, the young man’s eyes impressed him by their resemblance to a dog’s. “What’s it all about?” he said.

The young man moistened his lips.

“The insurance of our German business, sir.”

Soames pricked his ears, already slightly pointed by Nature.

“It’s a very serious matter,” the young man went on, “and I don’t know how it’ll affect me, but the fact is, this morning I overheard a private conversation.”

“Oh!” said Soames.

“Yes, sir. I quite understand your tone, but the very first words did it. I simply couldn’t make myself known after hearing them. I think you’ll agree, sir.”

“Who were the speakers?”

“The manager, and a man called Smith — I fancy by his accent his name’s a bit more foreign — who’s done most of the agenting for the German business.”

“What were the words?” said Soames.

“Well, sir, the manager was speaking, and then this Smith said: ‘Quite so, Mr. Elderson, but we haven’t paid you a commission on all this business for nothing; if the mark goes absolutely phut, you will have to see that your Society makes it good for us!’”

The intense longing, which at that moment came on Soames to emit a whistle, was checked by sight of Gradman’s face. The old fellow’s mouth had opened in the nest of his grizzly short beard; his eyes stared puglike, he uttered a prolonged: “A-ow!”

“Yes,” said the young man, “it was a knock-out!”

“Where were you?” asked Soames, sharply.

“In the lobby between the manager’s room and the board room. I’d just come from sorting some papers in the boardroom, and the manager’s door was open an inch or so. Of course I know the voices well.”

“What after?”

“I heard Mr. Elderson say, ‘H’ssh! Don’t talk like that!’ and I slipped back into the board room. I’d had more than enough, sir, I assure you.”

Suspicion and surmise clogged Soames' thinking apparatus. Was this young fellow speaking the truth? A man like Elderson — the risk was monstrous! And, if true, what was the directors' responsibility? But proof — proof? He stared at the young man, who looked upset and pale enough, but whose eyes did not waver. Shake him if he could! And he said sharply:

"Now mind what you're saying! This is most serious!"

"I know that, sir. If I'd consulted my own interest, I'd never have come here. I'm not a sneak."

The words rang true, but Soames did not drop his caution.

"Ever had any trouble in the office?"

"No, sir, you can make enquiry. I've nothing against Mr. Elderson, and he's nothing against me."

Soames thought suddenly: 'Good heavens! He's shifted it on to me, and in the presence of a witness! And I supplied the witness!'

"Have you any reason to suppose," he said, "that they became aware of your being there?"

"They couldn't have, I think."

The implications of this news seemed every second more alarming. It was as if Fate, kept at bay all his life by clever wrist-work, had suddenly slipped a thrust under his guard. No good to get rattled, however — must think it out at leisure!

"Are you prepared, if necessary, to repeat this to the Board?"

The young man pressed his hands together.

"Well, sir, I'd much rather have held my tongue; but if you decide it's got to be taken up, I suppose I must go through with it now. I'm sure I hope you'll decide to leave it alone; perhaps it isn't true — only why didn't Mr. Elderson say: 'You ruddy liar!'?"

Exactly! Why didn't he? Soames gave a grunt of intense discomfort.

"Anything more?" he said.

"No, sir."

"Very well. You've not told anyone?"

"No, sir."

"Then don't, and leave it to me."

"I'll be only too happy to, sir. Good-morning!"

"Good-morning!"

No — very bad morning! No satisfaction whatever in this sudden fulfilment of his prophetic feeling about Elderson. None!

"What d'you think of that young fellow, Gradman? Is he lying?"

Thus summoned, as it were, from stupor, Gradman thoughtfully rubbed a nose both thick and shining.

"It's one word against another, Mr. Soames, unless you get more evidence. But I can't see what the young man has to gain by it."

"Nor I; but you never know. The trouble will be to get more evidence. Can I act without it?"

"It's delicate," said Gradman. And Soames knew that he was thrown back on himself. When Gradman said a thing was delicate, it meant that it was the sort of matter on which he was accustomed to wait for orders — presumptuous even to hold opinion! But had he got one? Well, one would never know! The old chap would sit and rub his nose over it till Kingdom Come.

"I shan't act in a hurry," he said, almost angrily: "I can't see to the end of this."

Every hour confirmed that statement. At lunch the tape of his city club showed the mark still falling — to unheard-of depths! How they could talk of golf, with this business on his mind, he could not imagine!

"I must go and see that fellow," he said to himself. "I shall be guarded. He may throw some light." He waited until three o'clock and repaired to the P. P. R. S.

Reaching the office, he sought the Board room. The chairman was there in conference with the manager. Soames sat down quietly to listen; and while he listened he watched that fellow's face. It told him nothing. What nonsense people talked when they said you could tell character from faces! Only a perfect idiot's face could be read like that. And here was a man of experience and culture, one who knew every rope of business life and polite society. The hairless, neat features exhibited no more concern than the natural mortification of one whose policy had met with such a nasty knock. The drop of the mark had already wiped out any possible profit on the next half-year. Unless the wretched thing recovered, they would be carrying a practically dead load of German insurance. Really it was criminal that no limit of liability had been fixed! How on earth could he ever have overlooked that when he came on the Board? But he had only known of it afterwards. And who could have foreseen anything so mad as this Ruhr business, or realised the slack confidence of his colleagues in this confounded fellow? The words "gross negligence" appeared 'close up' before his eyes. What if an action lay against the Board! Gross negligence! At his age and with his reputation! Why! The thing was plain as a pikestaff; for omitting a limit of liability this chap had got his commission! Ten per cent, probably, on all that business — he must have netted thousands! A man must be in Queer Street indeed to take a risk like that! But conscious that his fancy was running on, Soames rose, and turned his back. The action suggested another. Simulate anger, draw some sign from that fellow's self-control! He turned again, and said pettishly: "What on earth were you about, Mr. Manager, when you allowed these contracts to go through without limit of liability? A man of your experience! What was your motive?"

A slight narrowing of the eyes, a slight compression of the lips. He had relied on the word 'motive,' but the fellow passed it by.

"For such high premiums as we have been getting, Mr. Forsyte, a limited liability was not possible. This is a most outrageous development, and I'm afraid it must be considered just bad luck."

"Unfortunately," said Soames, "there's no such thing as luck in properly regulated assurance, as we shall find, or I'm much mistaken. I shouldn't be surprised if an action lay against the Board for gross negligence!"

That had got the chairman's goat! — Got his goat? What expressions they used nowadays! Or did it mean the opposite? One never knew! But as for Elderson — he seemed to Soames to be merely counterfeiting a certain flusteration. Futile to attempt to spring anything out of a chap like that. If the thing were true, the fellow must be entirely desperate, prepared for anything and everything. And since from Soames the desperate side of life — the real holes, the impossible positions which demand a gambler's throw — had always been carefully barred by the habits of a prudent nature, he found it now impossible to imagine Elderson's state of mind, or his line of conduct if he were guilty. For all he could tell, the chap might be carrying poison about with him; might be sitting on a revolver like a fellow on the film. The whole thing was too unpleasant, too worrying for words. And without saying any more he went away, taking nothing with him but the knowledge that their total liability on this German business, with the mark valueless, was over two hundred thousand pounds. He hastily reviewed the fortunes of his co-directors. Old Fontenoy was always in low water; the chairman a dark horse; Mont was in land, land right down in value, and mortgaged at that; old Cosey Mothergill had nothing but his name and his director's fees; Meyricke must have a large income, but light come, light go, like most of those big counsel with irons in many fires and the certainty of a judgeship. Not a really substantial man among the lot, except himself! He ploughed his way along, head down. Public companies! Preposterous system! You had to trust somebody, and there you were! It was appalling!

"Balloons, sir — beautiful colours, five feet circumference. Take one, gentleman!"

"Good gad!" said Soames. As if the pricked bubble of German business were not enough!

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Chapter II

Victorine

All through December balloons had been slack — hardly any movement about them, even in Christmas week, and from the Bickets Central Australia was as far as ever. The girl Victorine, restored to comparative health, had not regained her position in the blouse department of Messrs. Boney Blayds & Co. They had given her some odd sewing, but not of late, and she had spent much time trying to get work less uncertain. Her trouble was — had always been — her face. It was unusual. People did not know what to make of a girl who looked like that. Why employ one who without qualification of wealth, rank, fashion, or ability (so far as they knew) made them feel ordinary? For — however essential to such as Fleur and Michael — dramatic interest was not primary in the manufacture or sale of blouses, in the fitting-on of shoes, the addressing of envelopes, making-up of funeral wreaths, or the other ambitions of Victorine. Behind those large dark eyes and silent lips, what went on? It worried Boney Blayds & Co., and the more wholesale firms of commerce. The lurid professions — film-super, or mannequin — did not occur to one, of self-deprecating nature, born in Putney.

When Bicket had gone out of a morning with his tray and his balloons not yet blown up, she would stand biting her finger, as though to gnaw her way to some escape from this hand-to-mouth existence which kept her husband thin as a rail, tired as a rook, shabby as a tailless sparrow, and, at the expense of all caste feeling, brought them in no more than just enough to keep them living under a roof. It had long been clear to them both that there was no future in balloons, just a cadging present. And there smouldered in the silent, passive Victorine a fierce resentment. She wanted better things for herself, for him, chiefly for him.

On the morning when the mark was bumping down, she was putting on her velveteen jacket and toque (best remaining items of her wardrobe), having taken a resolve. Bicket never mentioned his old job, and his wife had subtly divined some cause beyond the ordinary for his loss of it. Why not see if she could get him taken back? He had often said: "Mr. Mont's a gent and a sort o' socialist; been through the war, too; no high-and-mighty about HIM." If she could 'get at' this phenomenon! With the flush of hope and daring in her sallow cheeks, she took stock of her appearance from the window-glasses of the Strand. Her velveteen of jade-green always pleased one who had an eye for colour, but her black skirt — well, perhaps the wear and tear of it wouldn't show if she kept behind the counter. Had she brass enough to say that she came about a manuscript? And she rehearsed with silent lips, pinching her accent: "Would you ask Mr. Mont, please, if I could see him; it's about a manuscript." Yes! and then would come the question: "What name, please?" "Mrs. Bicket?" Never! "Miss Victorine Collins?" All authoresses had maiden names. Victorine — yes! But Collins! It didn't sound like. And no one would know what her maiden name had been. Why not choose one? They often chose. And she searched. Something Italian, like — like — Hadn't their landlady said to them when they came in: "Is your wife Eyetalian?" Ah! Manuelli! That was certainly Italian — the ice-cream man in Little Ditch Street had it! She walked on practising beneath her breath. If only she could get to see this Mr. Mont!

She entered, trembling. All went exactly as foreseen, even to the pinching of her accent, till she stood waiting for them to bring an answer from the speaking tube, concealing her hands in their very old gloves. Had Miss Manuelli an appointment? There was no manuscript.

"No," said Victorine, "I haven't sent it yet. I wanted to see him first." The young man at the counter was looking at her hard. He went again to the tube, then spoke.

"Will you wait a minute, please — Mr. Mont's lady secretary is coming down."

Victorine inclined her head towards her sinking heart. A lady secretary! She would never get there now! And there came on her the sudden dread of false pretences. But the thought of Tony standing at his corner, ballooned up to the eyes, as she had spied out more than once, fortified her desperation.

A girl's voice said: "Miss Manuelli? Mr. Mont's secretary, perhaps you could give me a message."

A fresh-faced young woman's eyes were travelling up and down her. Pinching her accent hard, she said: "Oh! I'm afraid I couldn't do that."

The travelling gaze stopped at her face. "If you'll come with me, I'll see if he can see you."

Alone in a small waiting-room, Victorine sat without movement, till she saw a young man's face poked through the doorway, and heard the words:

"Will you come in?"

She took a deep breath, and went. Once in the presence, she looked from Michael to his secretary and back again, subtly daring his youth, his chivalry, his sportsmanship, to refuse her a private interview. Through Michael passed at once the thought: 'Money, I suppose. But what an interesting face!' The secretary drew down the corners of her mouth and left the room,

"Well, Miss — er — Manuelli?"

"Not Manuelli, please — Mrs. Bicket; my husband used to be here."

"What!" The chap that had snooped 'Copper Coin!' Phew! Bicket's yarn — his wife — pneumonia! She looked as if she might have had it.

"He often spoke of you, sir. And, please, he hasn't any work. Couldn't you find room for him again, sir?"

Michael stood silent. Did this terribly interesting-looking girl know about the snooping?

"He just sells balloons in the street now; I can't bear to see him. Over by St. Paul's he stands, and there's no money in it; and we do so want to get out to Australia. I know he's very nervy, and gets wrong with people. But if you COULD take him back here . . . ."

No! she did not know!

"Very sorry, Mrs. Bicket. I remember your husband well, but we haven't a place for him. Are YOU all right again?"

"Oh! yes. Except that I can't get work again either."

What a face for wrappers! Sort of Mona Lisa-ish! Storbert's novel! Ha!

"Well, I'll have a talk with your husband. I suppose you wouldn't like to sit to an artist for a book-wrapper? It might lead to work in that line if you want it. You're just the type for a friend of mine. Do you know Aubrey Greene's work?"

"No, sir."

"It's pretty good — in fact, very good in a decadent way. You wouldn't mind sitting?"

"I wouldn't mind anything to save some money. But I'd rather you didn't tell my husband I'd been to see you. He might take it amiss."

"All right! I'll see him by accident. Near St. Paul's, you said? But there's no chance here, Mrs. Bicket. Besides, he couldn't make two ends meet on this job, he told me."

"When I was ill, sir."

"Of course, that makes a difference."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let me write you a note to Mr. Greene. Will you sit down a minute?"

He stole a look at her while she sat waiting. Really, her sallow, large-eyed face, with its dead-black, bobbed, frizzy-ended hair, was extraordinarily interesting — a little too refined and anaemic for the public; but, dash it all! the public couldn't always have its Reckitt's blue eyes, corn-coloured hair, and poppy cheeks. "She's not a peach," he wrote, "on the main tree of taste; but so striking in her way that she really might become a type, like Beardsley's or Dana's."

When she had taken the note and gone, he rang for his secretary.

"No, Miss Perren, she didn't take anything off me. But some type, eh?"

"I thought you'd like to see her. She wasn't an authoress, was she?"

"Far from it."

"Well, I hope she got what she wanted."

Michael grinned. "Partly, Miss Perren — partly. You think I'm an awful fool, don't you?"

"I'm sure I don't; but I think you're too soft-hearted."

Michael ran his fingers through his hair.

"Would it surprise you to hear that I've done a stroke of business?"

“Yes, Mr. Mont.”

“Then I won’t tell you what it is. When you’ve done pouting, go on with that letter to my father about ‘Duet’: ‘We are sorry to say that in the present state of the trade we should not be justified in reprinting the dialogue between those two old blighters; we have already lost money by it!’ You must translate, of course. Now can we say something to cheer the old boy up? How about this? ‘When the French have recovered their wits, and the birds begin to sing — in short, when spring comes — we hope to reconsider the matter in the light of — of’— er — what, Miss Perren?”

“‘The experience we shall have gained.’ Shall I leave out about the French and the birds?”

“Excellent! ‘Yours faithfully, Danby and Winter.’ Don’t you think it was a scandalous piece of nepotism bringing the book here at all, Miss Perren?”

“What is ‘nepotism’?”

“Taking advantage of your son. He’s never made a sixpence by any of his books.”

“He’s a very distinguished writer, Mr. Mont.”

“And we pay for the distinction. Well, he’s a good old Bart. That’s all before lunch, and mind you have a good one. That girl’s figure wasn’t usual either, was it? She’s thin, but she stands up straight. There’s a question I always want to ask, Miss Perren: Why do modern girls walk in a curve with their heads poked forward? They can’t all be built like that.”

The secretary’s cheeks brightened.

“There IS a reason, Mr. Mont.”

“Good! What is it?”

The secretary’s cheeks continued to brighten. “I don’t really know whether I can —”

“Oh! sorry. I’ll ask my wife. Only she’s quite straight herself.”

“Well, Mr. Mont, it’s this, you see: They aren’t supposed to have anything be — behind, and, of course, they have, and they can’t get the proper effect unless they curve their chests in and poke their heads forward. It’s the fashion-plates and mannequins that do it.”

“I see,” said Michael; “thank you, Miss Perren; awfully good of you. It’s the limit, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I don’t hold with it, myself.”

“No, quite!”

The secretary lowered her eyelids and withdrew.

Michael sat down and drew a face on his blotting-paper. It was not Victorine’s . . . .

Armed with the note to Aubrey Greene, Victorine had her usual lunch, a cup of coffee and a bit of heavy cake, and took the tube towards Chelsea. She had not succeeded, but the gentleman had been friendly and she felt cheered.

At the studio door was a young man inserting a key — very elegant in smoke-grey Harris tweeds, a sliding young man with no hat, beautifully brushed-back bright hair, and a soft voice.

“Model?” he said.

“Yes, sir, please. I have a note for you from Mr. Mont.”

“Michael? Come in.”

Victorine followed him in. It was ‘not half’ sea-green in there; a high room with rafters and a top light, and lots of pictures and drawings on the walls, and as if they had slipped off on to the floor. A picture on an easel of two ladies with their clothes sliding down troubled Victorine. She became conscious of the gentleman’s eyes, sea-green like the walls, sliding up and down her.

“Will you sit for anything?” he asked.

Victorine answered mechanically: “Yes, sir.”

“Do you mind taking your hat off?”

Victorine took off the toque, and shook out her hair.

“Ah!” said the gentleman. “I wonder.”

Victorine wondered what.

"Just sit down on the dais, will you?"

Victorine looked about her, uncertain. A smile seemed to fly up his forehead and over his slippery bright hair.

"This is your first shot, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"All the better." And he pointed to a small platform.

Victorine sat down on it in a black oak chair.

"You look cold."

"Yes, sir."

He went to a cupboard and returned with two small glasses of a brown fluid.

"Have a Grand Marnier?"

She noticed that he tossed his off in one gulp, and did the same. It was sweet, strong, very nice, and made her gasp.

"Take a cigarette."

Victorine took one from a case he handed, and put it between her lips. He lit it. And again a smile slid up away over the top of his head.

"You draw it in," he said. "Where were you born?"

"In Putney, sir."

"That's very interesting. Just sit still a minute. It's not as bad as having a tooth out, but it takes longer. The great thing is to keep awake."

"Yes, sir."

He took a large piece of paper and a bit of dark stuff, and began to draw.

"Tell me," he said, "Miss —"

"Collins, sir — Victorine Collins." Some instinct made her give her maiden name. It seemed somehow more professional.

"Are you at large?" He paused, and again the smile slid up over his bright hair: "Or have you any other occupation?"

"Not at present, sir. I'm married, but nothing else."

For some time after that the gentleman was silent. It was interesting to see him, taking a look, making a stroke on the paper, taking another look. Hundreds of looks, hundreds of strokes. At last he said: "All right! Now we'll have a rest. Heaven sent you here, Miss Collins. Come and get warm."

Victorine approached the fire.

"Do you know anything about expressionism?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it means not troubling about the outside except in so far as it expresses the inside. Does that convey anything to you?"

"No, sir."

"Quite! I think you said you'd sit for the — er — altogether?"

Victorine regarded the bright and sliding gentleman. She did not know what he meant, but she felt that he meant something out of the ordinary.

"Altogether what, sir?"

"Nude."

"Oh!" She cast her eyes down, then raised them to the sliding clothes of the two ladies. "Like that?"

"No, I shouldn't be treating you cubistically."

A slow flush was burning out the sallow in her cheeks. She said slowly:

"Does it mean more money?"

"Yes, half as much again — more perhaps. I don't want you to if you'd rather not. You can think it over and let me know next time."

She raised her eyes again, and said: “Thank you, sir.”

“Righto! Only please don’t ‘sir’ me.”

Victorine smiled. It was the first time she had achieved this functional disturbance, and it seemed to have a strange effect. He said hurriedly: “By George! When you smile, Miss Collins, I see you impressionistically. If you’ve rested, sit up there again.”

Victorine went back.

The gentleman took a fresh piece of paper.

“Can you think of anything that will keep you smiling?”

She shook her head. That was a fact.

“Nothing comic at all? I suppose you’re not in love with your husband, for instance?”

“Oh! yes.”

“Well, try that.”

Victorine tried that, but she could only see Tony selling his balloons.

“That won’t do,” said the gentleman. “Don’t think of him! Did you ever see ‘L’apres midi d’un Faune’?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, I’ve got an idea. ‘L’apres midi d’une Dryade.’ About the nude you really needn’t mind. It’s quite impersonal. Think of art, and fifteen bob a day. Shades of Nijinsky, I see the whole thing!”

All the time that he was talking his eyes were sliding off and on to her, and his pencil off and on to the paper. A sort of infection began to ferment within Victorine. Fifteen shillings a day! Blue butterflies!

There was a profound silence. His eyes and hand slid off and on. A faint smile had come on Victorine’s face — she was adding up the money she might earn.

At last his eyes and hand ceased moving, and he stood looking at the paper.

“That’s all for today, Miss Collins. I’ve got to think it out. Will you give me your address?”

Victorine thought rapidly.

“Please, sir, will you write to me at the post office. I don’t want my husband to know that I’m — I’m —”

“Affiliated to art? Well! Name of post office?”

Victorine gave it and resumed her hat.

“An hour and a half, five shillings, thank you. And tomorrow, at half-past two, Miss Collins — not ‘sir.’”

“Yes, s — thank you.”

Waiting for her ‘bus in the cold January air, the altogether appeared to Victorine improbable. To sit in front of a strange gentleman in her skin! If Tony knew! The slow flush again burned up the sallow in her cheeks. She climbed into the ‘bus. But fifteen shillings! Six days a week — why, it would be four pound ten! In four months she could earn their passage out. Judging by the pictures in there, lots must be doing it. Tony must know nothing, not even that she was sitting for her face. He was all nerves, and that fond of her! He would imagine things; she had heard him say those artists were just like cats. But that gentleman had been very nice, though he did seem as if he were laughing at everything. She wished he had shown her the drawing. Perhaps she would see herself in an exhibition some day. But without — oh! And suddenly she thought: ‘If I ate a bit more, I’d look nice like that, too!’ And as if to escape from the daring of that thought, she stared up into the face opposite. It had two chins, was calm and smooth and pink, with light eyes staring back at her. People had thoughts, but you couldn’t tell what they were! And the smile which Aubrey Greene desired crept out on his model’s face.

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Chapter III

Michael Walks and Talks

The face Michael drew began by being Victorine's, and ended by being Fleur's. If physically Fleur stood up straight, was she morally as erect? This was the speculation for which he continually called himself a cad. He saw no change in her movements, and loyally refrained from enquiring into the movements he could not see. But his aroused attention made him more and more aware of a certain cynicism, as if she were continually registering the belief that all values were equal and none of much value.

Wilfrid, though still in London, was neither visible nor spoken of. "Out of sight and hearing, out of mind," seemed to be the motto. It did not work with Michael — Wilfrid was constantly in his mind. If Wilfrid were not seeing Fleur, how could he bear to stay within such tantalising reach of her? If Fleur did not want Wilfrid to stay, why had she not sent him away? He was finding it difficult, too, to conceal from others the fact that Desert and he were no longer pals. Often the impetus to go and have it out with him surged up and was beaten back. Either there was nothing beyond what he already knew, or there was something — and Wilfrid would say there wasn't. Michael accepted that without cavil; one did not give a woman away! But he wanted to hear no lies from a War comrade. Between Fleur and himself no word had passed; for words, he felt, would add no knowledge, merely imperil a hold weak enough already. Christmas at the ancestral manor of the Monts had been passed in covert-shooting. Fleur had come and stood with him at the last drive on the second day, holding Ting-a-ling on a lead. The Chinese dog had been extraordinarily excited, climbing the air every time a bird fell, and quite unaffected by the noise of guns. Michael, waiting to miss his birds — he was a poor shot — had watched her eager face emerging from grey fur, her form braced back against Ting-a-ling. Shooting was new to her; and under the stimulus of novelty she was always at her best. He had loved even her "Oh, Michaels!" when he missed. She had been the success of the gathering, which meant seeing almost nothing of her except a sleepy head on a pillow; but, at least, down there he had not suffered from lurking uneasiness.

Putting a last touch to the bobbed hair on the blotting paper, he got up. St. Paul's, that girl had said. He might stroll up and have a squint at Bicket. Something might occur to him. Tightening the belt of his blue overcoat round his waist, he sallied forth, thin and sprightly, with a little ache in his heart.

Walking east, on that bright, cheerful day, nothing struck him so much as the fact that he was alive, well, and in work. So very many were dead, ill, or out of a job. He entered Covent Garden. Amazing place! A human nature which, decade after decade, could put up with Covent Garden was not in danger of extinction from its many ills. A comforting place — one needn't take anything too seriously after walking through it. On this square island were the vegetables of the earth and the fruits of the world, bounded on the west by publishing, on the cast by opera, on the north and south by rivers of mankind. Among discharging carts and litter of paper, straw and men out of drawing, Michael walked and sniffed. Smell of its own, Covent Garden, earthy and just not rotten! He had never seen — even in the War — any place that so utterly lacked form. Extraordinarily English! Nobody looked as if they had anything to do with the soil — drivers, hangers-on, packers, and the salesmen inside the covered markets, seemed equally devoid of acquaintanceship with sun, wind, water, earth or air — town types all! And — Golly! — how their faces jutted, sloped, sagged and swelled, in every kind of featural disharmony. What was the English type amongst all this infinite variety of disproportion? There just wasn't one! He came on the fruits, glowing piles, still and bright — foreigners from the land of the sun — globes all the same size and colour. They made Michael's mouth water. 'Something in the sun,' he thought; 'there really is.' Look at Italy, at the Arabs, at Australia — the Australians came from England, and see the type now! Nevertheless — a Cockney for good temper! The more regular a person's form and features, the more selfish they were! Those grape-fruit looked horribly self-satisfied, compared with the potatoes!

He emerged still thinking about the English. Well! They were now one of the plainest and most distorted races of the world; and yet was there any race to compare with them for good temper and for 'guts'? And they needed those in their smoky towns, and their climate — remarkable instance of adaptation to environment, the modern English character! 'I could pick out an Englishman anywhere,' he thought, 'and yet, physically, there's no general type now!' Astounding people! So ugly in the mass, yet growing such flowers of beauty, and such strange sprigs — like that little Mrs. Bicket; so unimaginative in bulk, yet with such a blooming lot of poets! How would old Danby like it, by the way, when Wilfrid took his next volume to some other firm; or rather what should he — Wilfrid's particular friend! — say to old Danby? Aha! He knew what he should say:

"Yes, sir, but you should have let that poor blighter off who snooped the 'Copper Coins.' Desert hasn't forgotten your refusal." One for old Danby and his eternal inthe-rightness! 'Copper Coin' had done uncommonly well. Its successor would probably do uncommonly better. The book was a proof of what he — Michael — was always saying: The 'cockyolly-bird period' was passing. People wanted life again. Sibley, Walter Nazing, Linda — all those who had nothing to say except that they were superior to such as had — were already measured for their coffins. Not that they would know when they were in them; not blooming likely! They would continue to wave their noses and look down them!

'I'M fed-up with them,' thought Michael. 'If only Fleur would see that looking down your nose is a sure sign of inferiority!' And, suddenly, it came to him that she probably did. Wilfrid was the only one of the whole lot she had ever been thick with; the others were there because — well, because she was Fleur, and had the latest things about her. When, very soon, they were no longer the latest things, she would drop them. But Wilfrid she would not drop. No, he felt sure that she had not dropped, and would not drop Wilfrid.

He looked up. Ludgate Hill! "Near St. Paul's — sells balloons?" And there — sure enough — the poor beggar was!

Bicket was deflating with a view to going off his stand for a cup of cocoa. Remembering that he had come on him by accident, Michael stood for a moment preparing the tones of surprise. Pity the poor chap couldn't blow himself into one of those coloured shapes and float over St. Paul's to Peter. Mournful little cuss he looked, squeezing out the air! Memory tapped sharply on his mind. Balloon — in the square — November the first — joyful night! Special! Fleur! Perhaps they brought luck. He moved and said in an astounded voice: "YOU, Bicket? Is this your stunt now?"

The large eyes of Bicket regarded him over a puce-coloured sixpennyworth.

"Mr. Mont! Often thought I'd like to see you again, sir."

"Same here, Bicket. If you're not doing anything, come and have some lunch."

Bicket completed the globe's collapse, and, closing his tray-lid, said: "Reelly, sir?"

"Rather! I was just going into a fish place."

Bicket detached his tray.

"I'll leave this with the crossing-sweeper." He did so, and followed at Michael's side.

"Any money in it, Bicket?"

"Bare livin', sir."

"How about this place? We'll have oysters."

A little saliva at the corner of Bicket's mouth was removed by a pale tongue.

At a small table decorated with white oilcloth and a cruet stand, Michael sat down.

"Two dozen oysters, and all that; then two good soles, and a bottle of Chablis. Hurry up, please."

When the white-aproned fellow had gone about it, Bicket said simply:

"My Gawd!"

"Yes, it's a funny world, Bicket."

"It is, and that's a fact. This lunch'll cost you a pound, I shouldn't wonder. If I take twenty-five bob a week, it's all I do."

"You touch it there, Bicket. I eat my conscience every day."

Bicket shook his head.

"No, sir, if you've got money, spend it. I would. Be 'appy if you can — there yn't too many that are."

The white-aproned fellow began blessing them with oysters. He brought them fresh-opened, three at a time. Michael bearded them; Bicket swallowed them whole. Presently above twelve empty shells, he said:

"That's where the Socialists myke their mistyke, sir. Nothing keeps me going but the sight of other people spendin' money. It's what we might all come to with a bit of luck. Reduce the world to a level of a pound a dy — and it won't even run to that, they sy! It's not good enough, sir. I'd rather 'ave less with the 'ope of more. Take awy the gamble, and life's a frost. Here's luck!"

“Almost thou persuadest me to be a capitalist, Bicket.”

A glow had come up in the thin and large-eyed face behind the greenish Chablis glass.

“I wish to Gawd I had my wife here, sir. I told you about her and the pneumonia. She’s all right agyne now, only thin. She’s the prize I drew. I don’t want a world where you can’t draw prizes. If it were all bloomin’ conscientious an’ accordin’ to merit, I’d never have got her. See?”

‘Me, too,’ thought Michael, mentally drawing that face again.

“We’ve all got our dreams; mine’s blue butterflies — Central Austrylia. The Socialists won’t ‘elp me to get there. Their ideas of ‘eaven don’t run beyond Europe.”

“Cripes!” said Michael. “Melted butter, Bicket?”

“Thank you, sir.”

Silence was not broken for some time, but the soles were.

“What made you think of balloons, Bicket?”

“You don’t ‘ave to advertise, they do it for you.”

“Saw too much of advertising with us, eh?”

“Well, sir, I did use to read the wrappers. Astonished me, I will sy — the number of gryte books.”

Michael ran his hands through his hair.

“Wrappers! The same young woman being kissed by the same young man with the same clean-cut jaw. But what can you do, Bicket? They WILL HAVE IT. I tried to make a break only this morning — I shall see what comes of it. “‘And I hope YOU won’t!’ he thought: ‘Fancy coming on Fleur outside a novel!’

“I did notice a tendency just before I left,” said Bicket, “to ‘ave cliffs or landskips and two sort of dolls sittin’ on the sand or in the grass lookin’ as if they didn’t know what to do with each other.”

“Yes,” murmured Michael, “we tried that. It was supposed not to be vulgar. But we soon exhausted the public’s capacity. What’ll you have now — cheese?”

“Thank you, sir; I’ve had too much already, but I won’t say ‘No.’”

“Two Stiltons,” said Michael.

“How’s Mr. Desert, sir?”

Michael reddened.

“Oh! He’s all right.”

Bicket had reddened also.

“I wish — I wish you’d let him know that it was quite a — an accident my pitchin’ on his book. I’ve always regretted it.”

“It’s usually an accident, I think,” said Michael slowly, “when we snoop other people’s goods. We never WANT to.”

Bicket looked up.

“No, sir, I don’t agree. ‘Alf mankind’s predytory — only, I’m not that sort, meself.”

In Michael loyalty tried to stammer “Nor is he.” He handed his cigarette case to Bicket.

“Thank you, sir, I’m sure.”

His eyes were swimming, and Michael thought: ‘Dash it! This is sentimental. Kiss me good-bye and go!’ He beckoned up the white-aproned fellow.

“Give us your address, Bicket. If integuments are any good to you, I might have some spare slops.”

Bicket backed the bill with his address and said, hesitating: “I suppose, sir, Mrs. Mont wouldn’t ‘ave anything to spare. My wife’s about my height.”

“I expect she would. We’ll send them along.” He saw the ‘little snipe’s’ lips quivering, and reached for his overcoat. “If anything blows in, I’ll remember you. Goodbye, Bicket, and good luck.”

Going east, because Bicket was going west, he repeated to himself the maxim: “Pity is tripe — pity is tripe!” Then getting on a ‘bus, he was borne back past St. Paul’s. Cautiously ‘taking a lunar’— as old Forsyte put it — he SAW Bicket inflating a balloon; little was visible of his face or figure behind that rosy circumference. Nearing Blake Street, he developed an invincible repugnance to work, and was carried on to Trafalgar Square. Bicket had stirred him up. The world was sometimes almost unbearably jolly. Bicket, Wilfrid, and the Ruhr!" Feeling is tosh! Pity is tripe!" He descended from his 'bus, and passed the lions towards Pall Mall. Should he go into 'Snooks' and ask for Bart? No use — he would not find Fleur there. That was what he really wanted — to see Fleur in the daytime. But — where? She was everywhere to be found, and that was nowhere.

She was restless. Was that his fault? If he had been Wilfrid — would she be restless? 'Yes,' he thought stoutly, 'Wilfrid's restless, too.' They were all restless — all the people he knew. At least all the young ones — in life and in letters. Look at their novels! Hardly one in twenty had any repose, any of that quality which made one turn back to a book as a corner of refuge. They dashed and sputtered and skidded and rushed by like motor cycles — violent, oh! and clever. How tired he was of cleverness! Sometimes he would take a manuscript home to Fleur for her opinion. He remembered her saying once: "This is exactly like life, Michael, it just rushes — it doesn't dwell on anything long enough to mean anything anywhere. Of course the author didn't mean it for satire, but if you publish it, I advise you to put: 'This awful satire on modern life' outside the cover." And they had. At least, they had put: "This wonderful satire on modern life." Fleur WAS like that! She could see the hurry, but, like the author of the wonderful satire, she didn't know that she herself veered and hurried, or — did she know? Was she conscious of kicking at life, like a flame at air?

He had reached Piccadilly, and suddenly he remembered that he had not called on her aunt for ages. That was a possible draw. He bent his steps towards Green Street.

"Mrs. Dartie at home?"

"Yes, sir."

Michael moved his nostrils. Fleur used — but he could catch no scent, except incense. Winifred burnt joss-sticks when she remembered what a distinguished atmosphere they produced.

"What name?"

"Mr. Mont. My wife's not here, I suppose?"

"No, sir. Only Mrs. Val Dartie."

Mrs. Val Dartie! Yes, he remembered, nice woman — but not a substitute for Fleur! Committed, however, he followed the maid.

In the drawing-room Michael found three people, one of them his father-inlaw, who had a grey and brooding aspect, and, from an Empire chair, was staring at blue Australian butterflies' wings under glass on a round scarlet table. Winifred had jazzed the Empire foundations of her room with a superstructure more suitable to the age. She greeted Michael with fashionable warmth. It was good of him to come when he was so busy with all these young poets. "I thought 'Copper Coin,'" she said —"what a NICE title! — such an intriguing little book. I do think Mr. Desert is clever! What is he doing now?"

Michael said: "I don't know," and dropped on to a settee beside Mrs. Val. Ignorant of the Forsyte family feud, he was unable to appreciate the relief he had brought in with him. Soames said something about the French, got up, and went to the window; Winifred joined him — their voices sounded confidential.

"How is Fleur?" said Michael's neighbour.

"Thanks, awfully well."

"Do you like your house?"

"Oh, fearfully. Won't you come and see it?"

"I don't know whether Fleur would —?"

"Why not?"

"Oh! Well!"

"She's frightfully accessible."

She seemed to be looking at him with more interest than he deserved, to be trying to make something out from his face, and he added:

"You're a relation — by blood as well as marriage, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then what's the skeleton?"

“Oh! nothing. I’ll certainly come. Only — she has so many friends.”

Michael thought: ‘I like this woman!’ “As a matter of fact,” he said, “I came here this afternoon thinking I might find Fleur. I should like her to know you. With all the jazz there is about, she’d appreciate somebody restful.”

“Thank you.”

“You’ve never lived in London?”

“Not since I was six.”

“I wish she could get a rest — pity there isn’t a d-desert handy.” He had stuttered; the word was not pronounced the same — still! He glanced, disconcerted, at the butterflies. “I’ve just been talking to a little Cockney whose S. O. S. is ‘Central Austrylia.’ But what do you say — Have we got souls to save?”

“I used to think so, but now I’m not so sure — something’s struck me lately.”

“What was that?”

“Well, I notice that any one at all out of proportion, or whose nose is on one side, or whose eyes jut out, or even have a special shining look, always believes in the soul; people who are in proportion, and have no prominent physical features, don’t seem to be really interested.”

Michael’s ears moved.

“By Jove!” he said; “some thought! Fleur’s beautifully proportioned — SHE doesn’t seem to worry. I’m not — and I certainly do. The people in Covent Garden must have lots of soul. You think ‘the soul’s’ the result of loose-gearing in the organism — sort of special consciousness from not working in one piece.”

“Yes, rather like that — what’s called psychic power is, I’m almost sure.”

“I say, is your life safe? According to your theory, though, we’re in a mighty soulful era. I must think over my family. How about yours?”

“The Forsytes! Oh, they’re quite too well-proportioned.”

“I agree, they haven’t any special juts so far as I’ve seen. The French, too, are awfully close-knit. It really is an idea, only, of course, most people see it the other way. They’d say the soul produces the disproportion, makes the eyes shine, bends the nose, and all that; where the soul is small, it’s not trying to get out of the body, whence the barber’s block. I’ll think about it. Thanks for the tip. Well, do come and see us. Good-bye! I don’t think I’ll disturb them in the window. Would you mind saying I had to scoot?” Squeezing a slim, gloved hand, receiving and returning a smiling look, he slid out, thinking: ‘Dash the soul, where’s her body?’

❦

CHAPTER IV

FLEUR'S BODY

Fleur's body, indeed, was at the moment in one of those difficult positions which continually threaten the spirit of compromise. It was in fact in Wilfrid's arms; sufficiently, at least, to make her say:

"No, Wilfrid — you promised to be good."

It was a really remarkable tribute to her powers of skating on thin ice that the word 'good' should still have significance. For eleven weeks exactly this young man had danced on the edge of fulfilment, and was even now divided from her by two clenched hands pressed firmly against his chest, and the word 'good'; and this after not having seen her for a fortnight.

When she said it, he let her go, with a sort of violence, and sat down on a piece of junk. Only the sense of damnable iteration prevented him from saying: "It can't go on, Fleur." She knew that! And yet it did! This was what perpetually amazed him. How a poor brute could hang on week after week saying to her and to himself: "Now or never!" when it wasn't either. Subconsciousness, that, until the word 'now' had been reached, Fleur would not know her own mind, alone had kept him dancing. His own feelings were so intense that he almost hated her for indecision. And he was unjust. It was not exactly indecision. Fleur wanted the added richness and excitement which Wilfrid's affection gave to life, but without danger and without loss. How natural! His frightful passionateness was making all the trouble. Neither by her wish, nor through her fault, was he passionate! And yet — it was both nice and proper to inspire passion; and, of course, she had the lurking sense that she was not 'in the mode' to cavil at a lover, especially since life owed her one.

Released, she smoothed herself and said: "Talk of something sensible; what have you been writing?"

"This."

Fleur read. Flushing and biting her lips, she said:

"It's frightfully bitter."

"It's frightfully true. Does HE ever ask you now whether you see me?"

"Never."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"What would you answer if he did?"

Fleur shrugged her shoulders.

Desert said quietly: "Yes, that's your attitude. It can't last, Fleur." He was standing by the window. She put the sheets down on his desk and moved towards him. Poor Wilfrid! Now that he was quiet she was sorry.

He said suddenly: "Stop! Don't move! HE'S down there in the street."

Recoiling, she gasped: "Michael! Oh! But how — how could he have known?"

Desert said grimly: "Do you only know him as little as that? Do you suppose he'd be there if he knew you were here?"

Fleur winced.

"Why IS he there, then?"

"He probably wants to see me. He looks as if he couldn't make up his mind. Don't get the wind up, he won't be let in."

Fleur sat down; she felt weak in the legs. The ice seemed suddenly of an appalling thinness — the water appallingly cold.

"Has he seen you?" she said.

"No."

The thought flashed through him: 'If I were a blackguard, I could force her hand, by moving one step and crooking my finger.' Pity one wasn't a blackguard — at all events, not to that point — things would be so much simpler!

"Where is he now?" asked Fleur.

"Going away."

In profound relief, she sighed out:

"But it's queer, isn't it, Wilfrid?"

"You don't suppose he's easy in his mind, do you?"

Fleur bit her lips. He was jeering, because she didn't or couldn't really love either of them. It was unjust. She COULD have loved — she HAD loved! Wilfrid and Michael — they might go to the deuce!

"I wish I had never come here," she said suddenly: "and I'll never come again!"

He went to the door, and held it open.

"You are right."

Fleur stood quite still, her chin on the collar of her fur, her clear-glancing eyes fixed on his face, her lips set and mutinous.

"You think I'm a heartless beast," she said slowly. "So I am — now. Good-bye!"

He neither took her hand nor spoke, he only bowed. His eyes were very tragic. Trembling with mortification, Fleur went out. She heard the door closed, while she was going down the stairs. At the bottom she stood uncertain. Suppose Michael had come back! Almost opposite was that gallery where she had first met him and — Jon. Slip across in there! If he were still hovering round the entrance of the little street, she could tell him with a good conscience where she had been. She peeped. Not in sight! Swiftly she slid across into the doorway opposite. They would be closing in a minute — just on four o'clock! She put down a shilling and slipped in. She must see — in case! She stood revolving — one-man show, the man — Claud Brains! She put down another shilling for a catalogue, and read as she went out. "No. 7. Woman getting the wind up." It told her everything; and with a lighter heart she skimmed along, and took a taxi. Get home before Michael! She felt relieved, almost exhilarated. So much for skating on thin ice! It wasn't good enough. Wilfrid must go. Poor Wilfrid! Well, he shouldn't have sneered — what did he know of her? Nobody knew anything of her! She was alone in the world. She slipped her latch-key into the hall door. No Michael. She sat down in the drawing-room before the fire, and took up Walter Nazing's last. She read a page three times. It meant no more with every reading — it meant less; he was the kind of author who must be read at a gallop, and given away lest a first impression of wind in the hair be lost in a sensation of wind lower down; but Wilfrid's eyes came between her and the words. Pity! Nobody pitied her; why, then, should she pity them? Besides, pity was 'pop,' as Amabel would say. The situation demanded cast-iron sense. But Wilfrid's eyes! Well — she wouldn't be seeing them again! Beautiful eyes when they smiled or when — so much more often — they looked at her with longing, as now between her and the sentence: "Solemnly and with a delicious egoism he more than awfully desired her who snug and rosy in the pink shell of her involuted and so petulant social periphrasis —" Poor Wilfrid! Pity was 'pop,' but there was pride! Did she choose that he should go away thinking that she had 'played him up' just out of vanity, as Walter Nazing said American women did? Did she? Would it not be more in the mode, really dramatic — if one 'went over the deep end,' as they said, just once? Would that not be something they could both look back on — he in the East he was always talking of, she in this West? The proposition had a momentary popularity in that organism called Fleur too finely proportioned for a soul according to the theory which Michael was thinking over. Like all popularities, it did not last. First: Would she like it? She did not think she would; one man, without love, was quite enough. Then there was the danger of passing into Wilfrid's power. He was a gentleman, but he was passionate; the cup once sipped, would he consent to put it down? But more than all was a physical doubt of the last two or three weeks which awaited verification, and which made her feel solemn. She stood up and passed her hands all over her, with a definite recoil from the thought of Wilfrid's hands doing the same. No! To have his friendship, his admiration, but not at that price. She viewed him, suddenly, as a bomb set on her copper floor; and in fancy ran and seized and flung him out into the Square — poor Wilfrid! Pity was 'pop!' But one might be sorry for ONESELF, losing him; losing too that ideal of modern womanhood expounded to her one evening by Marjorie Ferrar, pet of the 'panjoys,' whose red-gold hair excited so much admiration: "My ambition — old thing — is to be the perfect wife of one man, the perfect mistress of another, and the perfect mother of a third, all at once. It's perfectly possible — they do it in France."

But was it really so perfectly possible — even if pity WAS posh? How be perfect to Michael, when the slightest slip might reveal to him that she was being perfect to Wilfrid; how be perfect to Wilfrid, when every time she was perfect to Michael would be a dagger in Wilfrid's heart? And if — if her physical doubt should mature into certainty, how be perfect mother to the certainty, when she was either torturing two men, or lying to them like a trooperess? Not so perfectly possible as all that! 'If only I were all French!' thought Fleur . . . .

The clicking door startled her — the reason that she was not all French was coming in. He looked very grey, as if he had been thinking too much. He kissed her, and sat down moodily before the fire.

"Have you come for the night, Dad?"

"If I may," murmured Soames. "Business."

"Anything unpleasant, ducky?"

Soames looked up as if startled.

"Unpleasant? Why should it be unpleasant?"

"I only thought from your face."

Soames grunted. "This Ruhr!" he said. "I've brought you a picture. Chinese!"

"Oh, Dad! How jolly!"

"It isn't," said Soames; "it's a monkey eating fruit."

"But that's perfect! Where is it — in the hall?"

Soames nodded.

Stripping the coverings off the picture, Fleur brought it in, and setting it up on the jade-green settee, stood away and looked at it. The large white monkey with its brown haunting eyes, as if she had suddenly wrested its interest from the orange-like fruit in its crisped paw, the grey background, the empty rinds all round — bright splashes in a general ghostliness of colour, impressed her at once.

"But, Dad, it's a masterpiece — I'm sure it's of a frightfully good period."

"I don't know," said Soames. "I must look up the Chinese."

"But you oughtn't to give it to me, it must be worth any amount. You ought to have it in your collection."

"They didn't know its value," said Soames, and a faint smile illumined his features. "I gave three hundred for it. It'll be safer here."

"Of course it'll be safe. Only why safer?"

Soames turned towards the picture.

"I can't tell. Anything may come of this."

"Of what, dear?"

"Is 'old Mont' coming in to-night?"

"No, he's at Lippinghall still."

"Well, it doesn't matter — he's no good."

Fleur took his hand and gave it a squeeze.

"Tell me!"

Soames' tickled heart quivered. Fancy her wanting to know what was troubling him! But his sense of the becoming, and his fear of giving away his own alarm, forbade response.

"Nothing you'd understand," he said. "Where are you going to hang it?"

"There, I think; but we must wait for Michael."

Soames grumbled out:

"I saw him just now at your aunt's. Is that the way he attends to business?"

'Perhaps,' thought Fleur, 'he was only on his way back to the office. Cork Street IS more or less between! If he passed the end of it, he would think of Wilfrid, he might have been wanting to see him about books.'

"Oh, here's Ting! Well, darling!"

The Chinese dog, let in, as it were, by Providence, seeing Soames, sat down suddenly with snub upturned and eyes brilliant. "The expression of your face," he seemed to say, "pleases me. We belong to the past and could sing hymns together, old man."

“Funny little chap,” said Soames; “he always knows me.”

Fleur lifted him. “Come and see the new monkey, ducky.”

“Don’t let him lick it.”

Held rather firmly by his jade-green collar and confronted by an inexplicable piece of silk smelling of the past, Ting-a-ling raised his head higher and higher to correspond with the action of his nostrils, and his little tongue appeared, tentatively savouring the emanation of his country.

“It’s a nice monkey, isn’t it, darling?”

“No,” said Ting-a-ling, rather clearly. “Put me down!”

Restored to the floor, he sought a patch where the copper came through between two rugs, and licked it quietly.

“Mr. Aubrey Greene, ma’am!”

“H’m!” said Soames.

The painter came gliding and glowing in; his bright hair slipping back, his green eyes sliding off.

“Ah!” he said, pointing to the floor. “That’s what I’ve come about.”

Fleur followed his finger in amazement.

“Ting!” she said severely, “stop it! He will lick the copper, Aubrey.”

“But how perfectly Chinese! They do every thing we don’t.”

“Dad — Aubrey Greene. My father’s just brought me this picture, Aubrey — isn’t it a gem?”

The painter stood quite still, his eyes ceased sliding off, his hair ceased slipping back.

“Phew!” he said.

Soames rose. He had waited for the flippant; but he recognised in the tone something reverential, if not aghast.

“By George,” said Aubrey Greene, “those eyes! Where did you pick it up, sir?”

“It belonged to a cousin of mine — a racing man. It was his only picture.”

“Good for him! He must have had taste.”

Soames stared. The idea that George should have had taste almost appalled him.

“No,” he said, with a flash of inspiration: “What he liked about it was that it makes you feel uncomfortable.”

“Same thing! I don’t know where I’ve seen a more pungent satire on human life.”

“I don’t follow,” said Soames dryly.

“Why, it’s a perfect allegory, sir! Eat the fruits of life, scatter the rinds, and get copped doing it. When they’re still, a monkey’s eyes are the human tragedy incarnate. Look at them! He thinks there’s something beyond, and he’s sad or angry because he can’t get at it. That picture ought to be in the British Museum, sir, with the label: ‘Civilisation, caught out.’”

“Well, it won’t be,” said Fleur. “It’ll be here, labelled ‘The White Monkey.’”

“Same thing.”

“Cynicism,” said Soames abruptly, “gets you nowhere. If you’d said ‘MODERNITY caught out’—”

“I do, sir; but why be narrow? You don’t seriously suppose this age is worse than any other?”

“Don’t I?” said Soames. “In my belief the world reached its highest point in the ‘eighties, and will never reach it again.”

The painter stared.

“That’s frightfully interesting. I wasn’t born, and I suppose you were about my age then, sir. You believed in God and drove in DILIGENCES.”

DILIGENCES! The word awakened in Soames a memory which somehow seemed appropriate.

“Yes,” he said, “and I can tell you a story of those days that you can’t match in these. When I was a youngster in Switzerland with my people, two of my sisters had some black cherries. When they’d eaten about half a dozen they discovered that they all had little maggots in them. An English climber there saw how upset they were, and ate the whole of the rest of the cherries — about two pounds — maggots, stones and all, just to show them. That was the sort of men they were then.”

“Oh! Father!”

“Gee! He must have been gone on them.”

“No,” said Soames, “not particularly. His name was Powley; he wore side whiskers.”

“Talking of God and diligences; I saw a hansom yesterday.”

‘More to the point if you’d seen God,’ thought Soames, but he did not say so; indeed, the thought surprised him, it was not the sort of thing he had ever seen himself.

“You mayn’t know it, sir, but there’s more belief now than there was before the war — they’ve discovered that we’re not all body.”

“Oh!” said Fleur. “That reminds me, Aubrey. Do you know any mediums? Could I get one to come here? On our floor, with Michael outside the door, one would know there couldn’t be any hanky. Do the dark seance people ever go out? — they’re much more thrilling they say.”

“Spiritualism!” said Soames. “H’mph!” He could not in half an hour have expressed himself more clearly.

Aubrey Greene’s eyes slid off to Ting-a-ling. “I’ll see what I can do, if you’ll lend me your Peke for an hour or so tomorrow afternoon. I’d bring him back on a lead, and give him every luxury.”

“What do you want him for?”

“Michael sent me a most topping little model today. But, you see, she can’t smile.”

“Michael?”

“Yes. Something quite new; and I’ve got a scheme. Her smile’s like sunlight going off an Italian valley; but when you tell her to, she can’t. I thought your Peke could make her, perhaps.”

“May I come and see?” said Fleur.

“Yes, bring him tomorrow; but, if I can persuade her, it’ll be in the ‘altogether.’”

“Oh! Will you get me a seance, if I lend you Ting?”

“I will.”

“H’mph!” said Soames again. Seances, Italian sunlight, the ‘altogether!’ It was time he got back to Elderson, and what was to be done now, and left this fiddling while Rome burned.

“Good-bye, Mr. Greene,” he said; “I’ve got no time.”

“Quite, sir,” said Aubrey Greene.

“Quite!” mimicked Soames to himself, going out.

Aubrey Greene took his departure a few minutes later, crossing a lady in the hall who was delivering her name to the manservant.

Alone with her body, Fleur again passed her hands all over it. The ‘altogether’— was a reminder of the dangers of dramatic conduct.

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CHAPTER V

FLEUR'S SOUL

"Mrs. Val Dartie, ma'am."

A name which could not be distorted even by Coaker affected her like a finger applied suddenly to the head of the sciatic nerve. Holly! Not seen since the day when she did not marry Jon. Holly! A flood of remembrance — Wansdon, the Downs, the gravel pit, the apple orchard, the river, the copse at Robin Hill! No! It was not a pleasant sensation — to see Holly, and she said: "How awfully nice of you to come!"

"I met your husband this afternoon at Green Street; he asked me. What a lovely room!"

"Ting! Come and be introduced! This is Ting-a-ling; isn't he perfect? He's a little upset because of the new monkey. How's Val, and dear Wansdon? It was too wonderfully peaceful."

"It's a nice backwater. I don't get tired of it."

"And —" said Fleur, with a little laugh, "Jon?"

"He's growing peaches in North Carolina. British Columbia didn't do."

"Oh! Is he married?"

"No."

"I suppose he'll marry an American."

"He isn't twenty-two, you know."

"Good Lord!" said Fleur: "Am I only twenty-one? I feel forty-eight."

"That's living in the middle of things and seeing so many people —"

"And getting to know none."

"But don't you?"

"No, it isn't done. I mean we all call each other by our Christian names; but apres —"

"I like your husband very much."

"Oh! yes, Michael's a dear. How's June?"

"I saw her yesterday — she's got a new painter, of course — Claud Brains. I believe he's what they call a Vertiginist."

Fleur bit her lip.

"Yes, they're quite common. I suppose June thinks he's the only one."

"Well, she think's he's a genius."

"She's wonderful."

"Yes," said Holly, "the most loyal creature in the world while it lasts. It's like poultry farming — once they're hatched. You never saw Boris Strumolowski?"

"No."

"Well, don't."

"I know his bust of Michael's uncle. It's rather sane."

"Yes. June thought it a pot-boiler, and he never forgave her. Of course it was. As soon as her swan makes money, she looks round for another. She's a darling."

"Yes," murmured Fleur; "I liked June."

Another flood of remembrance — from a tea-shop, from the river, from June's little dining-room, from where in Green Street she had changed her wedding dress under the upward gaze of June's blue eyes. She seized the monkey and held it up.

"Isn't it a picture of 'life'?" Would she have said that if Aubrey Greene hadn't? Still it seemed very true at the moment.

"Poor monkey!" said Holly. "I'm always frightfully sorry for monkeys. But it's marvellous, I think."

“Yes. I’m going to hang it here. If I can get one more, I shall have done in this room; only people have so got on to Chinese things. This was luck — somebody died — George Forsyte, you know, the racing one.”

“Oh!” said Holly softly. She saw again her old kinsman’s japing eyes in the church when Fleur was being married, heard his throaty whisper, “Will she stay the course?” And was she staying it, this pretty filly? “Wish she could get a rest. If only there were a desert handy!” Well, one couldn’t ask a question so personal, and Holly took refuge in a general remark.

“What do all you smart young people feel about life, nowadays, Fleur! when one’s not of it and has lived twenty years in South Africa, one still feels out of it.”

“Life! Oh! well, we know it’s supposed to be a riddle, but we’ve given it up. We just want to have a good time because we don’t believe anything can last. But I don’t think we know how to have it. We just fly on, and hope for it. Of course, there’s art, but most of us aren’t artists; besides, expressionism — Michael says it’s got no inside. We gas about it, but I suppose it hasn’t. I see a frightful lot of writers and painters, you know; they’re supposed to be amusing.”

Holly listened, amazed. Who would have thought that this girl SAW? She might be seeing wrong, but anyway she saw!

“Surely,” she said, “you enjoy yourselves?”

“Well, I like getting hold of nice things, and interesting people; I like seeing everything that’s new and worth while, or seems so at the moment. But that’s just how it is — nothing lasts. You see, I’m not of the ‘Pan-joys,’ nor of the ‘new-faithfuls.’”

“The new-faithfuls?”

“Oh! don’t you know — it’s a sort of faith-healing done on oneself, not exactly the old ‘God-good, good-God!’ sort; but a kind of mixture of will-power, psycho-analysis, and belief that everything will be all right on the night if you say it will. You must have come across them. They’re frightfully in earnest.”

“I know,” said Holly; “their eyes shine.”

“I daresay. I don’t believe in them — I don’t believe in anyone; or anything — much. How can one?”

“How about simple people, and hard work?”

Fleur sighed. “I daresay. I will say for Michael — HE’S not spoiled. Let’s have tea? Tea, Ting?” and, turning up the lights, she rang the bell.

When her unexpected visitor had gone, she sat very still before the fire. To-day, when she had been so very nearly Wilfrid’s! So Jon was not married! Not that it made any odds! Things did not come round as they were expected to in books. And anyway sentiment was swosh! Cut it out! She tossed back her hair; and, getting hammer and nail, proceeded to hang the white monkey. Between the two tea-chests with their coloured pearl-shell figures, he would look his best. Since she couldn’t have Jon, what did it matter — Wilfrid or Michael, or both, or neither? Eat the orange in her hand, and throw away the rind! And suddenly she became aware that Michael was in the room. He had come in very quietly and was standing before the fire behind her. She gave him a quick look and said:

“I’ve had Aubrey Greene here about a model you sent him, and Holly — Mrs. Val Dartie — she said she’d seen you. Oh! and father’s brought us this. Isn’t it perfect?”

Michael did not speak.

“Anything the matter, Michael?”

“No, nothing.” He went up to the monkey. From behind him now Fleur searched his profile. Instinct told her of a change. Had he, after all, seen her going to Wilfrid’s — coming away?

“Some monkey!” he said. “By the way, have you any spare clothes you could give the wife of a poor snipe — nothing too swell?”

She answered mechanically: “Yes, of course!” while her brain worked furiously.

“Would you put them out, then? I’m going to make up a bunch for him myself — they could go together.”

Yes! He was quite unlike himself, as if the spring in him had run down. A sort of malaise overcame her. Michael not cheerful! It was like the fire going out on a cold day. And, perhaps for the first time, she was conscious that his cheerfulness was of real importance to her. She watched him pick up Ting-a-ling and sit down. And going up behind him, she bent over till her hair was against his cheek. Instead of rubbing his cheek on hers, he sat quite still, and her heart misgave her.

“What is it?” she said, coaxing.

"Nothing!"

She took hold of his ears.

"But there is. I suppose you know somehow that I went to see Wilfrid."

He said stonily: "Why not?"

She let go, and stood up straight.

"It was only to tell him that I couldn't see him again."

That half-truth seemed to her the whole.

He suddenly looked up, a quiver went over his face; he look her hand.

"It's all right, Fleur. You must do what you like, you know. That's only fair. I had too much lunch."

Fleur withdrew to the middle of the room.

"You're rather an angel," she said slowly, and went out.

Upstairs she looked out garments, confused in her soul.

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CHAPTER VI

MICHAEL GETS 'WHAT-FOR'

After his Green Street quest Michael had wavered back down Piccadilly, and, obeying one of those impulses which make people hang around the centres of disturbance, on to Cork Street. He stood for a minute at the mouth of Wilfrid's backwater.

'No,' he thought, at last, 'ten to one he isn't in; and if he is, twenty to one that I get any change except bad change!'

He was moving slowly on to Bond Street, when a little light lady, coming from the backwater, and reading as she went, ran into him from behind.

"Why don't you look where you're going! Oh! You? Aren't you the young man who married Fleur Forsyte? I'm her cousin, June. I thought I saw her just now." She waved a hand which held a catalogue with a gesture like the flirt of a bird's wing. "Opposite my gallery. She went into a house, or I should have spoken to her — I'd like to have seen her again."

Into a house! Michael dived for his cigarette-case. Hard-grasping it, he looked up. The little lady's blue eyes were sweeping from side to side of his face with a searching candour.

"Are you happy together?" she said.

A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. A sense of general derangement afflicted him — hers, and his own.

"I beg your pardon?" he gasped.

"I hope you are. She ought to have married my little brother — but I hope you are. She's a pretty child."

In the midst of a dull sense of stunning blows, it staggered him that she seemed quite unconscious of inflicting them. He heard his teeth gritting, and said dully: "Your little brother, who was he?"

"What! Jon — didn't you know Jon? He was too young, of course, and so was she. But they were head over — the family feud stopped that. Well! it's all past. I was at your wedding. I hope you're happy. Have you seen the Claud Brains show at my gallery? He's a genius. I was going to have a bun in here; will you join me? You ought to know his work."

She had paused at the door of a confectioner's. Michael put his hand on his chest.

"Thank you," he said, "I have just had a bun — two, in fact. Excuse me!"

The little lady grasped his other hand.

"Well, good-bye, young man! Glad to have met you. You're not a beauty, but I like your face. Remember me to that child. You should go and see Claud Brains. He's a real genius."

Stock-still before the door, he watched her turn and enter, with a scattered motion, as of flying, and a disturbance among those seated in the pastry-cook's. Then he moved on, the cigarette unlighted in his mouth, dazed, as a boxer from a blow which knocks him sideways, and another which knocks him straight again.

Fleur visiting Wilfrid — at this moment in his rooms up there — in his arms, perhaps! He groaned. A well-fed young man in a new hat skipped at the sound. Never! He could never stick that! He would have to clear out! He had believed Fleur honest! A double life! The night before last she had smiled on him. Oh! God! He dashed across into Green Park. Why hadn't he stood still and let something go over him? And that lunatic's little brother — John — family feud? Himself — a pis aller, then — taken without love at all — a makeshift! He remembered now her saying one night at Mapledurham: "Come again when I know I can't get my wish." So that was the wish she couldn't get! A makeshift! 'Jolly,' he thought: 'Oh! jolly!' No wonder, then! What could she care? One man or another! Poor little devil! She had never let him know — never breathed a word! Was that decent of her — or was it treachery? 'No,' he thought, 'if she HAD told me, it wouldn't have made any difference — I'd have taken her at any price. It was decent of her not to tell me.' But how was it he hadn't heard from some one? Family feud? The Forsytes! Except 'Old Forsyte,' he never saw them; and 'Old Forsyte' was closer than a fish. Well! he had got what-for! And again he groaned, in the twilight spaces of the Park. Buckingham Palace loomed up unlighted, huge and dreary. Conscious of his cigarette at last, he stopped to strike a match, and drew the smoke deep into his lungs with the first faint sense of comfort.

"You couldn't spare us a cigarette, Mister?"

A shadowy figure with a decent sad face stood beside the statue of Australia, so depressingly abundant!

"Of course!" said Michael; "take the lot." He emptied the case into the man's hand. "Take the case too —'present from Westminster'— you'll get thirty bob for it. Good luck!" He hurried on. A faint: "Hi, Mister!" pursued him unavailingly. Pity was pulp! Sentiment was bilge! Was he going home to wait till Fleur had — finished and come back? Not he! He turned towards Chelsea, batting along as hard as he could stride. Lighted shops, gloomy great Eaton Square, Chester Square, Sloane Square, the King's Road — along, along! Worse than the trenches — far worse — this whipped and scorpioned sexual jealousy! Yes, and he would have felt even worse, but for that second blow. It made it less painful to know that Fleur had been in love with that cousin, and Wilfrid, too, perhaps, nothing to her. Poor little wretch! 'Well, what's the game now?' he thought. The game of life — in bad weather, in stress? What was it? In the war — what had a fellow done? Somehow managed to feel himself not so dashed important; reached a condition of acquiescence, fatalism, "Who dies if England live" sort of sob-stuff state. The game of life? Was it different? "Bloody but unbowed" might be tripe; still — get up when you were knocked down! The whole was big, oneself was little! Passion, jealousy, ought they properly to destroy one's sportsmanship, as Nazing and Sibley and Linda Frewe would have it? Was the word 'gentleman' a dud? Was it? Did one keep one's form, or get down to squealing and kicking in the stomach?

'I don't know,' he thought, 'I don't know what I shall do when I see her — I simply don't know.' Steel-blue of the fallen evening, bare plane-trees, wide river, frosty air! He turned towards home. He opened his front door, trembling, and trembling, went into the drawing-room . . . .

When Fleur had gone upstairs and left him with Ting-a-ling he didn't know whether he believed her or not. If she had kept that other thing from him all this time, she could keep anything! Had she understood his words: "You must do as you like, that's only fair?" He had said them almost mechanically, but they were reasonable. If she had never loved him, even a little, he had never had any right to expect anything; he had been all the time in the position of one to whom she was giving alms. Nothing compelled a person to go on giving alms. And nothing compelled one to go on taking them — except — the ache of want, the ache, the ache!

"You little Djinn! You lucky little toad! Give me some of your complacency — you Chinese atom!" Ting-a-ling turned up his boot-buttons. "When you have been civilised as long as I," they seemed to say: "In the meantime, scratch my chest."

And scrattling in that yellow fur Michael thought: 'Pull yourself together! Man at the South Pole with the first blizzard doesn't sing: "Want to go home! Want to go home!"— he sticks it. Come, get going!' He placed Ting-a-ling on the floor, and made for his study. Here were manuscripts, of which the readers to Danby and Winter had already said: "No money in this, but a genuine piece of work meriting consideration." It was Michael's business to give the consideration; Danby's to turn the affair down with the words: "Write him (or her) a civil letter, say we were greatly interested, regret we do not see our way — hope to have the privilege of considering next effort, and so forth. What!"

He turned up his reading-lamp and pulled out a manuscript he had already begun.

> "No retreat, no retreat; they must conquer or die who have no retreat;
> No retreat, no retreat; they must conquer or die who have no retreat!"

The black footmen's refrain from 'Polly' was all that happened in his mind. Dash it! He must read the thing! Somehow he finished the chapter. He remembered now. The manuscript was all about a man who, when he was a boy, had been so greatly impressed by the sight of a maidservant changing her clothes in a room over the way, that his married life was a continual struggle not to be unfaithful with his wife's maids. They had just discovered his complex, and he was going to have it out. The rest of the manuscript no doubt would show how that was done. It went most conscientiously into all those precise bodily details which it was now so timorous and Victorian to leave out. Genuine piece of work, and waste of time to go on with it! Old Danby — Freud bored him stiff; and for once Michael did not mind old Danby being in the right. He put the thing back into the drawer. Seven o'clock! Tell Fleur what he had been told about that cousin? Why? Nothing could mend THAT! If only she were speaking the truth about Wilfrid! He went to the window — stars above, and stripes below, stripes of courtyard and back garden. "No retreat, no retreat; they must conquer or die who have no retreat!"

A voice said:

"When will your father be up?"

Old Forsyte! Lord! Lord!

“To-morrow, I believe, sir. Come in! You don’t know my den, I think.”

“No,” said Soames. “Snug! Caricatures. You go in for them — poor stuff!”

“But not modern, sir — a revived art.”

“Queering your neighbours — I never cared for them. They only flourish when the world’s in a mess and people have given up looking straight before them.”

“By Jove!” said Michael; “that’s good. Won’t you sit down, sir?”

Soames sat down, crossing his knees in his accustomed manner. Slim, grey, close — a sealed book, neatly bound! What was HIS complex? Whatever it was, he had never had it out. One could not even imagine the operation.

“I shan’t take away my Goya,” he said very unexpectedly; “consider it Fleur’s. In fact, if I only knew you were interested in the future, I should make more provision. In my opinion death duties will be prohibitive in a few years’ time.”

Michael frowned. “I’d like you to know sir, once for all, that what you do for Fleur, you do for Fleur. I can be Epicurus whenever I like — bread, and on feast days a little bit of cheese.”

Soames looked up with shrewdness in his glance. “I know that,” he said, “I always knew it.”

Michael bowed.

“With this land depression your father’s hard hit, I should think.”

“Well, he talks of being on the look out for soap or cars; but I shouldn’t be surprised if he mortgages again and lingers on.”

“A title without a place,” said Soames, “is not natural. He’d better wait for me to go, if I leave anything, that is. But listen to me: I’ve been thinking. Aren’t you happy together, you two, that you don’t have children?”

Michael hesitated.

“I don’t think,” he said slowly, “that we have ever had a scrap, or anything like it. I have been — I am — terribly fond of her, but you have known better than I that I only picked up the pieces.”

“Who told you that?”

“To-day — Miss June Forsyte.”

“THAT woman!” said Soames. “She can’t keep her foot out of anything. A boy and girl affair — over months before you married.”

“But deep, sir,” said Michael gently.

“Deep — who knows at that age? Deep?” Soames paused: “You’re a good fellow — I always knew. Be patient — take a long view.”

“Yes, sir,” said Michael, very still in his chair, “If I can.”

“She’s everything to me,” muttered Soames abruptly.

“And to me — which doesn’t make it easier.”

The line between Soames’ brows deepened.

“Perhaps not. But hold on! As gently as you like, but hold on! She’s young. She’ll flutter about; there’s nothing in it.”

‘Does he know about the other thing?’ thought Michael.

“I have my own worries,” went on Soames, “but they’re nothing to what I should feel if anything went wrong with her.”

Michael felt a twinge of sympathy, unusual towards that self-contained grey figure.

“I shall try my best,” he said quietly; “but I’m not naturally Solomon at six stone seven.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Soames, “I’m not so sure. Anyway, a child — well, a child would be — a — sort of insur —” He baulked, the word was not precisely —!

Michael froze.

“As to that, I can’t say anything.”

Soames got up.

“No,” he said wistfully, “I suppose not. It’s time to dress.”

To dress — to dine, and if to dine, to sleep — to sleep, to dream! And then what dreams might come!

On the way to his dressing-room Michael encountered Coaker; the man's face was long.

"What's up, Coaker?"

"The little dog, sir, has been sick in the drawing-room."

"The deuce he has!"

"Yes, sir; it appears that some one left him there alone. He makes himself felt, sir. I always say: He's an important little dog . . . ."

During dinner, as if visited by remorse for having given them advice and two pictures worth some thousands of pounds, Soames pitched a tale like those of James in his palmy days. He spoke of the French — the fall of the mark — the rise in Consols — the obstinacy of Dumetrius, the picture-dealer, over a Constable skyscape which Soames wanted and Dumetrius did not, but to which the fellow held on just for the sake of a price which Soames did not mean to pay. He spoke of the trouble which he foresaw with the United States over their precious Prohibition. They were a headstrong lot. They took up a thing and ran their heads against a stone wall. He himself had never drunk anything to speak of, but he liked to feel that he could. The Americans liked to feel that he couldn't, that was tyranny. They were overbearing. He shouldn't be surprised if everybody took to drinking over there. As to the League of Nations, a man that morning had palavered it up. That cock wouldn't fight — spend money, and arrange things which would have arranged themselves, but as for anything important, such as abolishing Bolshevism, or poison gas, they never would, and to pretend it was all-me-eye-and-Betty-Martin. It was almost a record for one habitually taciturn, and deeply useful to two young people only anxious that he should continue to talk, so that they might think of other things. The conduct of Ting-a-ling was the sole other subject of consideration. Fleur thought it due to the copper floor. Soames that he must have picked up something in the Square — dogs were always picking things up. Michael suggested that it was just Chinese — a protest against there being nobody to watch his self-sufficiency. In China there were four hundred million people to watch each other being self-sufficient. What would one expect of a Chinaman suddenly placed in the Gobi Desert? He would certainly be sick.

"No retreat, no retreat; they must conquer or die who have no retreat!"

When Fleur left them, both felt that they could not so soon again bear each other's company, and Soames said: "I've got some figures to attend to — I'll go to my room."

Michael stood up. "Wouldn't you like my den, sir?"

"No," said Soames, "I must concentrate. Say goodnight to Fleur for me."

Michael remained smoking above the porcelain effigies of Spanish fruits. That white monkey couldn't eat those and throw away the rinds! Would the fruits of his life be porcelain in future? Live in the same house with Fleur, estranged? Live with Fleur as now, feeling a stranger, even an unwelcome stranger? Clear out, and join the Air Force, or the 'Save the Children' corps? Which of the three courses was least to be deplored? The ash of his cigar grew long, dropped incontinent, and grew again; the porcelain fruits mocked him with their sheen and glow; Coaker put his head in and took it away again. (The Governor had got the hump — good sort, the Governor!) Decision waited for him, somewhere, somewhen — Fleur's, not his own. His mind was too miserable and disconcerted to be known; but she would know hers. She had the information which alone made decision possible about Wilfrid, that cousin, her own actions and feelings. Yes, decision would come, and would it matter in a world where pity was punk and only a Chinese philosophy of any use?

But not be sick in the drawing-room, try and keep one's end up, even if there were no one to see one being important! . . .

He had been asleep and it was dark, or all but, in his bed-dressing-room. Something white by his bed. A fragrant faint warmth close to him; a voice saying low: "It's only me. Let me come in your bed, Michael. "Like a child — like a child! Michael reached out his arms. The whiteness and the warmth came into them. Curls smothered his mouth, the voice said in his ear: "I wouldn't have come, would I, if there'd — if there'd been anything?" Michael's heart, wild, confused, beat against hers.

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CHAPTER VII

THE ALTOGETHER

Tony Bicket, replete, was in vein that fine afternoon; his balloons left him freely, and he started for home in the mood of a conqueror.

Victorine, too, had colour in her cheeks. She requited the story of his afternoon with the story of hers. A false tale for a true — no word of Danby and Winter, the gentleman with the sliding smile, of the Grand Marnier, or 'the altogether.' She had no compunction. It was her secret, her surprise; if, by sitting in or out of 'the altogether,' not yet decided, she could make their passage money — well, she should tell him she had won it on a horse. That night she asked:

"Am I so very thin, Tony?" more than once. "I do so want to get fat."

Bicket, still troubled that she had not shared that lunch, patted her tenderly, and said he would soon have her as fat as butter — he did not explain how.

They dreamed together of blue butterflies, and awoke to chilly gaslight and a breakfast of cocoa and bread-and-butter. Fog! Bicket was swallowed up before the eyes of Victorine ten yards from the door. She returned to the bedroom with anger in her heart. Who would buy balloons in a fog? She would do anything rather than let Tony go on standing out there all the choking days! Undressing again, she washed herself intensively, in case —! She had not long finished when her landlady announced the presence of a messenger boy. He bore an enormous parcel entitled "Mr. Bicket."

There was a note inside. She read:

"DEAR BICKET — Here are the togs. Hope they'll be useful. — Yours, MICHAEL MONT."

In a voice that trembled she said to the boy:

"Thank you, it's O. K. Here's twopence."

When his rich whistle was heard writhing into the fog, she flung herself down before the 'togs' in ecstasy. The sexes were divided by tissue paper. A blue suit, a velour hat, some brown shoes, three pairs of socks with two holes in them, four shirts only a little frayed at the cuffs, two black-and-white ties, six collars, not too new, some handkerchiefs, two vests beautifully thick, two pairs of pants, and a brown overcoat with a belt and just two or three nice little stains. She held the blue suit up against her arms and legs, the trousers and sleeves would only need taking-in about two inches. She piled them in a pyramid, and turned with awe to the spoil beneath the tissue paper. A brown knitted frock with little clear yellow buttons — unsoiled, uncreased. How could anybody spare a thing like that! A brown velvet toque with a little tuft of goldeny-brown feathers. She put it on. A pair of pink stays ever so little faded, with only three inches of bone above the waist, and five inches of bone below, pink silk ribbons, and suspenders — a perfect dream. She could not resist putting them on also. Two pairs of brown stockings; brown shoes; two combinations, a knitted camisole. A white silk jumper with a hole in one sleeve, a skirt of lilac linen that had gone a little in the wash; a pair of pallid pink silk pants; and underneath them all an almost black-brown coat, long and warm and cosy, with great jet buttons, and in the pocket six small handkerchiefs. She took a deep breath of sweetness — geranium!

Her mind leaped forward. Clothed, trousseaued, fitted out — blue butterflies — the sun! Only the money for the tickets wanting. And suddenly she saw herself with nothing on standing before the gentleman with sliding eyes. Who cared! The money!

For the rest of the morning she worked feverishly, shortening Tony, mending the holes in his socks, turning the fray of his cuffs. She ate a biscuit, drank another cup of cocoa — it was fattening, and went for the hole in the white silk jumper. One o'clock. In panic she stripped once more, put on a new combination, pair of stockings, and the stays, then paused in superstition. No! Her own dress and hat — like yesterday! Keep the rest until —! She hastened to her 'bus, overcome alternately by heat and cold. Perhaps he would give her another glass of that lovely stuff. If only she could go swimmy and not care for anything!

She reached the studio as two o'clock was striking, and knocked. It was lovely and warm in there, much warmer than yesterday, and the significance of this struck her suddenly. In front of the fire was a lady with a little dog.

"Miss Collins — Mrs. Michael Mont; she's lending us her Peke, Miss Collins."

The lady — only her own age, and ever so pretty — held out her hand. Geranium! This, then, was she whose clothes —!

She took the hand, but could not speak. If this lady were going to stay, it would be utterly impossible. Before her — so pretty, so beautifully covered — oh! no!

"Now, Ting, be good, and as amusing as you can. Goodbye, Aubrey! Good luck to the picture! Good-bye, Miss Collins; it ought to be wonderful."

Gone! The scent of geranium fading; the little dog snuffling at the door. The sliding gentleman had two glasses in his hands.

'Ah!' thought Victorine, and drank hers at a gulp.

"Now, Miss Collins, you don't mind, do you! You'll find everything in there. It's really nothing. I shall want you lying on your face just here with your elbows on the ground and your head up and a little turned this way; your hair as loose as it can be, and your eyes looking at this bone. You must imagine that it's a faun or some other bit of all right. The dog'll help you when he settles down to it. F-a-u-n, you know, not f-a-w-n."

"Yes," said Victorine faintly.

"Have another little tot?"

"Oh! please."

He brought it.

"I quite understand; but you know, really, it's absurd. You wouldn't mind with a doctor. That's right. Look here, I'll put this little cow-bell on the ground. When you're in position, give it a tinkle, and I'll come out. That'll help you."

Victorine murmured:

"You ARE kind."

"Not at all — it's natural. Now will you start in? The light won't last for ever. Fifteen bob a day, we said."

Victorine saw him slide away behind a screen, and looked at the little cow-bell. Fifteen bob! And fifteen bob! And fifteen bob! Many, many fifteen bobs before —! But not more times of sitting than of Tony's standing from foot to foot, offering balloons. And as if wound up by that thought, she moved like clockwork off the dais, into the model's room. Cosy in there, too; warm, a green silk garment thrown on a chair. She took off her dress. The beauty of the pink stays struck her afresh. Perhaps the gentleman would like — no, that would be even worse —! A noise reached her — from Ting-a-ling complaining of solitude. If she delayed, she never would —! Stripping hastily, she stood looking at herself in a glass. If only that slim, ivory-white image could move out on to the dais and she could stay here! Oh! It was awful — awful! She couldn't — no! she couldn't. She caught up her final garment again. Fifteen bob! But fifteen bob! Before her eyes, wild and mournful, came a vision: Of a huge dome, and a tiny Tony, with little, little balloons in a hand held out! Something cold and steely formed over her heart as icicles form on a window. If that was all they would do for him, she would do better! She dropped the garment; and, confused, numb, stepped forth in the 'altogether.' Ting-a-ling growled at her above his bone. She reached the cow-bell and lay down on her face as she had been told, with feet in the air, crossed. Resting her chin on one hand, she wagged the bell. It made a sound like no bell she had ever heard; and the little dog barked — he did look funny!

"Perfect, Miss Collins! Hold that!"

Fifteen bob! and fifteen bob!

"Just point those left toes a bit more. That's right! The flesh tone's perfect! My God, why must one walk before one runs! Drawing's a bore, Miss Collins; one ought to draw with a brush only; a sculptor draws with a chisel, at least when he's a Michelangelo. How old are you?"

"Twenty-one," came from lips that seemed to Victorine quite far away.

"I'm thirty-two. They say our generation was born so old that it can never get any older. Without illusions. Well! I never had any beliefs that I can remember. Had you?"

Victorine's wits and senses were astray, but it did not matter, for he was rattling on:

"We don't even believe in our ancestors. All the same, we're beginning to copy them again. D'you know a book called 'The Sobbing Turtle' that's made such a fuss? — sheer Sterne, very well done; but sheer Sterne, and the author's tongue in his cheek. That's it in a nutshell, Miss Collins — our tongues are in our cheeks — bad sign. Never mind; I'm going to out-

Piero Cosimo with this. Your head an inch higher, and that curl out of your eye, please. Thanks! Hold that! By the way, have you Italian blood? What was your mother's name, for instance?"

"Brown."

"Ah! You can never tell with Browns. It may have been Brune — or Bruno — but very likely she was Iberian. Probably all the inhabitants of Britain left alive by the Saxons were called Brown. As a fact, that's all tosh, though. Going back to Edward the Confessor, Miss Collins — a mere thirty generations — we each of us have one thousand and seventy-four million, five hundred and seventy-three thousand, nine hundred and eighty-four ancestors, and the population of this island was then well under a million. We're as inbred as racehorses, but not so nice to look at, are we? I assure you, Miss Collins, you're something to be grateful for. So is Mrs. Mont. Isn't she pretty? Look at that dog?"

Ting-a-ling, indeed, with forelegs braced, and wrinkled nose, was glaring, as if under the impression that Victorine was another bone.

"He's funny," she said, and again her voice sounded far away. Would Mrs. Mont lie here if he'd asked her? SHE would look pretty! But SHE didn't need the fifteen bob!

"Comfortable in that position?"

In alarm, she murmured:

"Oh! yes, thank you!"

"Warm enough?"

"Oh! yes, thank you!"

"That's good. Just a little higher with the head."

Slowly in Victorine the sense of the dreadfully unusual faded. Tony should never know. If he never knew, he couldn't care. She could lie like this all day — fifteen bob, and fifteen bob! It was easy. She watched the quick, slim fingers moving, the blue smoke from the cigarette. She watched the little dog.

"Like a rest? You left your gown; I'll get it for you."

In that green silk gown, beautifully padded, she sat up, with her feet on the floor over the dais edge.

"Cigarette? I'm going to make some Turkish coffee. You'd better walk about."

Victorine obeyed.

"You're out of a dream, Miss Collins. I shall have to do a Mathew Maris of you in that gown."

The coffee, like none she had ever tasted, gave her a sense of well-being. She said:

"It's not like coffee."

Aubrey Greene threw up his hands.

"You have said it. The British are a great race — nothing will ever do them in. If they could be destroyed, they must long ago have perished of their coffee. Have some more?"

"Please," said Victorine. There was such a little in the cup.

"Ready, again?"

She lay down, and let the gown drop off.

"That's right! Leave it there — you're lying in long grass, and the green helps me. Pity it's winter; I'd have hired a glade."

Lying in long grass — flowers, too, perhaps. She did love flowers. As a little girl she used to lie in the grass, and make daisy-chains, in the field at the back of her grandmother's lodge at Norbiton. Her grandmother kept the lodge. Every year, for a fortnight, she had gone down there — she had liked the country ever so. Only she had always had something on. It would be nicer with nothing. Were there flowers in Central Australia? With butterflies there must be! In the sun — she and Tony — like the Garden of Eden! . . .

"Thank you, that's all for today. Half a day — ten bob. To-morrow morning at eleven. You're a first-rate sitter, Miss Collins."

Putting on the pink stays, Victorine had a feeling of elation. She had done it! Tony should never know! The thought that he never would gave her pleasure. And once more divested of the 'altogether,' she came forth.

Aubrey Greene was standing before his handiwork.

“Not yet, Miss Collins,” he said; “I don’t want to depress you. That hip-bone’s too high. We’ll put it right tomorrow. Forgive my hand, it’s all chalk. Au revoir! Eleven o’clock. And we shan’t need this chap. No, you don’t!”

For Ting-a-ling was showing signs of accompanying the larger bone. Victorine passed out smiling.

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CHAPTER VIII

SOAMES TAKES THE MATTER UP

Soames had concentrated, sitting before the fire in his bedroom till Big Ben struck twelve. His reflections sum-totalled in a decision to talk it over with ‘old Mont’ after all. Though light-brained, the fellow was a gentleman, and the matter delicate. He got into bed and slept, but awoke at half-past two. There it was! ‘I WON’T think of it,’ he thought; and instantly began to. In a long life of dealings with money, he had never had such an experience. Perfectly straightforward conformity with the law — itself so often far from perfectly straightforward — had been the sine qua non of his career. Honesty, they said, was the best policy. But was it anything else? A normally honest man couldn’t keep out of a perfect penitentiary for a week. But then a perfect penitentiary had no relation to prison, or the Bankruptcy Court. The business of working honesty was to keep out of those two institutions. And so far he had never had any difficulty. What, besides the drawing of fees and the drinking of tea, were the duties of a director? That was the point. And how far, if he failed in them, was he liable? It was a director’s duty to be perfectly straightforward. But if a director were perfectly straightforward, he couldn’t be a director. That was clear. In the first place, he would have to tell his shareholders that he didn’t anything like earn his fees. For what did he do on his Boards? Well, he sat and signed his name and talked a little, and passed that which the general trend of business decided must be passed. Did he initiate? Once in a blue moon. Did he calculate? No, he read calculations. Did he check payments out and in? No, the auditors did that. There was policy! A comforting word, but — to be perfectly straightforward — a director’s chief business was to let the existing policy alone. Take his own case! If he had done his duty, he would have stopped this foreign insurance business which he had instinctively distrusted the moment he heard of it — within a month of sitting on the Board, or, having failed in doing so, resigned his seat. But he had not. Things had been looking better! It was not the moment, and so forth! If he had done his duty as a perfectly straightforward director, indeed, he would never have become a director of the P. P. R. S., because he would have looked into the policy of the Society much more closely than he had before accepting a position on the Board. But what with the names, and the prestige, and not looking a gift horse too closely in the mouth — there it had been! To be perfectly straightforward, he ought now to be circularising the shareholders, saying: “My laissez-faire has cost you two hundred odd thousand pounds. I have lodged this amount in the hands of trustees for your benefit, and am suing the rest of the directors for their quotas of the amount.” But he was not proposing to do so, because — well — because it wasn’t done, and the other directors wouldn’t like it. In sum: You waited till the shareholders found out the mess, and you hoped they wouldn’t. In fact, just like a Government, you confused the issues, and made the best case you could for yourselves. With a sense of comfort Soames thought of Ireland: The late Government had let the country in for all that mess in Ireland, and at the end taken credit for putting an end to what need never have been! The Peace, too, and the Air Force, and Agriculture, and Egypt — the five most important issues they’d had to deal with — they had put the chestnuts into the fire in every case! But had they confessed to it? Not they. One didn’t confess. One said: “The question of policy made it imperative at the time.” Or, better still, one said nothing; and trusted to the British character. With his chin resting on the sheet, Soames felt a momentary relief. The late Government weren’t sweating into THEIR sheets — not they — he was convinced of it! Fixing his eyes on the dying embers in the grate, he reflected on the inequalities and injustices of existence. Look at the chaps in politics and business, whose whole lives were passed in skating on thin ice, and getting knighted for it. They never turned a hair. And look at himself, for the first time in forty years on thin ice, and suffering confoundedly. There was a perfect cult of hoodwinking the public, a perfect cult of avoiding the consequences of administrative acts; and here was he, a man of the world, a man of the law, ignorant of those cults, and — and glad of it. From engrained caution and a certain pride, which had in it a touch of the fine, Soames shrank from that coarse-grained standard of honesty which conducted the affairs of the British public. In anything that touched money he was, he always had been, stiff-necked, stiff-kneed. Money was money, a pound a pound, and there was no way of pretending it wasn’t and keeping your self-respect. He got up, drank some water, took a number of deep breaths, and stamped his feet. Who was it said the other day that nothing had ever lost him five minutes’ sleep. The fellow must have the circulation of an ox, or the gift of Baron Munchausen. He took up a book. But his mind would only turn over and over the realisable value of his resources. Apart from his pictures, he decided that he could not be worth less than two hundred and fifty thousand pounds, and there was only Fleur — and she already provided for more or less. His wife had her settlement, and could live on it perfectly well in France. As for himself — what did he care? A room at his club near Fleur — he would be just as happy, perhaps happier! And suddenly he found that he had reached a way out of his disturbance and anxiety. By imagining the far-fetched, by facing the loss of his wealth, he had exorcised the demon. The book, 'The Sobbing Turtle,' of which he had not read one word, dropped from his hand; he slept . . . .

His meeting with 'Old Mont' took place at 'Snooks' directly after lunch. The tape in the hall, at which he glanced on going in, recorded a further heavy drop in the mark. Just as he thought: The thing was getting valueless!

Sitting there, sipping coffee, the baronet looked to Soames almost offensively spry. Two to one he had realised nothing! 'Well!' thought Soames,' as old Uncle Jolyon used to say, I shall astonish his weak nerves!'

And without preamble he began.

"How are you, Mont? This mark's valueless. You realise we've lost the P. P. R. S. about a quarter of a million by that precious foreign policy of Elderson's. I'm not sure an action won't lie against us for taking unjustifiable risk. But what I've come to see you about is this." He retailed the interview with the clerk, Butterfield, watching the eyebrows of his listener, and finished with the words: "What do you say?"

Sir Lawrence, whose foot was jerking his whole body, fixed his monocle.

"Hallucination, my dear Forsyte! I've known Elderson all my life. We were at Winchester together."

Again! Again! Oh! Lord! Soames said slowly:

"You can't tell from that. A man who was at Marlborough with me ran away with his mess fund and his colonel's wife, and made a fortune in Chili out of canned tomatoes. The point is this: If the young man's story's true, we're in the hands of a bad hat. It won't do, Mont. Will you tackle him, and see what he says to it? You wouldn't like a story of that sort about yourself. Shall we both go?"

"Yes," said Sir Lawrence, suddenly. "You're right. We'll both go, Forsyte. I don't like it, but we'll both go. He ought to hear it."

"Now?"

"Now."

With solemnity they assumed top hats, and issued.

"I think, Forsyte, we'll take a taxi."

"Yes," said Soames.

The cab ground its way slowly past the lions, then dashed on down to the Embankment. Side by side its occupants held their noses steadily before them.

"He was shooting with me a month ago," said Sir Lawrence. "Do you know the hymn 'O God, our help in ages past'? It's very fine, Forsyte."

Soames did not answer. The fellow was beginning to tittup!

"We had it that Sunday," went on Sir Lawrence. "Elderson used to have a fine voice — sang solos. It's a foghorn now, but a good delivery still." He gave his little whinnying laugh.

'Is it possible,' thought Soames, 'for this chap to be serious?' and he said:

"If we find this is true of Elderson, and conceal it, we could all be put in the dock."

Sir Lawrence refixed his monocle. "The deuce!" he said.

"Will you do the talking," said Soames, "or shall I?"

"I think you had better, Forsyte; ought we to have the young man in?"

"Wait and see," said Soames.

They ascended to the offices of the P. P. R. S. and entered the Board Room. There was no fire, the long table was ungarnished; an old clerk, creeping about like a fly on a pane, was filling inkstands out of a magnum.

Soames addressed him:

"Ask the manager to be so kind as to come and see Sir Lawrence Mont and Mr. Forsyte."

The old clerk blinked, put down the magnum, and went out.

"Now," said Soames in a low voice, "we must keep our heads. He'll deny it, of course."

"I should hope so, Forsyte; I should hope so. Elderson's a gentleman."

"No liar like a gentleman," muttered Soames, below his breath.

After that they stood in their overcoats before the empty grate, staring at their top hats placed side by side on the table.

"One minute!" said Soames, suddenly, and crossing the room, he opened a door opposite. There, as the young clerk had said, was a sort of lobby between Board Room and Manager's Room, with a door at the end into the main corridor. He stepped back, closed the door, and, rejoining Sir Lawrence, resumed his contemplation of the hats.

"Geography correct," he said with gloom.

The entrance of the manager was marked by Sir Lawrence's monocle dropping on to his coat-button with a tinkle. In cutaway black coat, clean-shaven, with grey eyes rather baggy underneath, a pink colour, every hair in place on a rather bald egg-shaped head, and lips alternately pouting, compressed, or smiling, the manager reminded Soames ridiculously of old Uncle Nicholas in his middle period. Uncle Nick was a clever fellow —"cleverest man in London," some one had called him — but none had ever impugned his honesty. A pang of doubt and disinclination went through Soames. This seemed a monstrous thing to have to put to a man of his own age and breeding. But young Butterfield's eyes — so honest and doglike! Invent a thing like that — was it possible? He said abruptly:

"Is that door shut?"

"Yes; do you feel a draught?" said the manager. "Would you like a fire?"

"No, thank you," said Soames. "The fact is, Mr. Elderson, a young man in this office came to me yesterday with a very queer story. Mont and I think you should hear it."

Accustomed to watching people's eyes, Soames had the impression of a film (such as passes over the eyes of parrots) passing over the eyes of the manager. It was gone at once, if, indeed, it had ever been.

"By all means."

Steadily, with that power he had over his nerves when it came to a point, and almost word for word, Soames repeated a story which he had committed to heart in the watches of the night. He concluded with:

"You'd like him in, no doubt. His name is Butterfield."

During the recital Sir Lawrence had done nothing but scrutinise his finger nails; he now said:

"You had to be told, Elderson."

"Naturally."

The manager was crossing to the bell. The pink in his cheeks looked harder; his teeth showed, they had a pointed look.

"Ask Mr. Butterfield to come here."

There followed a minute of elaborate inattention to each other. Then the young man came in, neat, commonplace, with his eyes on the manager's face. Soames had a moment of compunction. This young fellow held his life in his hands, as it were — one of the great army who made their living out of self-suppression and respectability, with a hundred ready to step into his shoes at his first slip. What was that old tag of the provincial actor's declamation — at which old Uncle Jolyon used to cackle so? "Like a pale martyr with his shirt on fire."

"So, Mr. Butterfield, you have been good enough to exercise your imagination in my regard."

"No, sir."

"You stick to this fantastic story of eavesdropping?"

"Yes, sir."

"We have no further use for your services then. Good morning!"

The young man's eyes, doglike, sought the face of Soames; a string twitched in his throat, his lips moved without a sound. He turned and went out.

"So much for that," said the manager's voice; "HE'LL never get another job."

The venom in those words affected Soames like the smell of Russian fat. At the same moment he had the feeling: This wants thinking out. Only if innocent, or guilty and utterly resolved, would Elderson have been so drastic. Which was he?

The manager went on:

"I thank you for drawing my attention to the matter, gentlemen. I have had my eye on that young man for some time. A bad hat all round."

Soames said glumly:

"What do you make out he had to gain?"

"Foresaw dismissal, and thought he would get in first."

"I see," said Soames. But he did not. His mind was back in his own office with Gradman rubbing his nose, shaking his grey head, and Butterfield's: "No, sir, I've nothing against Mr. Elderson, and he's nothing against me."

'I shall require to know more about that young man,' he thought.

The manager's voice again cut through.

"I've been thinking over what you said yesterday, Mr. Forsyte, about an action lying against the Board for negligence. There's nothing in that; our policy has been fully disclosed to the shareholders at two general meetings, and has passed without comment. The shareholders are just as responsible as the Board."

"H'm!" said Soames, and took up his hat. "Are you coming, Mont?"

As if summoned from a long distance, Sir Lawrence galvanitically refixed his monocle.

"It's been very distasteful," he said; "you must forgive us, Elderson. You had to be told. I don't think that young man can be quite all there — he had a peculiar look; but we can't have this sort of thing, of course. Good-bye, Elderson."

Placing their hats on their heads simultaneously the two walked out. They walked some way without speaking. Then Sir Lawrence said:

"Butterfield? My brother-inlaw has a head gardener called Butterfield — quite a good fellow. Ought we to look into that young man, Forsyte?"

"Yes," said Soames, "leave him to me."

"I shall be very glad to. The fact is, when one has been at school with a man, one has a feeling, don't you know."

Soames gave vent to a sudden outburst.

"You can't trust anyone nowadays, it seems to me," he said. "It comes of — well, I don't know what it comes of. But I've not done with this matter yet."

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CHAPTER IX

SLEUTH

The Hotch-potch Club went back to the eighteen-sixties. Founded by a posse of young sparks, social and political, as a convenient place in which to smoulder, while qualifying for the hearths of 'Snooks', The Remove, The Wayfarers, Burton's, Ostrich Feather, and other more permanent resorts, the Club had, chiefly owing to a remarkable chef in its early days, acquired a stability and distinction of its own. It still, however, retained a certain resemblance to its name, and this was its attraction to Michael — all sorts of people belonged. From Walter Nazing, and young semi-writers and patrons of the stage, who went to Venice, and talked of being amorous in gondolas, or of how so-and-so ought to be made love to; from such to bottle-brushed demi-generals, who had sat on courts-martial and shot men out of hand for the momentary weaknesses of human nature; from Wilfrid Desert (who never came there now) to Maurice Elderson, in the card-room, he could meet them all, and take the temperature of modernity. He was doing this in the Hotch-potch smoking-room, the late afternoon but one after Fleur had come into his bed, when he was informed:

"A Mr. Forsyte, sir, in the hall for you. Not the member we had here many years before he died; his cousin, I think."

Conscious that his associates at the moment would not be his father-inlaw's 'dream,' nor he theirs, Michael went out, and found Soames on the weighing machine.

"I don't vary," he said, looking up. "How's Fleur?"

"Very well, thank you, sir."

"I'm at Green Street. I stayed up about a young man. Have you any vacancy in your office for a clerk — used to figures. I want a job for him."

"Come in here, sir," said Michael, entering a small room.

Soames followed and looked round him.

"What do you call this?" he said.

"Well, we call it 'the grave'; it's nice and quiet. Will you have a sherry?"

"Sherry!" repeated Soames. "You young people think you've invented sherry; when I was a boy no one dreamed of dining without a glass of dry sherry with his soup, and a glass of fine old sherry with his sweet. Sherry!"

"I quite believe you, sir. There really is nothing new. Venice, for instance — wasn't that the fashion, too; and knitting, and royalties? It's all cyclic. Has your young man got the sack?"

Soames stared. "Yes," he said, "he has. His name is Butterfield; he wants a job."

"That's frightfully rife; we get applications every day. I don't want to be swanky, but ours is a rather specialised business. It has to do with books."

"He strikes me as capable, orderly, and civil; I don't see what more you want in a clerk. He writes a good hand, and, so far as I can see, he tells the truth."

"That's important, of course," said Michael; "but is he a good liar as well? I mean, there's more likely to be something in the travelling line; selling special editions, and that kind of thing. Could you open up about him a bit? Anything human is to the good — I don't say old Danby would appreciate that, but he needn't know."

"H'm! Well — he — er — did his duty — quite against his interest — in fact, it's ruination for him. He seems to be married and to have two children."

"Ho, ho! Jolly! If I got him a place, would he — would he be doing his duty again, do you think?"

"I am serious," said Soames; "the young man is on my mind."

"Yes," said Michael, ruminative, "the first thing in such a case is to get him on to some one else's, sharp. Could I see him?"

"I told him to step round and see you to-night after dinner. I thought you'd prefer to look him over in private before considering him for your office."

"Very thoughtful of you, sir! There's just one thing. Don't you think I ought to know the duty he did — in confidence? I don’t see how I can avoid putting my foot into my mouth without, do you?”

Soames stared at his son-inlaw’s face, where the mouth was wide; for the nth time it inspired in him a certain liking and confidence; it looked so honest.

“Well,” he said, going to the door and ascertaining that it was opaque, “this is matter for a criminal slander action, so for your own sake as well as mine you will keep it strictly to yourself”; and in a low voice he retailed the facts.

“As I expected,” he ended, “the young man came to me again this morning. He is naturally upset. I want to keep my hand on him. Without knowing more, I can’t make up my mind whether to go further or not. Besides”— Soames hesitated; to claim a good motive was repulsive to him: “I— it seems hard on him. He’s been getting three hundred and fifty.”

“Dashed hard!” said Michael. “I say, Elderson’s a member here.”

Soames looked with renewed suspicion at the door — it still seemed opaque, and he said: “The deuce he is! Do you know him?”

“I’ve played bridge with him,” said Michael; “he’s taken some of the best off me — snorting good player.”

“Ah!” said Soames — he never played cards himself. “I can’t take this young man into my own firm for obvious reasons; but I can trust you.”

Michael touched his forelock.

“Frightfully bucked, sir. Protection of the poor — some sleuth, too. I’ll see him to-night, and let you know what I can wangle.”

Soames nodded. ‘Good Gad!’ he thought; ‘what jargon! . . .’

The interview served Michael the good turn of taking his thoughts off himself. Temperamentally he sided already with the young man Butterfield; and, lighting a cigarette, he went into the card-room. Sitting on the high fender, he was impressed — the room was square, and within it were three square card tables, set askew to the walls, with three triangles of card players.

‘If only,’ thought Michael, ‘the fourth player sat under the table, the pattern would be complete. It’s having the odd player loose that spoils the cubes.’ And with something of a thrill he saw that Elderson was a fourth player! Sharp and impassive, he was engaged in applying a knife to the end of a cigar. Gosh! what sealed books faces were! Each with pages and pages of private thoughts, interests, schemes, fancies, passions, hopes and fears; and down came death — splosh! — and a creature wiped out, like a fly on a wall, and nobody any more could see its little close mechanism working away for its own ends, in its own privacy and its own importance; nobody any more could speculate on whether it was a clean or a dirty little bit of work. Hard to tell! They ran in all shapes! Elderson, for instance — was he a nasty mess, or just a lamb of God who didn’t look it? ‘Somehow,’ thought Michael, ‘I feel he’s a womaniser. Now why?’ He spread his hands out behind him to the fire, rubbing them together like a fly that has been in treacle. If one couldn’t tell what was passing in the mind of one’s own wife in one’s own house, how on earth could one tell anything from the face of a stranger, and he one of the closest bits of mechanism in the world — an English gentleman of business! If only life were like ‘The Idiot’ or ‘The Brothers Karamazov,’ and everybody went about turning out their inmost hearts at the tops of their voices! If only club card rooms had a dash of epilepsy in their composition! But — nothing! Nothing! The world was full of wonderful secrets which everybody kept to themselves without captions or close-ups to give them away!

A footman came in, looked at the fire, stood a moment expressionless as a stork, waiting for an order to ping out, staccato, through the hum, turned and went away.

Mechanism! Everywhere — mechanism! Devices for getting away from life so complete that there seemed no life to get away from.

‘It’s all,’ he thought, ‘awfully like a man sending a registered letter to himself. And perhaps it’s just as well. Is ‘life’ a good thing — is it? Do I want to see ‘life’ raw again?’

Elderson was seated now, and Michael had a perfect view of the back of his head. It disclosed nothing.

‘I’m no sleuth,’ he thought; ‘there ought to be something in the way he doesn’t part his hair behind.’ And, getting off the fender, he went home.

At dinner he caught one of his own looks at Fleur and didn’t like it. Sleuth! And yet how not try to know what were the real thoughts and feelings of one who held his heart, like an accordion, and made it squeak and groan at pleasure!

"I saw the model you sent Aubrey yesterday," she said. "She didn't say anything about the clothes, but she looked ever so! What a face, Michael! Where did you come across her?"

Through Michael sped the thought: 'Could I make her jealous?' And he was shocked at it. A low-down thought — mean and ornery! "She blew in," he said. "Wife of a little packer we had who took to snooping — er — books. He sells balloons now; they want money badly."

"I see. Did you know that Aubrey's going to paint her in the nude?"

"Phew! No! I thought she'd look good on a wrapper. I say! Ought I to stop that?"

Fleur smiled. "It's more money and her look-out. It doesn't matter to you, does it?"

Again that thought; again the recoil from it!

"Only," he said, "that her husband is a decent little snipe for a snooper, and I don't want to be more sorry for him."

"She won't tell him, of course."

She said it so naturally, so simply, that the words disclosed a whole attitude of mind. One didn't tell one's mate what would tease the poor brute! He saw by the flutter of her white eyelids that she also realised the give-away. Should he follow it up, tell her what June Forsyte had told him — have it all out — all out? But with what purpose — to what end? Would it change things, make her love him? Would it do anything but harass her a little more; and give him the sense that he had lost his wicket trying to drive her to the pavilion? No! Better adopt the principle of secrecy she had unwittingly declared her own, bite on it, and grin. He muttered:

"I'm afraid he'll find her rather thin."

Her eyes were bright and steady; and again he was worried by that low-down thought: 'Could he make her —?'

"I've only seen her once," he added, "and then she was dressed."

"I'm not jealous, Michael."

'No,' he thought, 'I wish to heaven you were!'

The words: "A young man called Butterfill to see you, sir," were like the turning of a key in a cell door.

In the hall the young man "called Butterfill" was engaged in staring at Ting-a-ling.

'Judging by his eyes,' thought Michael, 'he's more of a dog than that little Djinn!'

"Come up to my study," he said, "it's cold down here. My father-inlaw tells me you want a job."

"Yes, sir," said the young man, following up the stairs.

"Take a pew," said Michael; "and a cigarette. Now then! I know all about the turmoil. From your moustache, you were in the war, I suppose, like me? As between fellow-sufferers: Is your story O. K.?"

"God's truth, sir; I only wish it wasn't. I'd nothing to gain and everything to lose. I'd have done better to hold my tongue. It's his word against mine, and here I am in the street. That was my first job since the war, so I can whistle for a reference."

"Wife and two children, I think?"

"Yes, and I've put them in the cart for the sake of my conscience! It's the last time I'll do that, I know. What did it matter to me, whether the Society was cheated? My wife's quite right, I was a fool, sir."

"Probably," said Michael. "Do you know anything about books?"

"Yes, sir; I'm a good book-keeper."

"Holy Moses! OUR job is getting rid of them. My firm are publishers. We were thinking of putting on an extra traveller. Is your tongue persuasive?"

The young man smiled wanly.

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, look here," said Michael, carried away by the look in his eyes, "it's all a question of a certain patter. But, of course, that's got to be learned. I gather that you're not a reader."

"Well, sir, not a great reader."

"That, perhaps, is fortunate. What you would have to do is to impress on the poor brutes who sell books that every one of the books on your list — say about thirty-five — is necessary in large numbers to his business. It's lucky you've just chucked your conscience, because, as a matter of fact most of them won't be. I'm afraid there's nowhere you could go to to get lessons in persuasion, but you can imagine the sort of thing, and if you like to come here for an hour or two this week, I'll put you wise about our authors, and ready you up to go before Peter."

"Before Peter, sir?"

"The Johnny with the keys; luckily it's Mr. Winter, not Mr. Danby; I believe I could get him to let you in for a month's trial."

"Sir, I'll try my very best. My wife knows about books, she could help me a lot. I can't tell you what I think of your kindness. The fact is, being out of a job has put the wind up me properly. I've not been able to save with two children; it's like the end of the world."

"Right-o, then! Come here tomorrow evening at nine, and I'll stuff you. I believe you've got the face for the job, if you can get the patter. Only one book in twenty is a necessity really, the rest are luxuries. Your stunt will be to make them believe the nineteen are necessaries, and the twentieth a luxury that they need. It's like food or clothes, or anything else in civilisation."

"Yes, sir, I quite understand."

"All right, then. Good-night, and good luck!"

Michael stood up and held out his hand. The young man took it with a queer reverential little bow. A minute later he was out in the street; and Michael in the hall was thinking: 'Pity is tripe! Clean forgot I was a sleuth!'

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CHAPTER X

FACE

When Michael rose from the refectory table, Fleur had risen, too. Two days and more since she left Wilfrid's rooms, and she had not recovered zest. The rifling of the oyster Life, the garlanding of London's rarer flowers which kept colour in her cheeks, seemed stale, unprofitable. Those three hours, when from shock off Cork Street she came straight to shocks in her own drawing-room, had dislocated her so that she had settled to nothing since. The wound re-opened by Holly had nearly healed again. Dead lion beside live donkey cuts but dim figure. But she could not get hold again of — what? That was the trouble: What? For two whole days she had been trying. Michael was still strange, Wilfrid still lost, Jon still buried alive, and nothing seemed novel under the sun. The only object that gave her satisfaction during those two dreary, disillusioned days was the new white monkey. The more she looked at it, the more Chinese it seemed. It summed up the satirical truth of which she was perhaps subconscious, that all her little modern veerings and flutterings and rushings after the future showed that she believed in nothing but the past. The age had overdone it and must go back to ancestry for faith. Like a little bright fish out of a warm bay, making a splash in chill, strange waters, Fleur felt a subtle nostalgia.

In her Spanish room, alone with her own feelings, she stared at the porcelain fruits. They glowed, cold, uneatable! She took one up. Meant for a passion fruit? Alas! Poor passion! She dropped it with a dull clink on to the pyramid, and shuddered a little. Had she blinded Michael with her kisses? Blinded him to — what? To her incapacity for passion?

'But I'm not incapable,' she thought; 'I'm not. Some day I'll show him; I'll show them all.' She looked up at 'the Goya' hanging opposite. What gripping determination in the painting — what intensity of life in the black eyes of a rather raddled dame! SHE would know what she wanted, and get it, too! No compromise and uncertainty there — no capering round life, wondering what it meant, and whether it was worth while, nothing but hard living for the sake of living!

Fleur put her hands where her flesh ended, and her dress began. Wasn't she as warm and firm — yes, and ten times as pretty, as that fine and evil-looking Spanish dame, with the black eyes and the wonderful lace? And, turning her back on the picture, she went into the hall. Michael's voice and another's! They were coming down! She slipped across into the drawing-room and took up the manuscript of a book of poems, on which she was to give Michael her opinion. She sat, not reading, wondering if he were coming in. She heard the front door close. No! He had gone out! A relief, yet chilling! Michael not warm and cheerful in the house — if it were to go on, it would be wearing. She curled herself up and tried to read. Dreary poems — free verse, blank, introspective, all about the author's inside! No lift, no lilt! Duds! She seemed to have read them a dozen times before. She lay quite still — listening to the click and flutter of the burning logs! If the light were out she might go to sleep. She turned it off, and came back to the settee. She could see herself sitting there, a picture in the firelight; see how lonely she looked, pretty, pathetic, with everything she wished for, and — nothing! Her lip curled. She could even see her own spoiled-child ingratitude. And what was worse, she could see herself seeing it — a triple-distilled modern, so subtly arranged in life-tight compartments that she could not be submerged. If only something would blow in out of the unkempt cold, out of the waste and wilderness of a London whose flowers she plucked. The firelight — soft, uncertain — searched out spots and corners of her Chinese room, as on a stage in one of those scenes, seductive and mysterious, where one waited, to the sound of tambourines, for the next moment of the plot. She reached out and took a cigarette. She could see herself lighting it, blowing out the smoke — her own half-curled fingers, her parted lips, her white rounded arm. She was decorative! Well, and wasn't that all that mattered? To be decorative, and make little decorations; to be pretty in a world that wasn't pretty! In 'Copper Coin' there was a poem of a flicker-lit room, and a spoiled Columbine before the fire, and a Harlequin hovering without, like 'the spectre of the rose.' And suddenly, without warning, Fleur's heart ached. It ached definitely, rather horribly, and, slipping down on to the floor before the fire, she snuggled her face against Ting-a-ling. The Chinese dog raised his head — his black eyes lurid in the glow.

He licked her cheek, and turned his nose away. Huf! Powder! But Fleur lay like the dead. And she saw herself lying — the curve of her hip, the chestnut glow in her short hair; she heard the steady beat of her heart. Get up! Go out! Do something! But what — what was worth doing? What had any meaning in it? She saw herself doing — extravagant things; nursing sick women; tending pale babies; making a speech in Parliament; riding a steeplechase; hoeing turnips in knickerbockers — decorative. And she lay perfectly still, bound by the filaments of her self-vision. So long as she saw herself she would do nothing — she knew it — for nothing would be worth doing! And it seemed to her, lying there so still, that not to see herself would be worse than anything. And she felt that to feel this was to acknowledge herself caged for ever.

Ting-a-ling growled, turning his nose towards the windows. “In here,” he seemed to say, “we are cosy; we think of the past. We have no use for anything outside. Kindly go away — whoever it is out there!” And again he growled — a low, continuous sound.

“What is it, Ting?”

Ting-a-ling rose on his fore-legs, with muzzle pointed at the window.

“Do you want your walk?”

“No,” said the growl.

Fleur picked him up. “Don’t be so silly!” And she went to the window. The curtains were closely drawn; rich, Chinese, lined, they excluded the night. Fleur made a chink with one hand, and started back. Against the pane was a face, the forehead pressed against the glass, the eyes closed, as if it had been there a long time. In the dark it seemed featureless, vaguely pale. She felt the dog’s body stiffen under her arm — she felt his silence. Her heart pumped. It was ghastly — face without body.

Suddenly the forehead was withdrawn, the eyes opened. She saw — the face of Wilfrid. Could he see in-see her peering out from the darkened room? Quivering all over, she let the curtains fall to. Beckon? Let him in? Go out to him? Wave him away? Her heart beat furiously. How long had he been out there — like a ghost? What did he want of her? She dropped Ting-a-ling with a flump, and pressed her hands to her forehead, trying to clear confusion from her brain. And suddenly she stepped forward and flung the curtains apart. No face! Nothing! He was gone! The dark, draughty square — not a soul in it! Had he ever been — or was the face her fancy? But Ting-a-ling! Dogs had no fancies. He had gone back to the fire and settled down again.

‘It’s not my fault,’ she thought passionately. ‘It’s not! I didn’t want him to love me. I only wanted his — his —!’ Again she sank down before the fire. “Oh! Ting, have a feeling heart!” But the Chinese dog, mindful of the flump, made no response . . . .

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CHAPTER XI

COCKED HAT

After missing his vocation with the young man Butterfield, Michael had hesitated in the hall. At last he had not gone upstairs again, but quietly out. He walked past the Houses of Parliament and up Whitehall. In Trafalgar Square, it occurred to him that he had a father. Bart might be at 'Snooks', The Coffee House, The Aeroplane; and, with the thought, 'He'd be restful,' he sought the most modern of the three.

"Yes, Sir Lawrence Mont is in the lounge, sir."

He was sitting with knees crossed, and a cigar between his finger-tips, waiting for some one to talk to.

"Ah! Michael! Can you tell me why I come here?"

"To wait for the end of the world, sir?"

Sir Lawrence sniggered. "An idea," he said. "When the skies are wrecking civilisation, this will be the best-informed tape in London. The wish to be in at the death is perhaps the strongest of our passions, Michael. I should very much dislike being blown up, especially after dinner; but I should still more dislike missing the next show if it's to be a really good one. The air raids were great fun, after all."

Michael sighed.

"Yes," he said, "the war got us used to thinking of the millennium, and then it went and stopped, and left the millennium hanging over us. Now we shall never be happy till we get it. Can I take one of your cigars, sir?"

"My dear fellow! I've been reading Frazer again. Extraordinary how remote all superstition seems, now that we've reached the ultimate truth: That enlightenment never can prevail."

Michael stopped the lighting of his cigar.

"Do you really think that, sir?"

"What else can one think? Who can have any reasonable doubt now that with the aid of mechanics the headstrong part of man must do him in? It's an unavoidable conclusion from all recent facts. 'Per ardua ad astra,' 'Through hard knocks we shall see stars.'"

"But it's always been like that, sir, and here we are alive?"

"They say so, but I doubt it. I fancy we're really dead, Michael. I fancy we're only living in the past. I don't think — no, I don't think we can be said to expect a future. We talk of it, but I hardly think we hope for one. Underneath our protestations we subconsciously deduce. From the mess we've made of it these last ten years, we can feel the far greater mess we shall make of it in the next thirty. Human nature can argue the hind leg off a donkey, but the donkey will be four-legged at the end of the discussion."

Michael sat down suddenly and said:

"You're a bad, bold Bart!"

Sir Lawrence smiled.

"I should be glad to think that men really believed in humanity, and all that, but you know they don't — they believe in novelty and getting their own way. With rare exceptions they're still monkeys, especially the scientific variety; and when you put gunpowder and a lighted match into the paws of monkeys, they blow themselves up to see the fun. Monkeys are only safe when deprived of means to be otherwise."

"Lively, that!" said Michael.

"Not livelier than the occasion warrants, my dear boy. I've been thinking. We've got a member here who knows a trick worth twenty of any played in the war — an extraordinarily valuable fellow. The Government have got their eye on him. He'll help the other valuable fellows in France and Germany and America and Russia to make history. Between them, they'll do something really proud — something that'll knock all the other achievements of man into a cocked hat. By the way, Michael, new device of 'homo sapiens'— the cocked hat."

"Well," said Michael, "what are you going to do about it?"

Sir Lawrence’s eyebrow sought his hair.

“Do, my dear fellow? What should I do? Can I go out and grab him and the Government by the slack of their breeches; yes, and all the valuable fellows and Governments of the other countries? No! All I can do is to smoke my cigar and say: ‘God rest you, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay!’ By hook or crook, they will come into their own, Michael; but in the normal course of things I shall be dead before they do.”

“I shan’t,” said Michael

“No, my dear; but think of the explosions, the sights, the smells. By Jove, you’ve got something to live for, yet. Sometimes I wish I were your age. And sometimes,” Sir Lawrence relighted his cigar, “I don’t. Sometimes I think I’ve had enough of our pretences, and that there’s nothing left but to die like gentlemen.”

“Some Jeremiad, Dad!”

“Well,” said Sir Lawrence, with a twirl of his little grizzled moustache, “I hope I’m wrong. But we’re driving fast to a condition of things when millions can be killed by the pressing of a few buttons. What reason is there to suppose that our bumps of benevolence will increase in time to stop our using these great new toys of destruction, Michael!”

“‘Where you know little, place terrors.’”

“Very nice; where did you get that?”

“Out of a life of Christopher Columbus.”

“Old C. C.! I could bring myself to wish sometimes that he hadn’t been so deucedly inquisitive. We were snugger in the dark ages. There was something to be said for not discovering the Yanks.”

“Well,” said Michael, “*I* think we shall pedal through, yet. By the way, about this Elderson stunt: I’ve just seen the clerk — he doesn’t look to me the sort that would have made that up.”

“Ah! That! But if Elderson could do such a thing, well — really, anything might happen. It’s a complete stumper. He was such a pretty bat, always went in first wicket down. He and I put on fifty-four against Eton. I suppose old Forsyte told you?”

“Yes, he wanted me to find the chap a job.”

“Butterfield. Ask him if he’s related to old Butterfield the gardener? It would be something to go on. D’you find old Forsyte rather trying?”

Loyal to Fleur, Michael concealed his lips. “No, I get on very well with him.”

“He’s straight, I admit that.”

“Yes,” said Michael, “very straight.”

“But somewhat reticent.”

“Yes,” said Michael.

On this conclusion they were silent, as though terrors had been placed beyond it. And soon Michael rose. “Past ten, I’d better go home.”

Returning the way he came, he could think of nothing but Wilfrid. What wouldn’t he give to hear him say: “It’s all right, old man; I’ve got over it!”— to wring him by the hand again. Why should one catch this fatal disease called love? Why should one be driven half crazy by it? They said love was Nature’s provision against Bart’s terrors, against the valuable fellows. An insistent urge — lest the race die out. Prosaic, if true! Not that he cared whether Fleur had children. Queer how Nature camouflaged her schemes — leery old bird! But overreaching herself a bit, wasn’t she? Children might yet go clean out of fashion if Bart was right. A very little more would do it; who would have children for the mere pleasure of seeing them blown up, poisoned, starved to death? A few fanatics would hold on, the rest of the world go barren. The cocked hat! Instinctively Michael straightened his own, ready for crossing under Big Ben. He had reached the centre of Parliament Square, when a figure coming towards him swerved suddenly to its left and made in the direction of Victoria. Tall, with a swing in its walk. Wilfrid! Michael stood still. Coming from — South Square! And suddenly he gave chase. He did not run, but he walked his hardest. The blood beat in his temples, and he felt confused to a pitch past bearing. Wilfrid must have seen him, or he wouldn’t have swerved, wouldn’t be legging it away like a demon. Black! — black! He was not gaining, Wilfrid had the legs of him — to overtake him, he must run! But there rose in Michael a sort of exaltation. His best friend — his wife! There was a limit. One might be too proud to fight that. Let him go his ways! He stood still, watched the swift figure disappear, and slowly, head down under the now cocked hat, turned towards home. He walked quite quietly, and with a sense of finality. No use making a song about it! No fuss, but no retreat! In the few hundred yards before he reached his Square he was chiefly conscious of the tallness of houses, the shortness of men. Such midgets to have made this monstrous pile, lighted it so that it shone in an enormous glittering heap whose glow blurred the colour of the sky! What a vast business this midget activity! Absurd to think that his love for another midget mattered! He turned his key in the lock, took off his cocked hat and went into the drawing-room. Unlighted — empty? No. She and Ting-a-ling were on the floor before the fire! He sat down on the settee, and was abruptly conscious that he was trembling and sweating as if he had smoked a too strong cigar. Fleur had raised herself, cross-legged, and was staring up at him. He waited to get the better of his trembling. Why didn't she speak? Why was she sitting there, in the dark? 'She knows'; he thought: 'we both know this is the end. O God, let me at least be a sport!' He took a cushion, put it behind him, crossed his legs, and leaned back. His voice surprised him suddenly:

"May I ask you something, Fleur? And will you please answer me quite truly?"

"Yes."

"It's this: I know you didn't love me when you married me. I don't think you love me now. Do you want me to clear out?"

A long time seemed to pass.

"No."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I don't."

Michael got up.

"Will you answer one thing more?"

"Yes."

"Was Wilfrid here to-night?"

"Yes — no. That is —"

His hands clutched each other; he saw her eyes fix on them, and kept them still.

"Fleur, don't!"

"I'm not. He came to the window there. I saw his face — that's all. His face — it — Oh! Michael, don't be unkind to-night!"

Unkind! Unkind! Michael's heart swelled at that strange word.

"It's all right," he stammered: "So long as you tell me what it is you want."

Fleur said, without moving:

"I want to be comforted."

Ah! She knew exactly what to say, how to say it! And going on his knees, he began to comfort her.

❦

Chapter XII

Going East

He had not been on his knees many minutes before they suffered from reaction. To kneel there comforting Fleur brought him a growing discomfort. He believed her tonight, as he had not believed her for months past. But what was Wilfrid doing? Where wandering? The face at the window — face without voice, without attempt to reach her! Michael ached in that illegitimate organ the heart. Withdrawing his arms, he stood up.

"Would you like me to have a look for him? If it's all over — he might — I might —"

Fleur, too, stood up. She was calm enough now.

"Yes, I'll go to bed." With Ting-a-ling in her arms, she went to the door; her face, between the dog's chestnut fur and her own, was very pale, very still.

"By the way," she said, "this is my second no go, Michael; I suppose it means —"

Michael gasped. Currents of emotion, welling, ebbing, swirling, rendered him incapable of speech.

"The night of the balloon," she said: "Do you mind?"

"Mind? Good God! Mind!"

"That's all right, then. *I* don't. Good-night!"

She was gone. Without reason, Michael thought: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' And he stood, as if congealed, overcome by an uncontrollable sense of solidity. A child coming! It was as though the barque of his being, tossed and drifted, suddenly rode tethered — anchor down. He turned and tore at the curtains. Night of stars! Wonderful world! Jolly — jolly! And — Wilfrid! He flattened his face against the glass. Outside there Wilfrid's had been flattened. He could see it if he shut his eyes. Not fair! Dog lost — man lost! S. O. S. He went into the hall, and from the mothless marble coffer rived his thickest coat. He took the first taxi that came by.

"Cork Street! Get along!" Needle in bundle of hay! Quarter past eleven by Big Ben! The intense relief of his whole being in that jolting cab seemed to him brutal. Salvation! It WAS— he had a strange certainty of that as though he saw Fleur suddenly 'close-up' in a very strong light, concrete beneath her graceful veerings. Family! Continuation! He had been unable to anchor her, for he was not of her! But her child could and would! And, perhaps, he would yet come in with the milk. Why did he love her so — it was not done! Wilfrid and he were donkeys — out of touch, out of tune with the times!

"Here you are, sir — what number?"

"All right! Cool your heels and wait for me! Have a cigarette!"

With one between his own lips which felt so dry, he went down the backwater.

A light in Wilfrid's rooms! He rang the bell. The door was opened, the face of Wilfrid's man looked forth.

"Yes, sir?"

"Mr. Desert in?"

"No, sir. Mr. Desert has just started for the East. His ship sails tomorrow."

"Oh!" said Michael, blankly: "Where from?"

"Plymouth, sir. His train leaves Paddington at midnight. You might catch him yet."

"It's very sudden," said Michael, "he never —"

"No, sir. Mr. Desert is a sudden gentleman."

"Well, thanks; I'll try and catch him."

Back in the cab with the words: "Paddington — flick her along!" he thought: 'A sudden gentleman!' Perfect! He remembered the utter suddenness of that little interview beside the bust of Lionel Charwell. Sudden their friendship, sudden its end — sudden even Wilfrid's poems — offspring of a sudden soul! Staring from window to window in that jolting, rattling cab, Michael suffered from St. Vitus's dance. Was he a fool? Could he not let well alone? Pity was posh! And yet! With Wilfrid would go a bit of his heart, and in spite of all he would like him to know that. Upper Brook Street, Park

Lane! Emptying streets, cold night, stark plane trees painted-up by the lamps against a bluish dark. And Michael thought: ‘We wander! What’s the end — the goal? To do one’s bit, and not worry! But what is my bit? What’s Wilfrid’s? Where will he end up, now?’

The cab rattled down the station slope and drew up under cover. Ten minutes to twelve, and a long heavy train on platform one!

‘What shall I do?’ thought Michael: ‘It’s so darned crude! Must I go down — carriage by carriage?” Couldn’t let you go, old man, without”— blurb!’

Bluejackets! If not drunk — as near as made no matter. Eight minutes still! He began slowly walking along the train. He had not passed four windows before he saw his quarry. Desert was sitting back to the engine in the near corner of an empty first. An unlighted cigarette was in his mouth, his fur collar turned up to his eyes, and his eves fixed on an unopened paper on his hip. He sat without movement; Michael stood looking at him. His heart beat fast. He struck a match, took two steps, and said:

“Light, old boy?”

Desert stared up at him.

“Thanks,” he said, and took the match. By its flare his face was dark, thin, drawn; his eyes dark, deep, tired. Michael leaned in the window. Neither spoke.

“Take your seat, if you’re going, sir.”

“I’m not,” said Michael. His whole inside seemed turning over.

“Where are you going, old man?” he said suddenly.

“Jericho.”

“God, Wilfrid, I’m sorry!”

Desert smiled.

“Cut it out!”

“Yes, I know! Shake hands?”

Desert held out his hand.

Michael squeezed it hard.

A whistle sounded.

Desert rose suddenly and turned to the rack above him. He took a parcel from a bag. “Here,” he said, “these wretched things! Publish them if you like.”

Something clicked in Michael’s throat.

“Thanks, old man! That’s great! Good-bye!”

A sort of beauty came into Desert’s face.

“So long!” he said.

The train moved. Michael withdrew his elbows; quite still, he stared at the motionless figure slowly borne along, away. Carriage after carriage went by him, full of bluejackets leaning out, clamouring, singing, waving handkerchiefs and bottles. Guard’s van now — the tail light — all spread — a crimson blur — setting East — going — going — gone!

And that was all — was it? He thrust the parcel into his coat pocket. Back to Fleur, now! Way of the world — one man’s meat, another’s poison! He passed his hand over his eyes. The dashed things were full of — blurb!

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PART III

CHAPTER I

BANK HOLIDAY

Whitsuntide Bank Holiday was producing its seasonal invasion of Hampstead Heath, and among the ascending swarm were two who meant to make money in the morning and spend it in the afternoon.

Tony Bicket, with balloons and wife, embarked early on the Hampstead Tube.

"You'll see," he said, "I'll sell the bloomin' lot by twelve o'clock, and we'll go on the bust."

Squeezing his arm, Victorine fingered, through her dress, a slight swelling just above her right knee. It was caused by fifty-four pounds fastened in the top of her stocking. She had little feeling, now, against balloons. They afforded temporary nourishment, till she had the few more pounds needful for their passage-money. Tony still believed he was going to screw salvation out of his blessed balloons: he was 'that hopeful — Tony,' though their heads were only just above water on his takings. And she smiled. With her secret she could afford to be indifferent now to the stigma of gutter hawking. She had her story pat. From the evening paper, and from communion on 'buses with those interested in the national pastime, she had acquired the necessary information about racing. She even talked of it with Tony, who had street-corner knowledge. Already she had prepared chapter and verse of two imaginary coups; a sovereign made out of stitching imaginary blouses, invested on the winner of the Two Thousand Guineas, and the result on the dead-heater for the Jubilee at nice odds; this with a third winner, still to be selected, would bring her imaginary winnings up to the needed sixty pounds odd she would so soon have saved now out of 'the altogether.' This tale she would pitch to Tony in a week or two, reeling off by heart the wonderful luck she had kept from him until she had the whole of the money. She would slip her forehead against his eyes if he looked at her too hard, and kiss his lips till his head was no longer clear. And in the morning they would wake up and take their passages. Such was the plan of Victorine, with five ten-pound and four one-pound notes in her stocking, attached to the pink silk stays.

'Afternoon of a Dryad' had long been finished, and was on exhibition at the Dumetrius Gallery, with other works of Aubrey Greene. Victorine had paid a shilling to see it; had stood some furtive minutes gazing at that white body glimmering from among grass and spikey flowers, at the face, turned as if saying: "I know a secret!"

"Bit of a genius, Aubrey Greene — that face is jolly good!" Scared, and hiding the face, Victorine had slipped away.

From the very day when she had stood shivering outside the studio of Aubrey Greene she had been in full work. He had painted her three times — always nice, always polite, quite the gentleman! And he had given her introductions. Some had painted her in clothes, some half-draped, some in that 'altogether,' which no longer troubled her, with the money swelling her stocking and Tony without suspicion. Not every one had been 'nice'; advances had been made to her, but she had nipped them in the bud. It would have meant the money quicker, but — Tony! In a fortnight now she could snap her fingers at it all. And often on the way home she stood by that plate-glass window, before the fruits, and the corn, and the blue butterflies . . .

In the packed railway carriage they sat side by side, Bicket, with tray on knee, debating where he had best stand.

"I fyvour the mokes," he said at last, "up by the pond. People'll have more money than when they get down among the swings and cocoanuts; and you can go and sit in a chair by the pond, like the seaside — I don't want you with me not till I've sold out."

Victorine pressed his arm.

Along the top and over on to the heath to north and south the holiday swarms surged, in perfect humour, carrying paper bags. Round the pond children, with thin, grey-white, spindly legs, were paddling and shrilly chattering, too content to smile. Elderly couples crawled slowly by, with jutting stomachs, and faces discoloured by the unaccustomed climb. Girls and young men were few, for they were dispersed already on the heath, in search of a madder merriment. On benches, in chairs of green canvas or painted wood, hundreds were sitting, contemplating their feet, as if imagining the waves of the sea. Now and again three donkeys would start, urged from behind, and slowly tittup their burdens along the pond's margin. Hawkers cried goods. Fat dark women told fortunes. Policemen stood cynically near them. A man talked and talked and took his hat round.

Tony Bicket unslung his tray. His cockney voice, wheedling and a little husky, offered his coloured airs without intermission. This was something like! It was brisk! And now and again he gazed through the throng away across the pond, to where Victorine would be seated in a canvas chair, looking different from every one — he knew.

“Fine balloons — fine balloons! Six for a bob! Big one, Madam? Only sixpence. See the size! Buy, buy! Tyke one for the little boy!”

No ‘aldermen’ up here, but plenty in the mood to spend their money on a bit of brightness!

At five minutes before noon he snapped his tray to — not a bally balloon left! With six Bank Holidays a week he would make his fortune! Tray under arm, he began to tour the pond. The kiddies were all right, but — good Lord — how thin and pale! If he and Vic had a kid — but not they — not till they got out there! A fat brown kid, chysin’ blue butterflies, and the sun oozin’ out of him! Rounding the end of the pond, he walked slowly along the chairs. Lying back, elegant, with legs crossed, in brown stockings showing to the knees, and neat brown shoes with the flaps over — My! she looked a treat — in a world of her own, like that! Something caught Bicket by the throat. Gosh! He wanted things for her!

“Well, Vic! Penny!”

“I was thinkin’ of Australia.”

“Ah! It’s a gaudy long wait. Never mind — I’ve sold the bally lot. Which shall we do, go down among the trees, or get to the swings, at once?”

“The swings,” said Victorine.

The Vale of Health was in rhapsodic mood. The crowd flowed here in a slow, speechless stream, to the cries of the booth-keepers, and the owners of swings and cocoanuts. “Roll — bowl — or pitch! Now for the milky ones! Penny a shy! . . . Who’s for the swings? . . . Ices . . . Ices . . . Fine bananas!”

On the giant merry-go-round under its vast umbrella the thirty chain-hung seats were filled with girls and men. Round to the music — slowly — faster — whirling out to the full extent of the chain, bodies bent back, legs stuck forward, laughter and speech dying, faces solemn, a little lost, hands gripping the chains hard. Faster, faster; slowing, slowing to a standstill, and the music silent.

“My word!” murmured Victorine. “Come on, Tony!”

They entered the enclosure and took their seats. Victorine, on the outside, locked her feet, instinctively, one over the other, and tightening her clasp on the chains, curved her body to the motion. Her lips parted:

“Lor, Tony!”

Faster, faster — every nerve and sense given to that motion! O-o-h! It WAS a feeling — flying round like that above the world! Faster — faster! Slower — slow, and the descent to earth.

“Tony — it’s ‘eaven!”

“Queer feelin’ in yer inside, when you’re swung right out!”

“I’d like it level with the top. Let’s go once more!”

“Right-o!”

Twice more they went — half his profit on balloons! But who cared? He liked to see her face. After that, six shies at the milky ones without a hit, an ice apiece: then arm-inarm to find a place to eat their lunch. That was the time Bicket enjoyed most, after the ginger-beer and sandwiches; smoking his fag, with his head on her lap, and the sky blue. A long time like that; till at last she stirred.

“Let’s go and see the dancin’!”

In the grass enclosure ringed by the running path, some two dozen couples were jigging to a band.

Victorine pulled at his arm. “I WOULD love a turn!”

“Well, let’s ‘ave a go,” said Bicket. “This one-legged bloke’ll ‘old my tray.”

They entered the ring.

“Hold me tighter, Tony!”

Bicket obeyed. Nothing he liked better; and slowly their feet moved — to this side and that. They made little way, revolving, keeping time, oblivious of appearances.

“You dance all right, Tony.”

“YOU dance a treat!” gasped Bicket.

In the intervals, panting, they watched over the one-legged man; then to it again, till the band ceased for good.

“My word!” said Victorine. “They dance on board ship, Tony!”

Bicket squeezed her waist.

“I’ll do the trick yet, if I ‘ave to rob the Bank. There’s nothin’ I wouldn’t do for you, Vic.”

But Victorine smiled. She had done the trick already.

The crowd with parti-coloured faces, tired, good-humoured, frowsily scented, strolled over a battlefield thick-strewn with paper bags, banana peel, and newspapers.

“Let’s ‘ave our tea, and one more swing,” said Bicket; “then we’ll get over on the other side among the trees.”

Away over on the far side were many couples. The sun went very slowly down. Those two sat under a bush and watched it go. A faint breeze swung and rustled the birch leaves. There was little human sound out here. All seemed to have come for silence, to be waiting for darkness in the hush. Now and then some stealthy spy would pass and scrutinise.

“Foxes!” said Bicket. “Gawd! I’d like to rub their noses in it!”

Victorine sighed, pressing closer to him.

Some one was playing on a banjo now; a voice singing. It grew dusk, but a moon was somewhere rising, for little shadows stole out along the ground.

They spoke in whispers. It seemed wrong to raise the voice, as though the grove were under a spell. Even their whisperings were scarce. Dew fell, but they paid no heed to it. With hands locked, and cheeks together, they sat very still. Bicket had a thought. This was poetry — this was! Darkness now, with a sort of faint and silvery glow, a sound of drunken singing on the Spaniard’s Road, the whirr of belated cars returning from the north — and suddenly an owl hooted.

“My!” murmured Victorine, shivering: “An owl! Fancy! I used to hear one at Norbiton. I ‘ope it’s not bad luck!”

Bicket rose and stretched himself,

“Come on!” he said: “we’ve ‘ad a dy. Don’t you go catchin’ cold!”

Arm-inarm, slowly, through the darkness of the birch-grove, they made their way upwards — glad of the lamps, and the street, and the crowded station, as though they had taken an overdose of solitude.

Huddled in their carriage on the Tube, Bicket idly turned the pages of a derelict paper. But Victorine sat thinking of so much, that it was as if she thought of nothing. The swings and the grove in the darkness, and the money in her stocking. She wondered Tony hadn’t noticed when it crackled — there wasn’t a safe place to keep it in! What was he looking at, with his eyes so fixed? She peered, and read: “‘Afternoon of a Dryad.’ The striking picture by Aubrey Greene, on exhibition at the Dumetrius Gallery.”

Her heart stopped beating.

“Cripes!” said Bicket. “Ain’t that like you?”

“Like me? No!”

Bicket held the paper closer. “It IS. It’s like you all over. I’ll cut that out. I’d like to see that picture.”

The colour came up in her cheeks, released from a heart beating too fast now.

“‘Tisn’t decent,” she said.

“Dunno about that; but it’s awful like you. It’s even got your smile.”

Folding the paper, he began to tear the sheet. Victorine’s little finger pressed the notes beneath her stocking.

“Funny,” she said, slowly, “to think there’s people in the world so like each other.”

“I never thought there could be one like you. Charin’ Cross; we gotta change.”

Hurrying along the rat-runs of the Tube, she slipped her hand into his pocket, and soon some scraps of torn paper fluttered down behind her following him in the crush. If only he didn’t remember where the picture was!

Awake in the night, she thought:

‘I don’t care; I’m going to get the rest of the money — that’s all about it.’

But her heart moved queerly within her, like that of one whose feet have trodden suddenly the quaking edge of a bog.

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CHAPTER II

OFFICE WORK

Michael sat correcting the proofs of ‘Counterfeits’— the book left by Wilfrid behind him.

“Can you see Butterfield, sir?”

“I can.”

In Michael the word Butterfield excited an uneasy pride. The young man fulfilled with increasing success the function for which he had been engaged, on trial, four months ago. The head traveller had even called him “a find.” Next to ‘Copper Coin’ he was the finest feather in Michael’s cap. The Trade were not buying, yet Butterfield was selling books, or so it was reported; he appeared to have a natural gift of inspiring confidence where it was not justified. Danby and Winter had even entrusted to him the private marketing of that vellum-bound ‘Limited’ of ‘A Duet,’ by which they were hoping to recoup their losses on the ordinary edition. He was now engaged in working through a list of names considered likely to patronise the little masterpiece. This method of private approach had been suggested by himself.

“You see, sir,” he had said to Michael: “I know a bit about Coue. Well, you can’t work that on the Trade — they’ve got no capacity for faith. What can you expect? Every day they buy all sorts of stuff, always basing themselves on past sales. You can’t find one in twenty that’ll back the future. But with private gentlemen, and especially private ladies, you can leave a thought with them like Coue does — put it into them again and again that day by day in every way the author’s gettin’ better and better; and ten to one when you go round next, it’s got into their subconscious, especially if you take ’em just after lunch or dinner, when they’re a bit drowsy. Let me take my own time, sir, and I’ll put that edition over for you.”

“Well, Michael had answered, “if you can inspire confidence in the future of my governor, Butterfield, you’ll deserve more than your ten per cent.”

“I can do it, sir; it’s just a question of faith.”

“But you haven’t any, have you?”

“Well, not, so to speak, in the author — but I’ve got faith that I can give THEM faith in him; that’s the real point.”

“I see — the three-card stunt; inspire the faith you haven’t got, that the card is there, and they’ll take it. Well, the disillusion is not immediate — you’ll probably always get out of the room in time. Go ahead, then!”

The young man Butterfield had smiled . . . .

The uneasy part of the pride inspired in Michael now by the name was due to old Forsyte’s continually saying to him that he didn’t know — he couldn’t tell — there was that young man and his story about Elderson, and they got no further . . . .

“Good morning, sir. Can you spare me five minutes?”

“Come in, Butterfield. Bunkered with ‘Duet’?”

“No, sir. I’ve placed forty already. It’s another matter.” Glancing at the shut door, the young man came closer.

“I’m working my list alphabetically. Yesterday I was in the E’s.” His voice dropped. “Mr. Elderson.”

“Phew!” said Michael. “You can give HIM the go-by.”

“As a fact, sir, I haven’t.”

“What! Been over the top?”

“Yes, sir. Last night.”

“Good for you, Butterfield! What happened?”

“I didn’t send my name in, sir — just the firm’s card.”

Michael was conscious of a very human malice in the young man’s voice and face.

“Well?”

“Mr. Elderson, sir, was at his wine. I’d thought it out, and I began as if I’d never seen him before. What struck me was — he took my cue!”

“Didn’t kick you out?”

“Far from it, sir. He said at once: ‘Put my name down for two copies.’”

Michael grinned. “You both had a nerve.”

“No, sir; that’s just it. Mr. Elderson got it between wind and water. He didn’t like it a little bit.”

“I don’t twig,” said Michael.

“My being in this firm’s employ, sir. He knows you’re a partner here, and Mr. Forsyte’s son-inlaw, doesn’t he?”

“He does.”

“Well, sir, you see the connection — two directors believing me — not HIM. That’s why I didn’t miss him out. I fancied it’d shake him up. I happened to see his face in the sideboard glass as I went out. HE’S got the wind up all right.”

Michael bit his forefinger, conscious of a twinge of sympathy with Elderson, as for a fly with the first strand of cob-web round his hind leg.

“Thank you, Butterfield,” he said.

When the young man was gone, he sat stabbing his blotting-paper with a paper-knife. What curious ‘class’ sensation was this? Or was it merely fellow-feeling with the hunted, a tremor at the way things found one out? For, surely, this was real evidence, and he would have to pass it on to his father, and ‘Old Forsyte.’ Elderson’s nerve must have gone phut, or he’d have said: “You impudent young scoundrel — get out of here!” That, clearly, was the only right greeting from an innocent, and the only advisable greeting from a guilty man. Well! Nerve did fail sometimes — even the best. Witness the very proof-sheet he had just corrected:

THE COURT MARTIAL

“See ’ere! I’m myde o’ nerves and blood
The syme as you, not meant to be
Froze stiff up to me ribs in mud.
You try it, like I ‘ave, an’ see!

“‘Aye, you snug beauty brass hats, when
You stick what I stuck out that d’y,
An’ keep yer ruddy ‘earts up — then
You’ll learn, maybe, the right to s’y:

“‘Take aht an’ shoot ’im in the snow,
Shoot ’im for cowardice! ‘E who serves
His King and Country’s got to know
There’s no such bloody thing as nerves.’”

Good old Wilfrid!

“Yes, Miss Perren?”

“The letter to Sir James Foggart, Mr. Mont; you told me to remind you. And will you see Miss Manuelli?”

“Miss Manu — Oh! Ah! Yes.”

Bicket’s girl wife, whose face they had used on Storbert’s novel, the model for Aubrey Greene’s —! Michael rose, for the girl was in the room already.

‘I remember that dress!’ he thought: ‘Fleur never liked it.’

“What can I do for you, Mrs. Bicket? How’s Bicket, by the way?”

“Fairly, sir, thank you.”

“Still in balloons?”

“Yes.”

“Well, we all are, Mrs. Bicket.”

“Beg pardon?”

“In the air — don’t you think? But you didn’t come to tell me that?”

“No, sir.”

A slight flush in those sallow cheeks, fingers concerned with the tips of the worn gloves, lips uncertain; but the eyes steady — really an uncommon girl!

"You remember givin' me a note to Mr. Greene, sir?"

"I do; and I've seen the result; it's topping, Mrs. Bicket."

"Yes. But it's got into the papers — my husband saw it there last night; and of course, he doesn't know about me."

Phew! For what had he let this girl in?

"I've made a lot of money at it, sir — almost enough for our passage to Australia; but now I'm frightened. 'Isn't it like you?' he said to me. I tore the paper up, but suppose he remembers the name of the Gallery and goes to see the picture! That's even much more like me! He might go on to Mr. Greene. So would you mind, sir, speaking to Mr. Greene, and beggin' him to say it was some one else, in case Tony did go?"

"Not a bit," said Michael. "But do you think Bicket would mind so very much, considering what it's done for you? It can be quite a respectable profession."

Victorine's hands moved up to her breast.

"Yes," she said, simply. "I have been quite respectable. And I only did it because we do so want to get away, and I couldn't bear seein' him standin' in the gutter there sellin' those balloons in the fogs. But I'm ever so scared, sir, now."

Michael stared.

"My God!" he said; "money's an evil thing!"

Victorine smiled faintly. "The want of it is, I know."

"How much more do you need, Mrs. Bicket?"

"Only another ten pound, about, sir."

"I can let you have that."

"Oh! thank you; but it's not that — I can easy earn it — I've got used to it; a few more days don't matter."

"But how are you going to account for having the money?"

"Say I won it bettin'."

"THIN!" said Michael. "Look here! Say you came to me and I advanced it. If Bicket repays it from Australia, I can always put it to your credit again at a bank out there. I've got you into a hole, in a way, and I'd like to get you out of it."

"Oh! no, sir; you did me a service. I don't want to put you about, telling falsehoods for me."

"It won't worry me a bit, Mrs. Bicket. I can lie to the umteenth when there's no harm in it. The great thing for you is to get away sharp. Are there many other pictures of you?"

"Oh! yes, a lot — not that you'd recognise them, I think, they're so square and funny."

"Ah! well — Aubrey Greene has got you to the life!"

"Yes; it's like me all over, Tony says."

"Quite. Well, I'll speak to Aubrey, I shall be seeing him at lunch. Here's the ten pounds! That's agreed, then? You came to me today — see? Say you had a brain wave. I quite understand the whole thing. You'd do a lot for him; and he'd do a lot for you. It's all right — don't cry!"

Victorine swallowed violently. Her hand in the worn glove returned his squeeze.

"I'd tell him to-night, if I were you," said Michael, "and I'll get ready."

When she had gone he thought: 'Hope Bicket won't think I received value for that sixty pounds!' And, pressing his bell, he resumed the stabbing of his blotting-paper.

"Yes, Mr. Mont?"

"Now let's get on with it, Miss Perren."

"'DEAR SIR JAMES FOGGART — We have given the utmost consideration to your very interesting — er — production. While we are of opinion that the views so well expressed on the present condition of Britain in relation to the rest of the world are of great value to all — er — thinking persons, we do not feel that there are enough — er — thinking persons to make it possible to publish the book, except at a loss. The — er — thesis that Britain should now look for salvation through adjustment of markets, population, supply and demand, within the Empire, put with such exceedingly plain speech, will, we are afraid, get the goat of all the political parties; nor do we feel that your plan of emigrating boys and girls in large quantities before they are spoiled by British town life, can do otherwise than irritate a working-class which knows nothing of conditions outside its own country, and is notably averse to giving its children a chance in any other.'"

"Am I to put that, Mr. Mont?"

"Yes; but tone it in a bit. Er —"

"'Finally, your view that the land should be used to grow food is so very unusual in these days, that we feel your book would have a hostile Press except from the Old Guard and the Die-hard, and a few folk with vision.'"

"Yes, Mr. Mont?"

"'In a period of veering — er — transitions'— keep that, Miss Perren — 'and the airy unreality of hopes that have long gone up the spout'— almost keep that —'any scheme that looks forward and defers harvest for twenty years, must be extraordinarily unpopular. For all these reasons you will see how necessary it is for you to — er — seek another publisher. In short, we are not taking any.

"'With — er —' what you like —'dear Sir James Foggart,

"'We are your obedient servants,

"'DANBY AND WINTER.'"

"When you've translated that, Miss Perren, bring it in, and I'll sign it."

"Yes. Only, Mr. Mont — I thought you were a Socialist. This almost seems — forgive my asking?"

"Miss Perren, it's struck me lately that labels are 'off.' How can a man be anything at a time when everything's in the air? Look at the Liberals. They can't see the situation whole because of Free Trade; nor can the Labour Party because of their Capital levy; nor can the Tories because of Protection; they're all hag-ridden by catchwords! Old Sir James Foggart's jolly well right, but nobody's going to listen to him. His book will be waste paper if anybody ever publishes it. The world's unreal just now, Miss Perren; and of all countries we're the most unreal."

"Why, Mr. Mont?"

"Why? Because with the most stickfast of all the national temperaments, we're holding on to what's gone more bust for us than for any other country. Anyway, Mr. Danby shouldn't have left the letter to me, if he didn't mean me to enjoy myself. Oh! and while we're about it — I've got to refuse Harold Master's new book. It's a mistake, but they won't have it."

"Why not, Mr. Mont? 'The Sobbing Turtle' was such a success!"

"Well, in this new thing Master's got hold of an idea which absolutely forces him to say something. Winter says those who hailed 'The Sobbing Turtle' as such a work of art, are certain to be down on this for that; and Mr. Danby calls the book an outrage on human nature. So there's nothing for it. Let's have a shot:

"'MY DEAR MASTER — In the exhilaration of your subject it has obviously not occurred to you that you've bust up the show. In 'The Sobbing Turtle' you were absolutely in tune with half the orchestra, and that — er — the noisiest half. You were charmingly archaic, and securely cold-blooded. But now, what have you gone and done? Taken the last Marquesan islander for your hero and put him down in London town! The thing's a searching satire, a real criticism of life. I'm sure you didn't mean to be contemporary, or want to burrow into reality; but your subject has run off with you. Cold acid and cold blood are very different things, you know, to say nothing of your having had to drop the archaic. Personally, of course, I think this new thing miles better than 'The Sobbing Turtle,' which was a nice little affair, but nothing to make a song about. But I'm not the public, and I'm not the critics. The young and thin will be aggrieved by your lack of modernity, they'll say you're moralising; the old and fat will call you bitter and destructive; and the ordinary public will take your Marquesan seriously, and resent your making him superior to themselves. The prospects, you see, are not gaudy. How d'you think we're going to 'get away' with such a book? Well, we're not! Such is the fiat of the firm. I don't agree with it. I'd publish it tomorrow; but needs must when Danby and Winter drive. So, with every personal regret, I return what is really a masterpiece.

"'Always yours,

"'MICHAEL MONT.'"

"D'you know, Miss Perren, I don't think you need translate that?"

"I'm afraid it would be difficult."

"Right-o, then; but do the other, please. I'm going to take my wife out to see a picture; back by four. Oh! and if a little chap called Bicket, that we used to have here, calls any time and asks to see me, he's to come up; but I want warning first.

Will you let them know downstairs?”

“Yes, Mr. Mont. Oh! didn’t — wasn’t that Miss Manuelli the model for the wrapper on Mr. Storbert’s novel?”

“She was, Miss Perren; alone I found her.”

“She’s very interesting-looking, isn’t she?”

“She’s unique, I’m afraid.”

“She needn’t mind that, I should think.”

“That depends,” said Michael; and stabbed his blotting-paper.

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Chapter III

'Afternoon of a Dryad'

Fleur was still gracefully concealing most of what Michael called 'the eleventh baronet,' now due in about two months' time. She seemed to be adapting herself, in mind and body, to the quiet and persistent collection of the heir. Michael knew that, from the first, following the instructions of her mother, she had been influencing his sex, repeating to herself, every evening before falling asleep, and every morning on waking the words: "Day by day, in every way, he is getting more and more male," to infect the subconscious which, everybody now said, controlled the course of events; and that she was abstaining from the words: "I WILL have a boy," for this, setting up a reaction, everybody said, was liable to produce a girl. Michael noted that she turned more and more to her mother, as if the French, or more naturalistic, side of her, had taken charge of a process which had to do with the body. She was frequently at Mapledurham, going down in Soames' car, and her mother was frequently in South Square. Annette's handsome presence, with its tendency to black lace was always pleasing to Michael, who had never forgotten her espousal of his suit in days when it was a forlorn hope. Though he still felt only on the threshold of Fleur's heart, and was preparing to play second fiddle to 'the eleventh baronet,' he was infinitely easier in mind since Wilfrid had been gone. And he watched, with a sort of amused adoration, the way in which she focussed her collecting powers on an object that had no epoch, a process that did not date.

Personally conducted by Aubrey Greene, the expedition to view his show at the Dumetrius Gallery left South Square after an early lunch.

"Your Dryad came to me this morning, Aubrey," said Michael in the cab. "She wanted me to ask you to put up a barrage if by any chance her husband blows round to accuse you of painting his wife. It seems he's seen a reproduction of the picture."

"Umm!" murmured the painter: "Shall I, Fleur?"

"Of course you must, Aubrey!"

Aubrey Greene's smile slid from her to Michael.

"Well, what's his name?"

"Bicket."

Aubrey Greene fixed his eyes on space, and murmured slowly:

"An angry young husband called Bicket
Said: 'Turn yourself round and I'll kick it;
You have painted my wife
In the nude to the life,
Do you think, Mr. Greene, it was cricket?'"

"Oh! Aubrey!"

"Chuck it!" said Michael, "I'm serious. She's a most plucky little creature. She's made the money they wanted, and remained respectable."

"So far as I'm concerned, certainly."

"Well, I should think so."

"Why, Fleur?"

"You're not a vamp, Aubrey!"

"As a matter of fact, she excited my aesthetic sense."

"Much that'd save her from some aesthetes!" muttered Michael.

"Also, she comes from Putney."

"There you have a real reason. Then, you WILL put up a barrage if Bicket blows in?"

Aubrey Greene laid his hand on his heart. "And here we are!"

For the convenience of the eleventh baronet Michael had chosen the hour when the proper patrons of Aubrey Greene would still be lunching. A shock-headed young man and three pale-green girls alone wandered among the pictures. The painter led the way at once to his masterpiece; and for some minutes they stood before it in a suitable paralysis. To speak too soon in praise would never do; to speak too late would be equally tactless; to speak too fulsomely would jar; to mutter coldly: “Very nice — very nice indeed!” would blight. To say bluntly: “Well, old man, to tell you the truth, I don’t like it a little bit!” would get his goat.

At last Michael pinched Fleur gently, and she said:

“It really is charming, Aubrey; and awfully like — at least —”

“So far as one can tell. But really, old man, you’ve done it in once. I’m afraid Bicket will think so, anyway.”

“Dash that!” muttered the painter. “How do you find the colour values?”

“Jolly fine; especially the flesh; don’t you think so, Fleur?”

“Yes; only I should have liked that shadow down the side a little deeper.”

“Yes?” murmured the painter: “Perhaps!”

“You’ve caught the spirit,” said Michael. “But I tell you what, old man, you’re for it — the thing’s got meaning. I don’t know what the critics will do to you.”

Aubrey Greene smiled. “That was the worst of her. She led me on. To get an idea’s fatal.”

“Personally, I don’t agree to that; do you, Fleur?”

“Of course not; only one doesn’t say so.”

“Time we did, instead of kow-towing to the Cafe C’rillon. I say, the hair’s all right, and so are the toes — they curl as you look at ’em.”

“And it IS a relief not to get legs painted in streaky cubes. The asphodels rather remind one of the flowers in Leonardo’s ‘Virgin of the Rocks,’ Aubrey.”

“The whole thing’s just a bit Leonardoish, old man. You’ll have to live that down.”

“Oh! Aubrey, my father’s seen it. I believe he’s biting. Something you said impressed him — about our white monkey, d’you remember?”

Aubrey Greene threw up his hands. “Ah! That white monkey — to have painted that! Eat the fruit and chuck the rinds around, and ask with your eyes what it’s all about.”

“A moral!” said Michael: “Take care, old man! Well! Our taxi’s running up. Come along, Fleur; we’ll leave Aubrey to his conscience.”

Once more in the cab, he took her arm. “That poor little snipe, Bicket! Suppose I’d come on YOU as he’ll come on his wife!”

“I shouldn’t have looked so nice.”

“Oh! yes; much nicer; though she looks nice enough, I must say.”

“Then why should Bicket mind, in these days of emancipation?”

“Why? Good Lord, ducky! You don’t suppose Bicket —! I mean, we emancipated people have got into the habit of thinking we’re the world — well! we aren’t; we’re an excrescence, small, and noisy. We talk as if all the old values and prejudices had gone; but they’ve no more gone, really, you know, than the rows of villas and little grey houses.”

“Why this outburst, Michael?”

“Well, darling, I’m a bit fed-up with the attitude of our crowd. If emancipation were true, one could stick it; but it’s not. There isn’t ten per cent. difference between now and thirty years ago.”

“How do you know? You weren’t alive.”

“No; but I read the papers, and talk to the man in the street, and look at people’s faces. Our lot think they’re the tablecloth, but they’re only the fringe. D’you know, only one hundred and fifty thousand people in this country have ever heard a Beethoven Symphony? How many, do you suppose, think old B. a back number? Five thousand, perhaps, out of forty-two millions. How’s that for emancipation?”

He stopped, observing that her eyelids had drooped.

“I was thinking, Michael, that I should like to change my bedroom curtains to blue. I saw the exact colour yesterday at Harton’s. They say blue has an effect on the mind — the present curtains really are too jazzy.”

The eleventh baronet!

“Anything you like, darling. Have a blue ceiling if it helps.”

“Oh, no! But I think I’ll change the carpet, too; there’s a lovely powder blue at Harton’s.”

“Then get it. Would you like to go there now? I can take the Tube back to the office.”

“Yes, I think I’d better. I might miss it.”

Michael put his head out of the window. “Harton’s, please!” And, replacing his hat, he looked at her. Emancipated! Phew!

❦

CHAPTER IV

AFTERNOON OF A BICKET

Just about that moment Bicket re-entered his sitting-room and deposited his tray. All the morning under the shadow of St. Paul's he had re-lived Bank Holiday. Exceptionally tired in feet and legs, he was also itching mentally. He had promised himself a refreshing look from time to time at what was almost like a photo of Vic herself. And he had lost the picture! Yet he had taken nothing out of his pockets — just hung his coat up. Had it joggled out in the crush at the station, or had he missed his pocket opening and dropped it in the carriage? And he had wanted to see the original, too. He remembered that the Gallery began with a 'D,' and at lunch-time squandered a penny-halfpenny to look up the names. Foreign, he was sure — the picture being naked. 'Dumetrius?' Ah!

Back at his post, he had a bit of luck. 'That alderman,' whom he had not seen for months, came by. Intuition made him say at once: "Hope I see you well sir. Never forgotten your kindness."

The 'alderman,' who had been staring up as if he saw a magpie on the dome of St. Paul's, stopped as though attacked by cramp.

"Kindness?" he said; "what kindness? Oh! balloons! They were no good to me!"

"No, sir, I'm sure," said Bicket humbly.

"Well, here you are!" muttered the 'alderman'; "don't expect it again."

Half-a-crown! A whole half-crown! Bicket's eyes pursued the hastening form. "Good-luck!" he said softly to himself, and began putting up his tray. "I'll go home and rest my feet, and tyke Vic to see that picture. It'll be funny lookin' at it together."

But she was not in. He sat down and smoked a fag. He felt aggrieved that she was out, this the first afternoon he had taken off. Of course she couldn't stay in all day!

Still —! He waited twenty minutes, then put on Michael's suit and shoes.

'I'll go and see it alone,' he thought. 'It'll cost half as much. They charge you sixpence, I expect.'

They charged him a shilling — a shilling! One fourth of his day's earnings, to see a picture! He entered bashfully. There were ladies who smelled of scent and had drawling voices but not a patch on Vic for looks. One of them, behind him, said:

"See! There's Aubrey Greene himself! And that's the picture they're talking of —'Afternoon of a Dryad.'"

They passed him and moved on. Bicket followed. At the end of the room, between their draperies and catalogues, he glimpsed the picture. A slight sweat broke out on his forehead. Almost life-size, among the flowers and spiky grasses, the face smiled round at him — very image of Vic! Could some one in the world be as like her as all that? The thought offended him, as a collector is offended finding the duplicate of an unique possession.

"It's a wonderful picture, Mr. Greene. What a type!"

A young man without hat, and fair hair sliding back, answered:

"A find, wasn't she?"

"Oh! perfect! the very spirit of a wood nymph; so mysterious!"

The word that belonged to Vic! It was unholy. There she lay for all to look at, just because some beastly woman was made like her! A kind of rage invaded Bicket's throat, caused his checks to burn; and with it came a queer physical jealousy. That painter! What business had he to paint a woman so like Vic as that — a woman that didn't mind lyin' like that! They and their talk about cahryscuro and paganism, and a bloke called Leneardo! Blast their drawling and their tricks! He tried to move away, and could not, fascinated by that effigy, so uncannily resembling what he had thought belonged to himself alone. Silly to feel so bad over a 'coincidence,' but he felt like smashing the glass and cutting the body up into little bits. The ladies and the painter passed on, leaving him alone before the picture. Alone, he did not mind so much. The face was mournful-like, and lonely, and — and teasing, with its smile. It sort of haunted you — it did! 'Well!' thought Bicket, 'I'll get home to Vic. Glad I didn't bring her, after all, to see herself-like. If I was an alderman, I'd buy the blinkin' thing, and burn it!'

And there, in the entrance-lobby, talking to a 'dago,' stood — his very own 'alderman!' Bicket paused in sheer amazement.

"It's a rithing name, Mr. Forthyte," he heard the Dago say: "hith prithes are going up."

"That's all very well, Dumetrius, but it's not everybody's money in these days — too highly-finished, altogether!"

"Well, Mr. Forthyte, to YOU I take off ten per thent."

"Take off twenty and I'll buy it."

That Dago's shoulders mounted above his hairy ears — they did; and what a smile!

"Mithter Forthyte! Fifteen, thir!"

"Well, you're doing me; but send it round to my daughter's in South Square — you know the number. When do you close?"

"Day after tomorrow, thir."

So! The counterfeit of Vic had gone to that 'alderman,' had it? Bicket uttered a savage little sound, and slunk out.

He walked with a queer feeling. Had he got unnecessary wind up? After all, it wasn't her. But to know that another woman could smile that way, have frizzy-ended short black hair, and be all curved the same! And at every woman's passing face he looked — so different, so utterly unlike Vic's!

When he reached home she was standing in the middle of the room, with her lips to a balloon. All around her, on the floor, chairs, table, mantelpiece, were the blown-out shapes of his stock; one by one they had floated from her lips and selected their own resting-places: puce, green, orange, purple, blue, enlivening with their colour the dingy little space. All his balloons blown up! And there, in her best clothes, she stood, smiling, queer, excited.

"What in thunder!" said Bicket.

Raising her dress, she took some crackling notes from the top of her stocking, and held them out to him.

"See! Sixty-four pounds, Tony! I've got it all. We can go."

"WHAT!"

"I had a brain wave — went to that Mr. Mont who gave us the clothes, and he's advanced it. We can pay it back, some day. Isn't it a marvel?"

Bicket's eyes, startled like a rabbit's, took in her smile, her excited flush, and a strange feeling shot through all his body, as if THEY were taking HIM in! She wasn't like Vic! No! Suddenly he felt her arms round him, felt her moist lips on his. She clung so tight, he could not move. His head went round.

"At last! At last! Isn't it fine? Kiss me, Tony!"

Bicket kissed; his vertigo was real, but behind it, for the moment stifled, what sense of unreality! . . .

Was it before night, or in the night, that the doubt first came — ghostly, tapping, fluttering, haunting — then, in the dawn, jabbing through his soul, turning him rigid. The money — the picture — the lost paper — that sense of unreality! This story she had told him! Were such things possible? Why should Mr. Mont advance that money? She had seen him — that was certain; the room, the secretary — you couldn't mistake her description of that Miss Perren. Why, then, feel this jabbing doubt? The money — such a lot of money! Not with Mr. Mont — never — he was a gent! Oh! Swine that he was, to have a thought like that — of Vic! He turned his back to her and tried to sleep. But once you got a thought like that — sleep? No! Her face among the balloons, the way she had smothered his eyes and turned his head — so that he couldn't think, couldn't go into it and ask her questions! A prey to dim doubts, achings, uncertainty, thrills of hope, and visions of 'Austrylia,' Bicket arose haggard.

"Well," he said, over their cocoa and margarined bread: "I must see Mr. Mont, that's certain." And suddenly he added: "Vic?" looking straight into her face.

She answered his look — straight, yes, straight. Oh! he was a proper swine! . . .

When he had left the house Victorine stood quite still, with hands pressed against her chest. She had slept less than he. Still as a mouse, she had turned and turned the thought: 'Did I take him in? Did I?' And if not — what? She took out the notes which had bought — or sold? — their happiness, and counted them once more. And the sense of injustice burned within her. Had she wanted to stand like that before men? Hadn't she been properly through it about that? Why, she could have had the sixty pounds three months ago from that sculptor, who was wild about her; or — so he said! But she had stuck it; yes, she had. Tony had nothing against her really — even if he knew it all. She had done it for him — Well! mostly — for him selling those balloons day after day in all weathers! But for her, they would still be stuck, and another winter coming, and unemployment — so they said in the paper — to be worse and worse! Stuck in the fogs and the cold, again! Ugh! Her chest was still funny sometimes; and he always hoarse. And this poky little room, and the bed so small that she couldn't stir without waking him. Why should Tony doubt her? For he did — she had felt it, heard it in his "Vic?" Would Mr. Mont convince him? Tony was sharp! Her head drooped. The unfairness of it all! Some had everything to their hand, like that pretty wife of Mr. Mont's! And if one tried to find a way and get out to a new chance — then — then — this! She flung her hair back. Tony MUST believe — he should! If he wouldn't, let him look out. She had done nothing to be ashamed of! No, indeed! And with the longing to go in front and lead her happiness along, she got out her old tin trunk, and began with careful method to put things into it.

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Chapter V

Michael Gives Advice

Michael still sat, correcting the proofs of 'Counterfeits.' Save 'Jericho,' there had been no address to send them to. The East was wide, and Wilfrid had made no sign. Did Fleur ever think of Wilfrid now? He had the impression that she did not. And Wilfrid — well, probably he was forgetting her already. Even passion required a little sustenance.

"A Mr. Forsyte to see you, sir."

Apparition in bookland!

"Ah Show him in."

Soames entered with an air of suspicion.

"This your place?" he said. "I've looked in to tell you that I've bought that picture of young Greene's. Have you anywhere to hang it?"

"I should think we had," said Michael. "Jolly good, sir, isn't it?"

"Well," muttered Soames, "for these days, yes. He'll make a name."

"He's an intense admirer of that White Monkey you gave us."

"Ah! I've been looking into the Chinese. If I go on buying —" Soames paused.

"They ARE a bit of an antidote, aren't they, sir? That 'Earthly Paradise!' And those geese — they don't seem to mind your counting their feathers, do they?"

Soames made no reply; he was evidently thinking: 'How on earth I missed those things when they first came on the market!' Then, raising his umbrella, and pointing it as if at the book trade, he asked:

"Young Butterfield — how's he doing?"

"Ah! I was going to let you know, sir. He came in yesterday and told me that he saw Elderson two days ago. He went to sell him a copy of my father's 'Limited'; Elderson said nothing and bought two."

"The deuce he did!"

"Butterfield got the impression that his visit put the wind up him. Elderson knows, of course, that I'm in this firm, and your son-inlaw."

Soames frowned. "I'm not sure," he said, "that sleeping dogs —! Well, I'm on my way there now."

"Mention the book, sir, and see how Elderson takes it. Would you like one yourself? You're on the list. E, F— Butterfield should be reaching you today. It'll save you a refusal. Here it is — nice get-up. One guinea."

"'A Duet,'" read Soames. "What's it about? Musical?"

"Not precisely. A sort of cat-calling between the ghosts of the G. O. M. and Dizzy!"

"I'm not a reader," said Soames. He pulled out a note. "Why didn't you make it a pound? Here's the shilling."

"Thanks awfully, sir; I'm sure my father'll be frightfully bucked to think you've got one."

"Will he?" said Soames, with a faint smile. "D'you ever do any WORK here?"

"Well, we try to turn a doubtful penny."

"What d'you make at it?"

"Personally, about five hundred a year."

"That all?"

"Yes, but I doubt if I'm worth more than three."

"H'm! I thought you'd got over your Socialism."

"I fancy I have, sir. It didn't seem to go with my position."

"No," said Soames. "Fleur seems well."

“Yes, she’s splendid. She does the Coue stunt, you know.”

Soames stared. “That’s her mother,” he said; “I can’t tell. Good-bye! Oh! I want to know; what’s the meaning of that expression ‘got his goat?’”

“‘Got his goat?’ Oh, raised his dander, if you know what that means, it was before my time.”

“I see,” said Soames; “I had it right, then. Well!” He turned. His back was very neat and real. It vanished through the doorway, and with it seemed to go the sense of definition.

Michael took up the proofs, and read two poems. Bitter as quinine! The unrest in them — the yearning behind the words! Nothing Chinese there! After all, the ancients — like Old Forsyte, and his father in a very different way — had an anchor down. ‘What is it?’ thought Michael. ‘What’s wrong with us? We’re quick, and clever, cocksure, and dissatisfied. If only something would enthuse us, or get OUR goats! We’ve chucked religion, tradition, property, pity; and in their place we put — what? Beauty? Gosh! See Walter Nazing, and the Cafe C’rillon! And yet — we must be after something! Better world? Doesn’t look like it. Future life? Suppose I ought to “look into” spiritualism, as Old Forsyte would say. But — half in this world, half in that — deuced odd if spirits are less restive than we are!’

To what — to what, then, was it all moving? ‘Dash it!’ thought Michael, getting up, ‘I’ll try dictating an advertisement!’

“Will you come in, please, Miss Perren? For the new Desert volume — Trade Journals: ‘Danby and Winter will shortly issue ‘Counterfeits,’ by the author of ‘Copper Coin,’ the outstanding success of the last publishing season. I wonder how many publishers have claimed that, Miss Perren, for how many books this year? ‘These poems show all the brilliancy of mood, and more than the technical accomplishment of the young author’s first volume.’ How’s that?”

“Brilliancy of mood, Mr. Mont? Do you think?”

“No. But what am I to say? ‘All the pangs and pessimism?’”

“Oh, no! But possibly: ‘All the brilliancy of diction, the strangeness and variety of mood.’”

“Good. But it’ll cost more. Say: ‘All the brilliant strangeness’; that’ll ring their bells in once. We’re nuts on ‘the strange,’ but we’re not getting it — the outre, yes, but not the strange.”

“Surely Mr. Desert gets —”

“Yes, sometimes; but hardly any one else. To be strange, you’ve got to have guts, if you’ll excuse the phrase, Miss Perren.”

“Certainly, Mr. Mont. That young man Bicket is waiting to see you.”

“He is, is he?” said Michael, taking out a cigarette. “Give me time to tighten my belt, Miss Perren, and ask him up.”

‘The lie benevolent,’ he thought; ‘now for it!’

The entrance of Bicket into a room where his last appearance had been so painful, was accomplished with a certain stolidity. Michael stood, back to the hearth, smoking; Bicket, back to a pile of modern novels, with the words “This great new novel” on it. Michael nodded.

“Hallo, Bicket!”

Bicket nodded.

“Hope you’re keeping well, sir?”

“Frightfully well, thank you.” And there was silence.

“Well,” said Michael, at last, “I suppose you’ve come about that little advance to your wife. It’s quite all right; no hurry whatever.”

While saying this he had become conscious that the ‘little snipe’ was dreadfully disturbed. His eyes had a most peculiar look, those large, shrimp-like eyes which seemed, as it were, in advance of the rest of him. He hastened on:

“I believe in Australia myself. I think you’re perfectly right, Bicket, and the sooner you go, the better. She doesn’t look too strong.”

Bicket swallowed.

“Sir,” he said, “you’ve been a gent to me, and it’s hard to say things.”

“Then don’t.”

Bicket’s cheeks became suffused with blood: queer effect in that pale, haggard face.

“It isn’t what you think,” he said: “I’ve come to ask you to tell me the truth.” Suddenly he whipped from his pocket what Michael perceived to be a crumpled novel-wrapper.

“I took this from a book on the counter as I came by, downstairs. There! Is that my wife?” He stretched it out.

Michael beheld with consternation the wrapper of Storbert’s novel. One thing to tell the lie benevolent already determined on — quite another to deny this!

Bicket gave him little time.

“I see it is, from your fyce,” he said. “What’s it all mean? I want the truth — I must ‘ave it! I’m gettin’ wild over all this. If that’s ‘er fyce there, then that’s ‘er body in the Gallery — Aubrey Greene; it’s the syme nyme. What’s it all mean?” His face had become almost formidable; his cockney accent very broad. “What gyme ‘as she been plyin’? You gotta tell me before I go aht of ’ere.”

Michael’s heels came together. He said quietly.

“Steady, Bicket.”

“Steady! You’d be steady if YOUR wife-! All that money! YOU never advanced it — you never give it ‘er — never! Don’t tell me you did!”

Michael had taken his line. No lies!

“I lent her ten pounds to make a round sum of it — that’s all; the rest she earned — honourably; and you ought to be proud of her.”

Bicket’s mouth fell open.

“Proud? And how’s she earned it? Proud! My Gawd!”

Michael said coldly:

“As a model. I myself gave her the introduction to my friend, Mr. Greene, the day you had lunch with me. You’ve heard of models, I suppose?”

Bicket’s hands tore the wrapper, and the pieces fell to the floor. “Models!” he said: “Pynters — yes, I’ve ‘eard of ’em — Swines!”

“No more swine than you are, Bicket. Be kind enough not to insult my friend. Pull yourself together, man, and take a cigarette.”

Bicket dashed the proffered case aside.

“I— I— was stuck on her,” he said passionately, “and she’s put this up on me!” A sort of sob came out of his lungs.

“You were stuck on her,” said Michael; his voice had sting in it. “And when she does her best for you, you turn her down — is that it? Do you suppose she liked it?”

Bicket covered his face suddenly.

“What should I know?” he muttered from behind his hands.

A wave of pity flooded up in Michael. Pity! Blurb!

He said drily: “When you’ve quite done, Bicket. D’you happen to remember what YOU did for HER?”

Bicket uncovered his face and stared wildly.

“You’ve never told her that?”

“No; but I jolly well will if you don’t pull yourself together.”

“What do I care if you do, now — lyin’ like that, for all the men in the world! Sixty pound! Honourably! D’you think I believe that?” His voice had desolation in it.

“Ah!” said Michael. “You don’t believe simply because you’re ignorant, as ignorant as the swine you talk of. A girl can do what she did and be perfectly honest, as I haven’t the faintest doubt she is. You’ve only to look at her, and hear the way she speaks of it. She did it because she couldn’t bear to see you selling those balloons. She did it to get you out of the gutter, and give you both a chance. And now you’ve got the chance, you kick up like this. Dash it all, Bicket, be a sport! Suppose I tell her what you did for her — d’you think she’s going to squirm and squeal? Not she! It was damned human of you, and it was damned human of her; and don’t you forget it!”

Bicket swallowed violently again.

"It's all very well," he said, sullenly; "it 'asn't 'appened to you."

Michael was afflicted at once. No! It hadn't happened to him! And all his doubts of Fleur in the days of Wilfrid came hitting him.

"Look here, Bicket," he said, "do you doubt your wife's affection? The whole thing is there. I've only seen her twice, but I don't see how you can. If she weren't fond of you, why should she want to go to Australia, when she knows she can make good money here, and enjoy herself if she wants? I can vouch for my friend Greene. He's dashed decent, and I KNOW he's played cricket."

But, searching Bicket's face, he wondered: Were all the others she had sat to as dashed decent?

"Look here, Bicket! We all get up against it sometimes; and that's the test of us. You've just GOT to believe in her; there's nothing else to it."

"To myke a show of herself for all the world to see!" The words seemed to struggle from the skinny throat. "I saw that picture bought yesterday by a ruddy alderman."

Michael could not conceal a grin at this description of 'Old Forsyte.'

"As a matter of fact," he said, "it was bought by my own father-inlaw as a present to us, to hang in our house. And, mind you, Bicket, it's a fine thing."

"Ah!" cried Bicket, "it IS a fine thing! Money! It's money bought her. Money'll buy anything. It'll buy the 'eart out of your chest."

And Michael thought: 'I can't get away with it a bit! What price emancipation? He's never heard of the Greeks! And if he had, they'd seem to him a lot of loose-living foreigners. I must quit.' And, suddenly, he saw tears come out of those shrimp's eyes, and trickle down the hollowed cheeks.

Very disturbed, he said hastily:

"When you get out there, you'll never think of it again. Hang it all, Bicket, be a man! She did it for the best. If I were you, I'd never let on to her that I knew. That's what she'd do if I told her how you snooped those 'Copper Coins.'"

Bicket clenched his fists — the action went curiously with the tears; then, without a word, he turned and shuffled out.

'Well,' thought Michael, 'giving advice is clearly not my stunt! Poor little snipe!'

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CHAPTER VI

QUITTANCE

Bicket stumbled, half-blind, along the Strand. Naturally good-tempered, such a nerve-storm made him feel ill, and bruised in the brain. Sunlight and motion slowly restored some power of thought. He had got the truth. But was it the whole and nothing but the truth? Could she have made all that money without —? If he could believe that, then, perhaps — out of this country where people could see her naked for a shilling — he might forget. But — all that money! And even if all earned 'honourable,' as Mr. Mont had put it, in how many days, exposed to the eyes of how many men? He groaned aloud in the street. The thought of going home to her — of a scene, of what he might learn if there WERE a scene, was just about unbearable. And yet — must do it, he supposed. He could have borne it better under St. Paul's, standing in the gutter, offering his balloons. A man of leisure for the first time in his life, a blooming 'alderman' with nothing to do but step in and take a ticket to the ruddy butterflies! And he owed that leisure to what a man with nothing to take his thoughts off simply could not bear! He would rather have snaffled the money out of a shop till. Better that on his soul, than the jab of this dark fiendish sexual jealousy. 'Be a man!' Easy said! 'Pull yourself together! She did it for you!' He would a hundred times rather she had not. Blackfriars Bridge! A dive, and an end in the mud down there? But you had to rise three times; they would fish you out alive, and run you in for it — and nothing gained — not even the pleasure of thinking that Vic would see what she had done, when she came to identify the body. Dead was dead, anyway, and he would never know what she felt post-mortem! He trudged across the bridge, keeping his eyes before him. Little Ditch Street — how he used to scuttle down it, back to her, when she had pneumonia! Would he never feel like that again? He strode past the window, and went in.

Victorine was still bending over the brown tin trunk. She straightened herself, and on her face came a cold, tired look.

"Well," she said, "I see you know."

Bicket had but two steps to take in that small room. He took them, and put his hands on her shoulders. His face was close, his eyes, so large and strained, searched hers.

"I know you've myde a show of yerself for all London to see; what I want to know is — the rest!"

Victorine stared back at him.

"The rest!" she said — it was not a question, just a repetition, in a voice that seemed to mean nothing.

"Ah!" said Bicket hoarsely; "The rest — Well?"

"If you think there's a 'rest,' that's enough."

Bicket jerked his hands away.

"Aoh! for the land's sake, daon't be mysterious. I'm 'alf orf me nut!"

"I see that," said Victorine; "and I see this: You aren't what I thought you. D'you think I liked doing it?" She raised her dress and took out the notes. "There you are! You can go to Australia without me."

Bicket cried hoarsely: "And leave you to the blasted pynters?"

"And leave me to meself. Take them!"

But Bicket recoiled against the door, staring at the notes with horror. "Not me!"

"Well, *I* can't keep 'em. I earned them to get you out of this."

There was a long silence, while the notes lay between them on the table, still crisp if a little greasy — the long-desired, the dreamed-of means of release, of happiness together in the sunshine. There they lay; neither would take them! What then?

"Vic," said Bicket at last, in a hoarse whisper, "swear you never let 'em touch you!"

"Yes, I can swear that."

And she could smile, too, saying it — that smile of hers! How believe her — living all these months, keeping it from him, telling him a lie about it in the end! He sank into a chair by the table and laid his head on his arms.

Victorine turned and began pulling an old cord round the trunk. He raised his head at the tiny sound. Then she really meant to go away! He saw his life devastated, empty as a cocoanut on Hampstead Heath; and all defence ran melted out of his cockney spirit. Tears rolled from his eyes.

“When you were ill,” he said, “I stole for you. I got the sack for it.”

She spun round. “Tony — you never told me! What did you steal?”

“Books. All your extra feedin’ was books.”

For a long minute she stood looking at him, then stretched out her hands without a word. Bicket seized them.

“I don’t care about anything,” he gasped, “so ‘elp me, so long as you’re fond of me, Vic!”

“And I don’t neither. Oh! let’s get out of this, Tony! this awful little room, this awful country. Let’s get out of it all!”

“Yes,” said Bicket; and put her hands to his eyes.

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CHAPTER VII

LOOKING INTO ELDERSON

Soames had left Danby and Winter divided in thought between Elderson and the White Monkey. As Fleur surmised, he had never forgotten Aubrey Greene's words concerning that bit of salvage from the wreck of George Forsyte. "Eat the fruits of life, scatter the rinds, and get copped doing it." His application of them tended towards the field of business.

The country was still living on its capital. With the collapse of the carrying trade and European markets, they were importing food they couldn't afford to pay for. In his opinion they would get copped doing it, and that before long. British credit was all very well, the wonder of the world and that, but you couldn't live indefinitely on wonder. With shipping idle, concerns making a loss all over the place, and the unemployed in swarms, it was a pretty pair of shoes! Even insurance must suffer before long. Perhaps that chap Elderson had foreseen this already, and was simply feathering his nest in time. If one was to be copped in any case, why bother to be honest? This was cynicism so patent, that all the Forsyte in Soames rejected it; and yet it would keep coming back. In a general bankruptcy, why trouble with thrift, far-sightedness, integrity? Even the Conservatives were refusing to call themselves Conservatives again, as if there were something ridiculous about the word, and they knew there was really nothing left to conserve. "Eat the fruit, scatter the rinds, and get copped doing it." That young painter had said a clever thing — yes, and his picture was clever, though Dumetrius had done one over the price — as usual! Where would Fleur hang it? In the hall, he shouldn't be surprised — good light there; and the sort of people they knew wouldn't jib at the nude. Curious — where all the nudes went to! You never saw a nude — no more than you saw the proverbial dead donkey! Soames had a momentary vision of dying donkeys laden with pictures of the nude, stepping off the edge of the world. Refusing its extravagance, he raised his eyes, just in time to see St. Paul's, as large as life. That little beggar with his balloons wasn't there today! Well — he'd nothing for him! At a tangent his thoughts turned towards the object of his pilgrimage — the P. P. R. S. and its half-year's accounts. At his suggestion, they were writing off that German business wholesale — a dead loss of two hundred and thirty thousand pounds. There would be no interim dividend, and even then they would be carrying forward a debit towards the next half-year. Well! better have a rotten tooth out at once and done with; the shareholders would have six months to get used to the gap before the general meeting. He himself had got used to it already, and so would they in time. Shareholders were seldom nasty unless startled — a long-suffering lot!

In the board room the old clerk was still filling his inkpots from the magnum.

"Manager in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Say I'm here, will you?"

The old clerk withdrew. Soames looked at the clock. Twelve! A little shaft of sunlight slanted down the wainscotting and floor. There was nothing else alive in the room save a bluebottle and the tick of the clock; not even a daily paper. Soames watched the bluebottle. He remembered how, as a boy, he had preferred bluebottles and green-bottles to the ordinary fly, because of their bright colour. It was a lesson. The showy things, the brilliant people, were the dangerous. Witness the Kaiser, and that precious Italian poet — what was his name! And this Jack-o'-lantern of their own! He shouldn't be surprised if Elderson were brilliant in private life. Why didn't the chap come? Was that encounter with young Butterfield giving him pause? The bluebottle crawled up the pane, buzzed down, crawled up again; the sunlight stole inward along the floor. All was vacuous in the board room, as though embodying the principle of insurance: "Keep things as they are."

'Can't kick my heels here for ever,' thought Soames, and moved to the window. In that wide street leading to the river, sunshine illumined a few pedestrians and a brewer's dray, but along the main artery at the end the traffic streamed and rattled. London! A monstrous place! And all insured! 'What'll it be like thirty years hence?' he thought. To think that there would be London, without himself to see it! He felt sorry for the place, sorry for himself. Even old Gradman would be gone. He supposed the insurance societies would look after it, but he didn't know. And suddenly he became aware of Elderson.

The fellow looked quite jaunty, in a suit of dittoes and a carnation.

"Contemplating the future, Mr. Forsyte?"

"No," said Soames. How had the fellow guessed his thoughts?

"I'm glad you've come in. It gives me a chance to say how grateful I am for the interest you take in the concern. It's rare. A manager has a lonely job."

Was he mocking? He seemed altogether very spry and uppish. Light-heartedness always made Soames suspicious — there was generally some reason for it.

"If every director were as conscientious as you, one would sleep in one's bed. I don't mind telling you that the amount of help I got from the Board before you came on it was — well — negligible."

Flattery! The fellow must be leading up to something!

Elderson went on:

"I can say to you what I couldn't say to any of the others: I'm not at all happy about business, Mr. Forsyte. England is just about to discover the state she's really in."

Faced with this startling confirmation of his own thoughts, Soames reacted.

"No good crying out before we're hurt," he said; "the pound's still high. We're good stayers."

"In the soup, I'm afraid. If something drastic isn't done — we SHALL stay there. And anything drastic, as you know, means disorganisation and lean years before you reap reward."

How could the fellow talk like this, and look as bright and pink as a new penny? It confirmed the theory that he didn't care what happened. And, suddenly, Soames resolved to try a shot.

"Talking of lean years — I came in to say that I think we must call a meeting of the shareholders over this dead loss of the German business." He said it to the floor, and looked quickly up. The result was disappointing. The manager's light-grey eyes met his without a blink.

"I've been expecting that from you," he said.

'The deuce you have!' thought Soames, for it had but that moment come into his mind.

"By all means call one," went on the manager; "but I'm afraid the Board won't like it."

Soames refrained from saying: 'Nor do I.'

"Nor the shareholders, Mr. Forsyte. In a long experience I've found that the less you rub their noses in anything unpleasant, the better for every one."

"That may be," said Soames, stiffening in contrariety; "but it's all a part of the vice of not facing things."

"I don't think, Mr. Forsyte, that you will accuse ME of not facing things, in the time to come."

Time to come! Now, what on earth did the fellow mean by that?

"Well, I shall moot it at the next Board," he said.

"Quite!" said the manager. "Nothing like bringing things to a head, is there?"

Again that indefinable mockery, as if he had something up his sleeve. Soames looked mechanically at the fellow's cuffs — beautifully laundered, with a blue stripe; at his holland waistcoat, and his bird's-eye tie — a regular dandy. He would give him a second barrel!

"By the way," he said, "Mont's written a book. I've taken a copy."

Not a blink! A little more show of teeth, perhaps — false, no doubt!

"I've taken two — poor, dear Mont!"

Soames had a sense of defeat. This chap was armoured like a crab, varnished like a Spanish table.

"Well," he said, "I must go."

The manager held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Forsyte. I'm so grateful to you."

The fellow was actually squeezing his hand. Soames went out confused. To have his hand squeezed was so rare! It undermined him. And yet, it might be the crown of a consummate bit of acting. He couldn't tell. He had, however, less intention even than before of moving for a meeting of the shareholders. No, no! That had just been a shot to get a rise; and it had failed. But the Butterfield shot had gone home, surely! If innocent, Elderson must certainly have alluded to the impudence of the young man's call. And yet such a cool card was capable of failing to rise, just to tease you! No! Nothing doing — as they said nowadays. He was as far as ever from a proof of guilt; and to speak truth, glad of it. Such a scandal could serve no purpose save that of blackening the whole concern, directors and all. People were so careless, they never stopped to think, or apportion blame where it was due. Keep a sharp eye open, and go on as they were! No good stirring hornets' nests! He had got so far in thought and progress, when a voice said:

"Well met, Forsyte! Are you going my way?"

"Old Mont," coming down the steps of 'Snooks'!

"I don't know," said Soames.

"I'm off to the Aeroplane for lunch."

"That new-fangled place?"

"Rising, you know, Forsyte — rising."

"I've just been seeing Elderson. He's bought two copies of your book."

"Dear me! Poor fellow!"

Soames smiled faintly. "That's what he said of you! And who d'you think sold them to him? Young Butterfield."

"Is he still alive?"

"He was, this morning."

Sir Lawrence's face took on a twist:

"I've been thinking, Forsyte. They tell me Elderson keeps two women."

Soames stared. The idea was attractive; would account for everything.

"My wife says it's one too many, Forsyte. What do you say?"

"I?" said Soames. "I only know the chap's as cool as a cucumber. I'm going in here. Good-bye!"

One could get no help from that baronet fellow; he couldn't take anything seriously. Two women! At Elderson's age! What a life! There were always men like that, not content with one thing at a time — living dangerously. It was mysterious to him. You might look and look into chaps like that, and see nothing. And yet, there they were! He crossed the hall, and went into the room where connoisseurs were lunching. Taking down the menu at the service table, he ordered himself a dozen oysters; but, suddenly remembering that the month contained no "r," changed them to a fried sole.

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Chapter VIII

Levanted

"No, dear heart, Nature's 'off'!"

"How d'you mean, Michael?"

"Well, look at the Nature novels we get. Sedulous stuff pitched on Cornish cliffs or Yorkshire moors — ever been on a Yorkshire moor? — it comes off on you; and the Dartmoor brand. Gosh! Dartmoor, where the passions come from — ever been on Dartmoor? Well, they don't, you know. And the South Sea bunch! Oh, la, la! And the poets, the splash-and-splutter school don't get within miles of Nature. The village idiot school is a bit better, certainly. After all, old Wordsworth made Nature, and she's a bromide. Of course, there's raw nature with the small 'n'; but if you come up against that, it takes you all your time to keep alive — the Nature we gas about is licensed, nicely blended and bottled. She's not modern enough for contemporary style."

"Oh! well, let's go on the river, anyway, Michael. We can have tea at 'The Shelter.'"

They were just reaching what Michael always called 'this desirable residence,' when Fleur leaned forward, and, touching his knee, said:

"I'm not half as nice to you as you deserve, Michael."

"Good Lord, darling! I thought you were."

"I know I'm selfish; especially just now."

"It's only the eleventh baronet."

"Yes; it's a great responsibility. I only hope he'll be like you."

Michael slid in to the landing-stage, shipped his sculls, and sat down beside her.

"If he's like me, I shall disown him. But sons take after their mothers."

"I meant in character. I want him frightfully to be cheerful and not restless, and have the feeling that life's worth while."

Michael stared at her lips — they were quivering; at her cheek, slightly browned by the afternoon's sunning; and, bending sideways, he put his own against it.

"He'll be a sunny little cuss, I'm certain."

Fleur shook her head.

"I don't want him greedy and self-centred; it's in my blood, you know. I can see it's ugly, but I can't help it. How do you manage not to be?"

Michael ruffled his hair with his free hand.

"The sun isn't too hot for you, is it, ducky?"

"No. Seriously, Michael — how?"

"But I AM. Look at the way I want you. Nothing will cure me of that."

A slight pressure of her cheek on his own was heartening, and he said:

"Do you remember coming down the garden one night, and finding me in a boat just here? When you'd gone, I stood on my head, to cool it. I was on my uppers; I didn't think I'd got an earthly —" He stopped. No! He would not remind her, but that was the night when she said: "Come again when I know I can't get my wish!" The unknown cousin!

Fleur said quietly:

"I was a pig to you, Michael, but I was awfully unhappy. That's gone. It's gone at last; there's nothing wrong now, except my own nature."

Conscious that his feelings betrayed the period, Michael said:

"Oh! if that's all! What price tea?"

They went up the lawn arm-inarm. Nobody was at home — Soames in London, Annette at a garden party. "We'll have tea on the verandah, please," said Fleur. Sitting there, happier than he ever remembered being, Michael conceded a certain value to Nature, to the sunshine stealing down, the scent of pinks and roses, the sighing in the aspens. Annette's pet doves were cooing; and, beyond the quietly-flowing river, the spires of poplar trees rose along the further bank. But, after all, he was only enjoying them because of the girl beside him, whom he loved to touch and look at, and because, for the first time, he felt as if she did not want to get up and flutter off to some one or something else. Curious that there could be, outside oneself, a being who completely robbed the world of its importance, 'snooped,' as it were, the whole 'bag of tricks'— and she one's own wife! Very curious, considering what one was! He heard her say:

"Of course, mother's a Catholic; only, living with father down here, she left off practising. She didn't even bother me much. I've been thinking, Michael — what shall we do about HIM?"

"Let him rip."

"I don't know. He must be taught something, because of going to school. The Catholics, you know, really do get things out of their religion."

"Yes; they go it blind; it's the only logical way now."

"I think having no religion makes one feel that nothing matters."

Michael suppressed the words: 'We could bring him up as a sun-worshipper,' and said, instead:

"It seems to me that whatever he's taught will only last till he can think for himself; then he'll settle down to what suits him."

"But what do YOU think about things, Michael? You're as good as any one I know."

"Gosh!" murmured Michael, strangely flattered: "Is that so?"

"What DO you think? Be serious!"

"Well, darling, doctrinally nothing — which means, of course, that I haven't got religion. I believe one has to play the game — but that's ethics."

"But surely it's a handicap not to be able to rely on anything but oneself? If there's something to be had out of any form of belief, one might as well have it."

Michael smiled, but not on the surface.

"You're going to do just as you like about the eleventh baronet, and I'm going to abet you. But considering his breeding — I fancy he'll be a bit of a sceptic."

"But I don't WANT him to be. I'd rather he were snug, and convinced and all that. Scepticism only makes one restless."

"No white monkey in him? Ah! I wonder! It's in the air, I guess. The only thing will be to teach him a sense of other people, as young as possible, with a slipper, if necessary."

Fleur gave him a clear look, and laughed.

"Yes," she said: "Mother used to try, but father wouldn't let her."

They did not reach home till past eight o'clock.

"Either your father's here, or mine," said Michael, in the hall; "there's a prehistoric hat."

"It's Dad's. His is grey inside. Bart's is buff."

In the Chinese room Soames indeed was discovered, with an opened letter, and Ting-a-ling at his feet. He held the letter out to Michael, without a word.

There was no date, and no address; Michael read:

"DEAR MR. FORSYTE. — Perhaps you will be good enough to tell the Board at the meeting on Tuesday that I am on my way to immunity from the consequences of any peccadillo I may have been guilty of. By the time you receive this, I shall be there. I have always held that the secret of life, no less than that of business, is to know when not to stop. It will be no use to proceed against me, for my person will not be attachable, as I believe you call it in the law, and I have left no property behind. If your object was to corner me, I cannot congratulate you on your tactics. If, on the other hand, you inspired that young man's visit as a warning that you were still pursuing the matter, I should like to add new thanks to those which I expressed when I saw you a few days ago.

"Believe me, dear Mr. Forsyte,

"Faithfully yours,

"ROBERT ELDERSON."

Michael said cheerfully:

"Happy release! Now you'll feel safer, sir."

Soames passed his hand over his face, evidently wiping off its expression. "We'll discuss it later," he said. "This dog's been keeping me company."

Michael admired him at that moment. He was obviously swallowing his 'grief,' to save Fleur.

"Fleur's a bit tired," he said. "We've been on the river, and had tea at 'The Shelter'; Madame wasn't in. Let's have dinner at once, Fleur."

Fleur had picked up Ting-a-ling, and was holding her face out of reach of his avid tongue.

"Sorry you've had to wait, Dad," she murmured, behind the yellow fur; "I'm just going to wash; shan't change."

When she had gone, Soames reached for the letter.

"A pretty kettle of fish!" he muttered. "Where it'll end, I can't tell!"

"But isn't this the end, sir?"

Soames stared. These young people! Here he was, faced with a public scandal, which might lead to he didn't know what — the loss of his name in the city, the loss of his fortune, perhaps; and they took it as if —! They had no sense of responsibility — none! All his father's power of seeing the worst, all James' nervous pessimism, had come to the fore in him during the hour since, at the Connoisseur's Club, he had been handed that letter. Only the extra 'form' of the generation that succeeded James saved him, now that Fleur was out of the room, from making an exhibition of his fears.

"Your father in town?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Good!" Not that he felt relief. That baronet chap was just as irresponsible — getting him to go on that Board! It all came of mixing with people brought up in a sort of incurable levity, with no real feeling for money.

"Now that Elderson's levanted," he said, "the whole thing must come out. Here's his confession in my hand —"

"Why not tear it up, sir, and say Elderson has developed consumption?"

The impossibility of getting anything serious from this young man afflicted Soames like the eating of heavy pudding.

"You think that would be honourable?" he said grimly.

"Sorry, sir!" said Michael, sobered. "Can I help at all?"

"Yes; by dropping your levity, and taking care to keep wind of this matter away from Fleur."

"I will," said Michael, earnestly: "I promise you. I'll Dutch-oyster the whole thing. What's your line going to be?"

"We shall have to call the shareholders together and explain this dicky-dealing. They'll very likely take it in bad part."

"I can't see why they should. How could you have helped it?"

Soames sniffed.

"There's no connection in life between reward and your deserts. If the war hasn't taught you that, nothing will."

"Well," said Michael, "Fleur will be down directly. If you'll excuse me a minute; we'll continue it in our next."

Their next did not occur till Fleur had gone to bed.

"Now, sir," said Michael, "I expect my governor's at the Aeroplane. He goes there and meditates on the end of the world. Would you like me to ring him up, if your Board meeting's tomorrow?"

Soames nodded. He himself would not sleep a wink — why should 'Old Mont'?

Michael went to the Chinese tea chest.

"Bart? This is Michael. Old For — my father-inlaw is here; he's had a pill. . . . No; Elderson. Could you blow in by any chance and hear? . . . He's coming, sir. Shall we stay down, or go up to my study?"

"Down," muttered Soames, whose eyes were fixed on the white monkey. "I don't know what we're all coming to," he added, suddenly.

"If we did, sir, we should die of boredom."

"Speak for yourself. All this unreliability! I can't tell where it's leading."

"Perhaps there's somewhere, sir, that's neither heaven nor hell."

"A man of HIS age!"

"Same age as my dad; it was a bad vintage, I expect. If you'd been in the war, sir, it would have cheered you up no end."

"Indeed!" said Soames.

"It took the linch-pins out of the cart — admitted; but, my Lord! it did give you an idea of the grit there is about, when it comes to being up against it."

Soames stared. Was this young fellow reading him a lesson against pessimism?

"Look at young Butterfield, the other day," Michael went on, "going over the top, to Elderson! Look at the girl who sat for 'the altogether' in that picture you bought us! She's the wife of a packer we had, who got hoofed for snooping books. She made quite a lot of money by standing for the nude, and never lost her wicket. They're going to Australia on it. Yes, and look at that little snooper himself; he snooped to keep her alive after pneumonia, and came down to selling balloons."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Soames.

"Only grit, sir. You said you didn't know what we were coming to. Well, look at the unemployed! Is there a country in the world where they stick it as they do here? I get awfully bucked at being English every now and then. Don't you?"

The words stirred something deep in Soames; but, far from giving it away, he continued to gaze at the white monkey. The restless, inhuman, and yet so human, angry sadness of the creature's eyes! 'No whites to them!' thought Soames: 'that's what does it, I expect!' And George had liked that picture to hang opposite his bed! Well, George had grit — joked with his last breath: very English, George! Very English, all the Forsytes! Old Uncle Jolyon, and his way with shareholders; Swithin, upright, puffy, huge in a too little arm-chair at Timothy's: 'All these small fry!' he seemed to hear the words again; and Uncle Nicholas, whom that chap Elderson reproduced as it were unworthily, spry and all-there, and pretty sensual, but quite above suspicion of dishonesty. And old Roger, with his crankiness, and German mutton! And his own father, James — how he had hung on, long and frail as a reed, hung on and on! And Timothy, preserved in Consols, dying at a hundred! Grit and body in those old English boys, in spite of their funny ways. And there stirred in Soames a sort of atavistic will-power. He would see, and they would see — and that was all about it!

The grinding of a taxi's wheels brought him back from reverie. Here came 'Old Mont,' tittuppy, and light in the head as ever, no doubt. And, instead of his hand, Soames held out Elderson's letter.

"Your precious schoolfellow's levanted," he said.

Sir Lawrence read it through, and whistled.

"What do you think, Forsyte — Constantinople?"

"More likely Monte Carlo," said Soames gloomily. "Secret commission — it's not an extraditable offence."

The odd contortions of that baronet's face were giving him some pleasure — the fellow seemed to be feeling it, after all.

"I should think he's really gone to escape his women, Forsyte."

The chap was incorrigible! Soames shrugged his shoulders almost violently.

"You'd better realise," he said, "that the fat is in the fire."

"But surely, my dear Forsyte, it's been there ever since the French occupied the Ruhr. Elderson has cut his lucky; we appoint some one else. What more is there to it?"

Soames had the peculiar feeling of having overdone his own honesty. If an honourable man, a ninth baronet, couldn't see the implications of Elderson's confession, were they really there? Was any fuss and scandal necessary? Goodness knew, HE didn't want it! He said heavily:

"We now have conclusive evidence of a fraud; we KNOW Elderson was illegally paid for putting through business by which the shareholders have suffered a dead loss. How can we keep this knowledge from them?"

"But the mischief's done, Forsyte. How will the knowledge help them?"

Soames frowned.

"We're in a fiduciary position. I'm not prepared to run the risks of concealment. If we conceal, we're accessory after the fact. The thing might come out at any time.” If that was caution, not honesty, he couldn’t help it.

“I should be glad to spare Elderson’s name. We were at —”

“I’m aware of that,” said Soames, drily.

“But what risk is there of its coming out, Forsyte? Elderson won’t mention it; nor young Butterfield, if you tell him not to. Those who paid the commission certainly won’t. And beyond us three here, no one else knows. It’s not as if we profited in any way.”

Soames was silent. The argument was specious. Entirely unjust, of course, that he should be penalised for what Elderson had done!

“No,” he said, suddenly, “it won’t do. Depart from the law, and you can’t tell where it’ll end. The shareholders have suffered this loss, and they have the right to all the facts within the directors’ knowledge. There might be some means of restitution they could avail themselves of. We can’t judge. It may be they’ve a remedy against ourselves.”

“If that’s so, Forsyte, I’m with you.”

Soames felt disgust. Mont had no business to put it with a sort of gallantry that didn’t count the cost; when the cost, if cost there were, would fall, not on Mont, whose land was heavily mortgaged, but on himself, whose property was singularly realisable.

“Well,” he said, coldly, “remember that tomorrow. I’m going to bed.”

At his open window upstairs he felt no sense of virtue, but he enjoyed a sort of peace. He had taken his line, and there it was!

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Chapter IX

Soames Doesn't Give a Damn

During the month following the receipt of Elderson's letter, Soames aged more than thirty days. He had forced his policy of disclosure on a doubting Board, the special meeting had been called, and, just as, twenty-three years ago, pursuing divorce from Irene, he had to face the public eye, so now he suffered day and night in dread of that undiscriminating optic. The French had a proverb: "Les absents ont toujours tort!" but Soames had grave doubts about it. Elderson would be absent from that meeting of the shareholders, but — unless he was much mistaken — he himself, who would be present, would come in for the blame. The French were not to be relied on. What with his anxiety about Fleur, and his misgiving about the public eye, he was sleeping badly, eating little, and feeling below par. Annette had recommended him to see a doctor. That was probably why he did not. Soames had faith in doctors for other people; but they had never — he would say — done anything for HIM, possibly because, so far, there had not been anything to do.

Failing in her suggestion, and finding him every day less sociable, Annette had given him a book on Coue. After running it through, he had meant to leave it in the train, but the theory, however extravagant, had somehow clung to him. After all, Fleur was doing it; and the thing cost you nothing: there might be something in it! There was. After telling himself that night twenty-five times that he was getting better and better, he slept so soundly that Annette, in the next room, hardly slept at all.

"Do you know, my friend," she said at breakfast, "you were snoring last night so that I could not hear the cock crow."

"Why should you want to?" said Soames.

"Well, never mind — if you had a good night. Was it my little Coue who gave you that nice dream?"

Partly from fear of encouraging Coue, and partly from fear of encouraging her, Soames avoided a reply; but he had a curious sense of power, as if he did not care what people said of him.

'I'll do it again to-night,' he thought.

"You know," Annette went on, "you are just the temperament for Coue, Soames. When you cure yourself of worrying, you will get quite fat."

"Fat!" said Soames, looking at her curves. "I'd as soon grow a beard."

Fatness and beards were associated with the French. He would have to keep an eye on himself if he went on with this — er — what was one to call it? Tomfoolery was hardly the word to conciliate the process, even if it did require you to tie twenty-five knots in a bit of string: very French, that, like telling your beads! He himself had merely counted on his fingers. The sense of power lasted all the way up to London; he had the conviction that he could sit in a draught if he wanted to, that Fleur would have her boy all right; and as to the P. P. R. S. — ten to one he wouldn't be mentioned by name in any report of the proceedings.

After an early lunch and twenty-five more assurances over his coffee, he set out for the city.

This Board, held just a week before the special meeting of the shareholders, was in the nature of a dress rehearsal. The details of confrontation had to be arranged, and Soames was chiefly concerned with seeing that a certain impersonality should be preserved. He was entirely against disclosure of the fact that young Butterfield's story and Elderson's letter had been confided to himself. The phrase to be used should be a "member of the Board." He saw no need for anything further. As for explanations, they would fall, of course, to the chairman and the senior director, Lord Fontenoy. He found, however, that the Board thought he himself was the right person to bring the matter forward. No one else — they said — could supply the personal touch, the necessary conviction; the chairman should introduce the matter briefly, then call on Soames to give the evidence within his knowledge. Lord Fontenoy was emphatic.

"It's up to you, Mr. Forsyte. If it hadn't been for you, Elderson would be sitting there today. From beginning to end you put the wind up him; and I wish the deuce you hadn't. The whole thing's a confounded nuisance. He was a very clever fellow, and we shall miss him. Our new man isn't a patch on him. If he did take a few thou. under the rose, he took 'em off the Huns."

Old guinea-pig! Soames replied, acidly:

“And the quarter of a million he’s lost the shareholders, for the sake of those few thou.? Bagatelle, I suppose?”

“Well, it might have turned out a winner; for the first year it did. We all back losers sometimes.”

Soames looked from face to face. They did not support this blatant attitude, but in them all, except perhaps ‘Old Mont’s,’ he felt a grudge against himself. Their expressions seemed to say: ‘Nothing of this sort ever happened till you came on the Board.’ He had disturbed their comfort, and they disliked him for it. They were an unjust lot! He said doggedly:

“You leave it to me, do you? Very well!”

What he meant to convey — or whether he meant to convey anything, he did not know; but even that ‘old guinea-pig’ was more civil afterwards. He came away from the Board, however, without any sense of power at all. There he would be on Tuesday next, bang in the public eye.

After calling to enquire after Fleur, who was lying down rather poorly, he returned home with a feeling of having been betrayed. It seemed that he could not rely, after all, on this fellow with his twenty-five knots. However much better he might become, his daughter, his reputation, and possibly his fortune, were not apparently at the disposition of his subconscious self. He was silent at dinner, and went up afterwards to his picture gallery, to think things over. For half an hour he stood at the open window, alone with the summer evening; and the longer he stood there, the more clearly he perceived that the three were really one. Except for his daughter’s sake, what did he care for his reputation or his fortune? His reputation! Lot of fools — if they couldn’t see that he was careful and honest so far as had lain within his reach — so much the worse for them! His fortune — well, he had better make another settlement on Fleur and her child at once, in case of accidents; another fifty thousand. Ah! if she were only through her trouble! It was time Annette went up to her for good; and there was a thing they called twilight sleep. To have her suffering was not to be thought of!

The evening lingered out; the sun went down behind familiar trees; Soames’ hands, grasping the window-ledge, felt damp with dew; sweetness of grass and river stole up into his nostrils. The sky had paled, and now began to darken; a scatter of stars came out. He had lived here a long time, through all Fleur’s childhood — best years of his life; still, it wouldn’t break his heart to sell. His heart was up in London. Sell? That was to run before the hounds with a vengeance. No — no! — it wouldn’t come to THAT! He left the window and, turning up the lights, began the thousand and first tour of his pictures. He had made some good purchases since Fleur’s marriage, and without wasting his money on fashionable favourites. He had made some good sales, too. The pictures in this gallery, if he didn’t mistake, were worth from seventy to a hundred thousand pounds; and, with the profits on his sales from time to time, they stood him in at no more than five-and-twenty thousand — not a bad result from a life’s hobby, to say nothing of the pleasure! Of course, he might have taken up something else — butterflies, photography, archaeology, or first editions; some other sport in which you backed your judgment against the field, and collected the results; but he had never regretted choosing pictures. Not he! More to show for your money, more kudos, more profit, and more risk! The thought startled him a little; had he really taken to pictures because of the risk? A risk had never appealed to him; at least, he hadn’t realised it, so far. Had his ‘subconscious’ some part in the matter? He suddenly sat down and closed his eyes. Try the thing once more; very pleasant feeling, that morning, of not “giving a damn”; he never remembered having it before! He had always felt it necessary to worry — kind of insurance against the worst; but worry was wearing, no doubt about it, wearing. Turn out the light! They said in that book, you had to relax. In the now dim and shadowy room, with the starlight, through many windows, dusted over its reality, Soames, in his easy chair, sat very still. A faint drone rose on the words: “fatter and fatter” through his moving lips. ‘No, no,’ he thought: ‘that’s wrong!’ And he began the drone again. The tips of his fingers ticked it off; on and on — he would give it a good chance. If only one needn’t worry! On and on —“better and better!” If only —! His lips stopped moving; his grey head fell forward into the subconscious. And the stealing starlight dusted over him, too, a little unreality.

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CHAPTER X

BUT TAKES NO CHANCES

Michael knew nothing of the City; and, in the spirit of the old cartographers: “Where you know nothing, place terrors,” made his way through the purlieus of the Poultry, towards that holy of holies, the offices of Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte. His mood was attuned to meditation, for he had been lunching with Sibley Swan at the Cafe C’rillon. He had known all the guests — seven chaps even more modern than old Sib — save only a Russian so modern that he knew no French and nobody could talk to him. Michael had watched them demolish everything, and the Russian closing his eyes, like a sick baby, at mention of any living name. . . . ‘Carry on!’ he thought, several of his favourites having gone down in the melee. ‘Stab and bludge! Importance awaits you at the end of the alley.’ But he had restrained his irreverence till the moment of departure.

“Sib,” he said, rising, “all these chaps here are dead — ought they to be about in this hot weather?”

“What’s that?” ejaculated Sibley Swan, amidst the almost painful silence of the chaps.

“I mean — they’re alive — so they MUST be damned!” And avoiding a thrown chocolate which hit the Russian, he sought the door.

Outside, he mused: ‘Good chaps, really! Not half so darned superior as they think they are. Quite a human touch — getting that Russian on the boko. Phew! It’s hot!’

On that first day of the Eton and Harrow match all the forfeited heat of a chilly summer had gathered and shimmered over Michael, on the top of his Bank ‘bus; shimmered over straw hats, and pale, perspiring faces, over endless other ‘buses, business men, policemen, shopmen at their doors, sellers of newspapers, laces, jumping toys, endless carts and cabs, letterings and wires, all the confusion of the greatest conglomeration in the world — adjusted almost to a hair’s-breadth, by an unseen instinct. Michael stared and doubted. Was it possible that, with everyone pursuing his own business, absorbed in his own job, the thing could work out? An ant-heap was not busier, or more seemingly confused. Live wires crossed and crossed and crossed — inextricable entanglement, you’d say; and yet, life, the order needful to life, somehow surviving! ‘No slouch of a miracle!’ he thought, ‘modern town life!’ And suddenly it seemed to cease, as if demolished by the ruthless dispensation of some super Sibley Swan; for he was staring down a cul-de-sac. On both sides, flat houses, recently re-buffed, extraordinarily alike; at the end, a flat buff house, even more alike, and down to it, grey virgin pavement, unstained by horse or petrol; no cars, cats, carts, policemen, hawkers, flies, or bees. No sign of human life, except the names of legal firms to right and left of each open doorway.

“‘Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte, Commissioners for Oaths: First Floor.’”

‘Rule Britannia!’ thought Michael, ascending wide stone steps.

Entering the room to which he had been ushered, he saw an old and pug-faced fellow with a round grizzled beard, a black alpaca coat, and a roomy holland waistcoat round his roomy middle, who rose from a swivel chair.

“Aoh!” he said, “Mr. Michael Mont, I think. I’ve been expecting you. We shan’t be long about it, after Mr. Forsyte comes. He’s just stepped round the corner. Mrs. Michael well, I hope?”

“Thanks; as well as —”

“Ye-es: it makes you anxious. Take a seat. Perhaps you’d like to read the draft?”

Thus prescribed for, Michael took some foolscap from a pudgy hand, and sat down opposite. With one eye on the old fellow, and the other on the foolscap, he read steadily.

“It seems to mean something,” he said at last.

He saw a gape, as of a frog at a fly, settle in the beard; and hastened to repair his error.

“Calculating what’s going to happen if something else doesn’t, must be rather like being a bookmaker.”

He felt at once that he had not succeeded. There was a grumpy mutter:

“We don’t waste our time, ’ere. Excuse me, I’m busy.”

Michael sat, compunctious, watching him tick down a long page of entries. He was like one of those old dogs which lie outside front doors, keeping people off the premises, and notifying their fleas. After less than five minutes of that perfect silence Soames came in.

"You're here, then?" he said.

"Yes, sir; I thought it best to come at the time you mentioned. What a nice cool room!"

"Have you read this?" asked Soames, pointing to the draft.

Michael nodded.

"Did you understand it?"

"Up to a point, I think."

"The interest on THIS fifty thousand," said Soames, "is Fleur's until her eldest child, if it's a boy, attains the age of twenty-one, when the capital becomes his absolutely. If it's a girl, Fleur retains half the income for life, the rest of the income becomes payable to the girl when she attains the age of twenty-one or marries, and the capital of that half goes to her child or children lawfully begotten, at majority or marriage, in equal shares. The other half of the capital falls into Fleur's estate, and is disposable by her will, or follows the laws of intestacy."

"You make it wonderfully clear," said Michael

"Wait!" said Soames. "If Fleur has no children —"

Michael started.

"Anything is possible," said Soames gravely, "and my experience is that the contingencies not provided for are those which happen. In such a case the income of the whole is hers for life, and the capital hers at death to do as she likes with. Failing that, it goes to the next of kin. There are provisions against anticipation and so forth."

"Ought she to make a fresh will?" asked Michael, conscious of sweat on his forehead.

"Not unless she likes. Her present will covers it."

"Have I to do anything?"

"No. I wanted you to understand the purport before I sign; that's all. Give me the deed, Gradman, and get Wickson in, will you?"

Michael saw the old chap produce from a drawer a fine piece of parchment covered with copper-plate writing and seals, look at it lovingly, and place it before Soames. When he had left the room, Soames said in a low voice:

"This meeting on Tuesday — I can't tell! But, whatever happens, so far as I can see, this ought to stand."

"It's awfully good of you, sir."

Soames nodded, testing a pen.

"I'm afraid I've got wrong with your old clerk," said Michael; "I like the look of him frightfully, but I accidentally compared him to a bookmaker."

Soames smiled. "Gradman," he said, "is a 'character.' There aren't many, nowadays."

Michael was wondering: Could one be a 'character' under the age of sixty? — when the 'character' returned, with a pale man in dark clothes.

Lifting his nose sideways, Soames said at once:

"This is a post-nuptial settlement on my daughter. I deliver this as my act and deed."

He wrote his name, and got up.

The pale person and Gradman wrote theirs, and the former left the room. There was a silence as of repletion.

"Do you want me any more?" asked Michael.

"Yes. I want you to see me deposit it at the bank with the marriage settlement. Shan't come back, Gradman!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Gradman."

Michael heard the old fellow mutter through his beard half buried in a drawer to which he was returning the draft, and followed Soames out.

"Here's where I used to be," said Soames as they went along the Poultry; "and my father before me."

"More genial, perhaps," said Michael.

“The trustees are meeting us at the bank; you remember them?”

“Cousins of Fleur’s, weren’t they, sir?”

“Second cousins; young Roger’s eldest, and young Nicholas’. I chose them youngish. Very young Roger was wounded in the war — he does nothing. Very young Nicholas is at the Bar.”

Michael’s ears stood up. “What about the next lot, sir? Very very young Roger would be almost insulting, wouldn’t it?”

“There won’t be one,” said Soames, “with taxation where it is. He can’t afford it; he’s a steady chap. What are you going to call your boy, if it IS one?”

“We think Christopher, because of St. Paul’s and Columbus. Fleur wants him solid, and I want him enquiring.”

“H’m! And if it’s a girl?”

“Oh! — if it’s a girl — Anne.”

“Yes,” said Soames: “Very neat. Here they are!”

They had reached the bank, and in the entrance Michael saw two Forsytes between thirty and forty, whose chinny faces he dimly remembered. Escorted by a man with bright buttons down his front, they all went to a room, where a man without buttons produced a japanned box. One of the Forsytes opened it with a key; Soames muttered an incantation, and deposited the deed. When he and the chinnier Forsyte had exchanged a few remarks with the manager on the question of the bank rate, they all went back to the lobby and parted with the words: “Well, good-bye.”

“Now,” said Soames, in the din and hustle of the street, “he’s provided for, so far as I can see. When exactly do you expect it?”

“It should be just a fortnight.”

“Do you believe in this — this twilight sleep?”

“I should like to,” said Michael, conscious again of sweat on his forehead. “Fleur’s wonderfully calm; she does Coue night and morning.”

“That!” said Soames. He did not mention that he himself was doing it, thus giving away the state of his nerves. “If you’re going home, I’ll come, too.”

“Good!”

He found Fleur lying down with Ting-a-ling on the foot of the sofa.

“Your father’s here, darling. He’s been anointing the future with another fifty thou. I expect he’d like to tell you all about it.”

Fleur moved restlessly.

“Presently. If it’s going on as hot as this, it’ll be rather a bore, Michael.”

“Oh! but it won’t, ducky. Three days and a thunderstorm.”

Taking Ting-a-ling by the chin, he turned his face up.

“And how on earth is your nose going to be put out of joint, old man? There’s no joint to put.”

“He knows there’s something up.”

“He’s a wise little brute, aren’t you, old son?”

Ting-a-ling sniffed.

“Michael!”

“Yes, darling?”

“I don’t seem to care about anything now — it’s a funny feeling.”

“That’s the heat.”

“No. I think it’s because the whole business is too long. Everything’s ready, and now it all seems rather stupid. One more person in the world or one more out of it — what does it matter?”

“Don’t! It matters frightfully!”

“One more gnat to dance, one more ant to run about!”

Anguished, Michael said again:

"Don't, Fleur! That's just a mood."

"Is Wilfrid's book out?"

"It comes out tomorrow."

"I'm sorry I gave you such a bad time, there. I only didn't want to lose him."

Michael took her hand.

"Nor did I— goodness knows!" he said.

"He's never written, I suppose?"

"No."

"Well, I expect he's all right by now. Nothing lasts."

Michael put her hand to his cheek.

"*I* do, I'm afraid," he said.

The hand slipped round over his lips.

"Give Dad my love, and tell him I'll be down to tea. Oh! I'm so hot!"

Michael hovered a moment, and went out. Damn the heat, upsetting her like this!

He found Soames standing in front of the white monkey.

"I should take this down, if I were you," he muttered, "until it's over."

"Why, sir?" asked Michael, in surprise.

Soames frowned.

"Those eyes!"

Michael went up to the picture. Yes! He was a haunting kind of brute!

"But it's such top-hole work, sir."

Soames nodded.

"Artistically, yes. But at such times you can't be too careful what she sees."

"I believe you're right. Let's have him down."

"I'll hold him," said Soames, taking hold of the bottom of the picture.

"Got him tight? Right-o. Now!"

"You can say I wanted an opinion on his period," said Soames, when the picture had been lowered to the floor.

"There can hardly be a doubt of that, sir — the present!"

Soames stared. "What? Oh! You mean —? Ah! H'm! Don't let her know he's in the house."

"No. I'll lock him up." Michael lifted the picture. "D'you mind opening the door, sir?"

"I'll come back at tea-time," said Soames. "That'll look as if I'd taken him off. You can hang him again, later."

"Yes. Poor brute!" said Michael, bearing the monkey off to limbo.

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Chapter XI

With a Small ‘n’

On the night of the Monday following, after Fleur had gone to bed, Michael and Soames sat listening to the mutter of London coming through the windows of the Chinese room opened to the brooding heat.

“They say the war killed sentiment,” said Soames suddenly: “Is that true?”

“In a way, yes, sir. We had so much reality that we don’t want any more.”

“I don’t follow you.”

“I meant that only reality really makes you feel. So if you pretend there IS no reality, you don’t have to feel. It answers awfully well, up to a point.”

“Ah!” said Soames. “Her mother comes up tomorrow morning, to stay. This P. P. R. S. meeting of mine is at half-past two. Good-night!”

Michael, at the window, watched the heat gathered black over the Square. A few tepid drops fell on his outstretched hand. A cat stole by under a lamp-post, and vanished into shadow so thick that it seemed uncivilised.

Queer question of ‘Old Forsyte’s’ about sentiment; odd that he should ask it! ‘Up to a point! But don’t we all get past that point?’ he thought. Look at Wilfrid, and himself — after the war they had deemed it blasphemous to admit that anything mattered except eating and drinking, for tomorrow they died; even fellows like Nazing, and Master, who were never in the war, had felt like that ever since. Well, Wilfrid had got it in the neck; and he himself had got it in the wind; and he would bet that — barring one here and there whose blood was made of ink — they would all get it in the neck or wind soon or late. Why, he would cheerfully bear Fleur’s pain and risk, instead of her! But if nothing mattered, why should he feel like that?

Turning from the window, he leaned against the lacquered back of the jade-green settee, and stared at the wall space between the Chinese tea-chests. Jolly thoughtful of the ‘old man’ to have that white monkey down! The brute was potent — symbolic of the world’s mood: beliefs cancelled, faiths withdrawn! And, dash it! not only the young — but the old — were in that temper! ‘Old Forsyte,’ or he would never have been scared by that monkey’s eyes; yes, and his own governor, and Elderson, and all the rest. Young and old — no real belief in anything! And yet — revolt sprang up in Michael, with a whirr, like a covey of partridges. It DID matter that some person or some principle outside oneself should be more precious than oneself — it dashed well did! Sentiment, then, wasn’t dead — nor faith, nor belief, which were the same things. They were only shedding shell, working through chrysalis, into — butterflies, perhaps. Faith, sentiment, belief, had gone underground, possibly, but they were there, even in ‘Old Forsyte’ and himself. He had a good mind to put the monkey up again. No use exaggerating his importance! . . . By George! Some flare! A jagged streak of vivid light had stripped darkness off the night. Michael crossed, to close the windows. A shattering peal of thunder blundered overhead; and down came the rain, slashing and sluicing. He saw a man running, black, like a shadow across a dark blue screen; saw him by the light of another flash, suddenly made lurid and full of small meaning, with face of cheerful anxiety, as if he were saying: “Hang it, I’m getting wet!” Another frantic crash!

‘Fleur!’ thought Michael; and clanging the last window down, he ran upstairs.

She was sitting up in bed, with a face all round, and young, and startled.

‘Brutes!’ he thought — guns and the heavens confounded in his mind: ‘They’ve waked her up!’

“It’s all right, darling! Just another little summer kick-up! Were you asleep?”

“I was dreaming!” He felt her hand clutching within his own, saw a sudden pinched look on her face, with a sort of rage. What infernal luck!

“Where’s Ting?”

No dog was in the corner.

“Under the bed — you bet! Would you like him up?”

“No. Let him stay; he hates it.”

She put her head against his arm, and Michael curled his hand round her other ear.

"I never liked thunder much!" said Fleur," and now it — it hurts!"

High above her hair Michael's face underwent the contortions of an overwhelming tenderness. One of those crashes which seem just overhead sent her face burrowing against his chest, and, sitting on the bed, he gathered her in, close.

"I wish it were over," came, smothered, from her lips.

"It will be directly, darling; it came on so suddenly!" But he knew she didn't mean the storm.

"If I come through, I'm going to be quite different to you, Michael."

Anxiety was the natural accompaniment of such events, but the words, "If I come through" turned Michael's heart right over. Incredible that one so young and pretty should be in even the remotest danger of extinction; incredibly painful that she should be in fear of it! He hadn't realised. She had been so calm, so matter-of-fact about it all.

"Don't!" he mumbled; "of course you'll come through."

"I'm afraid."

The sound was small and smothered, but the words hurt horribly. Nature, with the small 'n,' forcing fear into this girl he loved so awfully! Nature kicking up this godless din above her poor little head!

"Ducky, you'll have twilight sleep and know nothing about it; and be as right as rain in no time."

Fleur freed her hand.

"Not if it's not good for him. Is it?"

"I expect so, sweetheart; I'll find out. What makes you think —?"

"Only that it's not natural. I want to do it properly. Hold my hand hard, Michael. I— I'm not going to be a fool. Oh! Some one's knocking — go and see."

Michael opened the door a crack. Soames was there — unnatural — in a blue dressing gown and scarlet slippers!

"Is she all right?" he whispered.

"Yes, yes."

"In this bobbery she oughtn't to be left."

"No, sir, of course not. I shall sleep on the sofa."

"Call me, if anything's wanted."

"I will."

Soames' eyes slid past, peering into the room. A string worked in his throat, as if he had things to say which did not emerge. He shook his head, and turned. His slim figure, longer than usual, in its gown, receded down the corridor, past the Japanese prints which he had given them. Closing the door again, Michael stood looking at the bed. Fleur had settled down; her eyes were closed, her lips moving. He stole back on tiptoe. The thunder, travelling away south, blundered and growled as if regretfully. Michael saw her eyelids quiver, her lips stop, then move again. 'Coue!' he thought.

He lay down on the sofa at the foot of the bed, whence, without sound, he could raise himself and see her. Many times he raised himself. She had dropped off, was breathing quietly. The thunder was faint now, the flashes imperceptible. Michael closed his eyes.

A faint last mutter roused him to look at her once more, high on her pillows by the carefully shaded light. Young — young! Colourless, like a flower in wax! No scheme in her brain, no dread — peaceful! If only she could stay like that and wake up with it all over! He looked away. And there she was at the far end, dim, reflected in a glass; and there to the right, again. She lay, as it were, all round him in the pretty room, the inhabiting spirit — of his heart.

It was quite still now. Through a chink in those powder-blue curtains he could see some stars. Big Ben chimed one.

He had slept, perhaps, dozed at least, dreamed a little. A small sound woke him. A very little dog, tail down, yellow, low and unimportant, was passing down the room, trailing across it to the far corner. 'Ah!' thought Michael, closing his eyes again: 'You!'

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CHAPTER XII

ORDEAL BY SHAREHOLDER

Repairing, next day, to the Aeroplane Club, where, notably spruce, Sir Lawrence was waiting in the lounge, Michael thought: 'Good old Bart! he's got himself up for the guillotine all right!'

"That white piping will show the blood!" he said. "Old Forsyte's neat this morning, but not so gaudy."

"Ah! How is 'Old Forsyte'? In good heart?"

"One doesn't ask him, sir. How do you feel yourself?"

"Exactly as I used to before the Eton and Winchester match. I think I shall have shandy-gaff at lunch."

When they had taken their seats, Sir Lawrence went on:

"I remember seeing a man tried for murder in Colombo; the poor fellow was positively blue. I think my favourite moment in the past, Michael, is Walter Raleigh asking for a second shirt. By the way, it's never been properly settled yet whether the courtiers of that day were lousy. What are you going to have, my dear fellow?"

"Cold beef, pickled walnuts, and gooseberry tart."

"Excellent for the character. I shall have curry; they give you a very good Bombay duck here. I rather fancy we shall be fired, Michael. 'Nous sommes trahis!' used to be the prerogative of the French, but I'm afraid we're getting the attitude, too. The Yellow Press has made a difference."

Michael shook his head.

"We say it, but we don't act on it; the climate's too uncertain."

"That sounds deep. This looks very good curry — will you change your mind? Old Fontenoy sometimes comes in here; he has no inside. It'll be serious for him if we're shown the door."

"Deuced rum," said Michael suddenly, "how titles still go down. There can't be any belief in their business capacity."

"Character, my dear fellow — the good old English gentleman. After all, there's something in it."

"I fancy, sir, it's more a case of complex in the shareholders. Their parents show them a lord when they're young."

"Shareholders," said Sir Lawrence; "the word is comprehensive. Who are they, what are they, when are they?"

"This afternoon," said Michael, "and I shall have a good look at them."

"They won't let you in, my dear."

"No?"

"Certainly not."

Michael frowned.

"What paper," he said, "is sure not to be represented?"

Sir Lawrence gave his whinnying laugh.

"The Field," he said; "The Horse and Hound; The Gardener's Weekly."

"I'll slide in on them."

"You'll see us die game, I hope," said Sir Lawrence, with sudden gravity.

They took a cab together to the meeting, but separated before reaching the door of the hotel.

Michael had thought better of the Press, and took up a position in the passage, whence he could watch for a chance. Stout men, in dark suits, with a palpable look of having lunched off turbot, joints, and cheese, kept passing him. He noticed that each handed the janitor a paper. 'I'll hand him a paper, too,' he thought, 'and scoot in.' Watching for some even stouter men, he took cover between two of them, and approached the door, with an announcement of 'Counterfeits' in his left hand. Handing it across a neighbouring importance, he was quickly into a seat. He saw the janitor's face poked round the door. 'No, my friend,' thought Michael, 'if you could tell duds from shareholders, you wouldn't be in that job!'

He found a report before him, and holding it up, looked at other things. The room seemed to him to have been got by a concert-hall out of a station waiting-room. It had a platform with a long table, behind which were seven empty chairs, and seven inkpots, with seven quill pens upright in them. ‘Quills!’ thought Michael; ‘symbolic, I suppose — they’ll all use fountain-pens!’

Back-centre of the platform was a door, and in front, below it, a table, where four men were sitting, fiddling with notebooks. ‘Orchestra,’ thought Michael. He turned his attention to the eight or ten rows of shareholders. They looked what they were, but he could not tell why. Their faces were cast in an infinity of moulds, but all had the air of waiting for something they knew they would not get. What sort of lives did they lead, or did their lives lead them? Nearly all wore moustaches. His neighbours to right and left were the same stout shareholders between whom he had slipped in; they both had thick lobes to their ears, and necks even broader than the straight broad backs of their heads. He was a good deal impressed. Dotted here and there he noticed a woman, or a parson. There was practically no conversation, from which he surmised that no one knew his neighbour. He had a feeling that a dog somewhere would have humanised the occasion. He was musing on the colour scheme of green picked out with chocolate and chased with gold, when the door behind the platform was thrown open, and seven men in black coats filed in, and with little bows took their seats behind the quills. They reminded him of people getting up on horses, or about to play the piano — full of small adjustments. That — on the Chairman’s right — would be old Fontenoy, with a face entirely composed of features. Michael had an odd conceit: a little thing in a white top-hat sat inside the brain, driving the features eight-inhand. Then came a face straight from a picture of Her Majesty’s Government in 1850, round and pink, with a high nose, a small mouth, and little white whiskers; while at the end on the right was a countenance whose jaw and eyes seemed boring into a conundrum beyond the wall at Michael’s back. ‘Legal!’ he thought. His scrutiny passed back to the Chairman. Chosen? Was he — or was he not? A bearded man, a little behind on the Chairman’s left, was already reading from a book, in a rapid monotonous voice. That must be the secretary letting off his minute guns. And in front of him was clearly the new manager, on whose left Michael observed his own father. The dark pothooks over Sir Lawrence’s right eye were slightly raised, and his mouth was puckered under the cut line of his small moustache. He looked almost Oriental, quick but still. His left hand held his tortoiseshell-rimmed monocle between thumb and finger. ‘Not quite in the scene!’ thought Michael; ‘poor old Bart!’ He had come now to the last of the row. ‘Old Forsyte’ was sitting precisely as if alone in the world; with one corner of his mouth just drawn down, and one nostril just drawn up, he seemed to Michael quite fascinatingly detached; and yet not out of the picture. Within that still neat figure, whereof only one patent-leather boot seemed with a slight movement to be living, was intense concentration, entire respect for the proceedings, and yet, a queer contempt for them; he was like a statue of reality, by one who had seen that there was precious little reality in it. ‘He chills my soup,’ thought Michael, ‘but — dash it! — I can’t help half admiring him!’

The Chairman had now risen. ‘He IS’— thought Michael; ‘no, he isn’t — yes — no — I can’t tell!’ He could hardly attend to what the Chairman said, for wondering whether he was chosen or not, though well aware that it did not matter at all. The Chairman kept steadily on. Distracted, Michael caught words and words: “European situation — misguided policy — French — totally unexpected — position disclosed — manager — unfortunate circumstances shortly to be explained to you — future of this great concern — no reason to doubt —”

‘Oil,’ thought Michael, ‘he is — and yet —!’

“I will now ask one of your directors, Mr. Forsyte, to give you at first hand an account of this painful matter.”

Michael saw Soames, pale and deliberate, take a piece of paper from his breast-pocket, and rise. Was it to the occasion?

“I will give you the facts shortly,” he said in a voice which reminded Michael of a dry, made-up wine. “On the eleventh of January last I was visited by a clerk in the employ of the Society —”

Familiar with these details, Michael paid them little attention, watching the shareholders for signs of reaction. He saw none, and it was suddenly borne in on him why they wore moustaches: They could not trust their mouths! Character was in the mouth. Moustaches had come in when people no longer went about, like the old Duke, saying: “Think what you damned well like of my character!” Mouths had tried to come in again, of course, before the war; but what with majors, shareholders, and the working classes, they now had little or no chance! He heard Soames say: “In these circumstances we came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to wait and see.” Michael saw a sudden quiver pass over the moustaches, as might wind over grass.

‘Wrong phrase,’ he thought; ‘we all do it, but we can’t bear being reminded of it.’

“Six weeks ago, however,” he heard Soames intone, “an accidental incident seems to have warned your late manager that Sir Lawrence and I still entertained suspicions, for I received a letter from him practically admitting that he had taken this secret commission on the German business, and asking me to inform the Board that he had gone abroad and left no property behind him. This statement we have been at pains to verify. In these circumstances we had no alternative but to call you together, and lay the facts before you.”

The voice, which had not varied an iota, ceased its recital; and Michael saw his father-inlaw return to his detachment — stork on one leg, about to apply beak to parasite, could have inspired no greater sense of loneliness. ‘Too like the first account of the battle of Jutland!’ he thought: ‘He mentioned all the losses, and never once struck the human note.’

A pause ensued, such as occurs before an awkward fence, till somebody has found a gate. Michael rapidly reviewed the faces of the Board. Only one showed any animation. It was concealed in a handkerchief. The sound of the blown nose broke the spell. Two shareholders rose to their feet at once — one of them Michael’s neighbour on the right.

“Mr. Sawdry,” said the Chairman, and the other shareholder sat down.

With a sonorous clearing of the throat, Michael’s neighbour turned his blunt red face towards Soames.

“I wish to ask you, sir, why you didn’t inform the Board when you first ‘eard of this?”

Soames rose slightly.

“You are aware, I presume, that such an accusation, unless it can be fully substantiated, is a matter for criminal proceedings?”

“No; it would ha’ been privileged.”

“As between members of the Board, perhaps; but any leakage would have rendered us liable. It was a mere case of word against word.”

“Perhaps Sir Lawrence Mont will give us ‘is view of that?”

Michael’s heart began to beat. There was an air of sprightliness about his father’s standing figure.

“You must remember, sir,” he said, “that Mr. Elderson had enjoyed our complete confidence for many years; he was a gentleman, and, speaking for myself, an old schoolfellow of his, I preferred, in common loyalty, to give his word preference, while — er — keeping the matter in mind.”

“Oh!” said Michael’s neighbour: “What’s the Chairman got to say about bein’ kept in the dark?”

“We are all perfectly satisfied, sir, with the attitude of our co-directors, in a very delicate situation. You will kindly note that the mischief was already done over this unfortunate assurance, so that there was no need for undue haste.”

Michael saw his neighbour’s neck grow redder.

“I don’t agree,” he said. “‘Wait and see’— We might have ‘ad that commission out of him, if he’d been tackled promptly.” And he sat down.

He had not reached mahogany before the thwarted shareholder had started up.

“Mr. Botterill,” said the Chairman.

Michael saw a lean and narrow head, with two hollows in a hairy neck, above a back slightly bent forward, as of a doctor listening to a chest.

“I take it from you, then, sir,” he said, “that these two directors represent the general attitude of the Board, and that the Board were content to allow a suspected person to remain manager. The gentleman on your extreme left — Mr. Forsyte, I think — spoke of an accidental incident. But for that, apparently, we should still be in the hands of an unscrupulous individual. The symptoms in this case are very disquieting. There appears to have been gross over-confidence; a recent instance of the sort must be in all our minds. The policy of assuring foreign business was evidently initiated by the manager for his own ends. We have made a severe loss by it. And the question for us shareholders would seem to be whether a Board who placed confidence in such a person, and continued it after their suspicions were aroused, are the right people to direct this important concern.”

Throughout this speech Michael had grown very hot. ‘“Old Forsyte” was right,’ he thought; ‘they’re on their uppers after all.’

There was a sudden creak from his neighbour on the left.

“Mr. Tolby,” said the Chairman.

"It's a seerious matter, this, gentlemen. I propose that the Board withdraw, an' leave us to discuss it."

"I second that," said Michael's neighbour on the right.

Searching the vista of the Board, Michael saw recognition gleam for a second in the lonely face at the end, and grinned a greeting.

The Chairman was speaking.

"If that is your wish, gentlemen, we shall be happy to comply with it. Will those who favour the motion hold up their hands?"

All hands were held up, with the exception of Michael's, of two women whose eager colloquy had not permitted them to hear the request, and of one shareholder, just in front of Michael, so motionless that he seemed to be dead.

"Carried," said the Chairman, and rose from his seat.

Michael saw his father smiling, and speaking to 'Old Forsyte' as they both stood up. They all filed out, and the door was closed.

'Whatever happens,' Michael thought, 'I've got to keep my head shut, or I shall be dropping a brick.'

"Perhaps the Press will kindly withdraw, too," he heard some one say.

With a general chinny movement, as if enquiring their rights of no one in particular, the four Pressmen could be seen to clasp their notebooks. When their pale reluctance had vanished, there was a stir among the shareholders, like that of ducks when a dog comes up behind. Michael saw why, at once. They had their backs to each other. A shareholder said:

"Perhaps Mr. Tolby, who proposed the withdrawal, will act as Chairman."

Michael's left-hand neighbour began breathing heavily.

"Right-o!" he said. "Any one who wants to speak, kindly ketch my eye."

Everyone now began talking to his neighbour, as though to get at once a quiet sense of proportion, before speaking. Mr. Tolby was breathing so heavily that Michael felt a positive draught.

"'Ere, gentlemen," he said suddenly, "this won't do! We don't want to be too formal, but we must preserve some order. I'll open the discussion myself. Now, I didn't want to 'urt the feelin's of the Board by plain speakin' in their presence. But, as Mr. What's-'is-name there, said: The public 'as got to protect itself against sharpers, and against slackness. We all know what 'appened the other day, and what'll 'appen again in other concerns, unless we shareholders look after ourselves. In the first place, then, what I say is: They ought never to 'ave touched anything to do with the 'Uns. In the second place, I say they showed bad judgment. And in the third place I say they were too thick together. In my opinion, we should propose a vote of no confidence."

Cries of: "Hear, hear!" mixed with indeterminate sounds, were broken sharply by a loud: "No!" from the shareholder who had seemed dead. Michael's heart went out to him, the more so as he still seemed dead. The negative was followed by the rising of a thin, polished-looking shareholder, with a small grey moustache.

"If you'll forgive my saying so, sir," he began, "your proposal seems to me very rough-and-ready justice. I should be interested to know how you would have handled such a situation if you had been on the Board. It is extremely easy to condemn other people!"

"Hear, hear!" said Michael, astonished at his own voice.

"It is all very well," the polished shareholder went on, "when any thing of this sort happens, to blame a directorate, but, speaking as a director myself, I should be glad to know whom one is to trust, if not one's manager. As to the policy of foreign insurance, it has been before us at two general meetings; and we have pocketed the profit from it for nearly two years. Have we raised a voice against it?"

The dead shareholder uttered a "No!" so loud that Michael almost patted his head.

The shareholder, whose neck and back were like a doctor's, rose to answer.

"I differ from the last speaker in his diagnosis of the case. Let us admit all he says, and look at the thing more widely. The proof of pudding is in the eating. When a Government makes a bad mistake of judgment, the electorate turns against it as soon as it feels the effects. This is a very sound check on administration; it may be rough and ready, but it is the less of two evils. A Board backs its judgment; when it loses, it should pay. I think, perhaps, Mr. Tolby, being our informal Chairman, was out of order in proposing a vote of no confidence; if that be so, I should be happy to do so, myself."

The dead shareholder's "No!" was so resounding this time that there was a pause for him to speak; he remained, however, without motion. Both of Michael's neighbours were on their feet. They bobbed at each other over Michael's head, and Mr. Tolby sat down.

"Mr. Sawdry," he said.

"Look 'ere, gentlemen," said Mr. Sawdry, "and ladies, this seems to me a case for compromise. The Directors that knew about the manager ought to go; but we might stop at that. The gentleman in front of me keeps on saying 'No.' Let 'im give us 'is views."

"No," said the dead shareholder, but less loudly.

"If a man can't give 'is views," went on Mr. Sawdry, nearly sitting down on Michael, "'c shouldn't interrupt, in my opinion."

A shareholder in the front row now turned completely round so that he faced the meeting.

"I think," he said, "that to prolong this discussion is to waste time; we are evidently in two, if not three, minds. The whole of the business of this country is now conducted on a system of delegated trust; it may be good, it may be bad — but there it is. You've got to trust somebody. Now, as to this particular case, we've had no reason to distrust the Board, so far; and, as I take it, the Board had no previous reason to distrust the late manager. I think it's going too far, at present, to propose anything definite like a vote of no confidence; it seems to me that we should call the Board in and hear what assurances they have to give us against a repetition of anything of the sort in the future."

The sounds which greeted this moderate speech were so inextricable that Michael could not get the sense of them. Not so with the speech which followed. It came from a shareholder on the right, with reddish hair, light eyelashes, a clipped moustache, and a scraped colour.

"I have no objection whatever to having the Board in," he said in a rather jeering voice, "and passing a vote of no confidence in their presence. There is a question, which no one has touched on, of how far, if we turn them out, we could make them liable for this loss. The matter is not clear, but there is a good sporting chance, if we like to take it. Whereas, if we don't turn them out, it's obvious we can't take it, even if we wish."

The impression made by this speech was of quite a different order from any of the others. It was followed by a hush, as though something important had been said at last. Michael stared at Mr. Tolby. The stout man's round, light, rather prominent eye was extraordinarily reflective. 'Trout must look like that,' thought Michael, 'when they see a mayfly.' Mr. Tolby suddenly stood up.

"All right," he said, "'ave 'em in!"

"Yes," said the dead shareholder. There was no dissent. Michael saw some one rise and ascend the platform.

"Let the Press know!" said Mr. Tolby.

❦

Chapter XIII

Soames at Bay

When the door had closed behind the departing directors, Soames sought a window as far as possible from the lunch eaten before the meeting.

"Funeral baked meats, eh, Forsyte?" said a voice in his ear. "Our number's up, I think. Poor old Mothergill's looking very blue. I think he ought to ask for a second shirt!"

Soames' tenacity began wriggling within him.

"The thing wants tackling," he grumbled; "the Chairman's not the man for the job!" Shades of old Uncle Jolyon! He would have made short work of this! It wanted a masterful hand.

"Warning to us all, Forsyte, against loyalty! It's not in the period. Ah! Fontenoy!"

Soames became conscious of features rather above the level of his own.

"Well, Mr. Forsyte, hope you're satisfied? A pretty damned mess! If I'd been the Chairman, I'd never have withdrawn. Always keep hounds under your eye, Mont. Take it off, and they'll go for you! Wish I could get among 'em with a whip; I'd give it those two heavy pug-faced chaps — they mean business! Unless you've got something up your sleeve, Mr. Forsyte, we're dished."

"What should I have up my sleeve?" said Soames coldly.

"Damn it, sir, you put the chestnuts in the fire; it's up to you to pull 'em out. I can't afford to lose these fees!"

Soames heard Sir Lawrence murmur: "Crude, my dear Fontenoy!" and said with malice:

"You may lose more than your fees!"

"Can't! They may have Eaglescourt tomorrow, and take a loss off my hands." A gleam of feeling burned up suddenly in the old eyes: "The country drives you to the wall, skins you to the bone, and expects you to give 'em public service gratis. Can't be done, Mont — can't be done!"

Soames turned away; he had an utter disinclination for talk, like one standing before an open grave, watching a coffin slowly lowered. Here was his infallibility going — going! He had no illusions. It would all be in the papers, and his reputation for sound judgment gone for ever! Bitter! No more would the Forsytes say: "Soames says —" No more would old Gradman follow him with eyes like an old dog's, grudging sometimes, but ever submitting to infallibility. It would be a nasty jar for the old fellow. His business acquaintances — after all, they were not many, now! — would no longer stare with envious respect. He wondered if the reverberations would reach Dumetrius, and the picture market! The sole comfort was: Fleur needn't know. Fleur! Ah! If only her business were safely over! For a moment his mind became empty of all else. Then with a rush the present filled it up again. Why were they all talking as if there were a corpse in the room? Well! There was — the corpse of his infallibility! As for monetary loss — that seemed secondary, remote, incredible — like a future life. Mont had said something about loyalty. He didn't know what loyalty had to do with it! But if they thought he was going to show any white feather, they were extremely mistaken. Acid courage welled up into his brain. Shareholders, directors — they might howl and shake their fists; he was not going to be dictated to. He heard a voice say:

"Will you come in, please, gentlemen?"

Taking his seat again before his unused quill, he noticed the silence — shareholders waiting for directors, directors for shareholders. "Wish I could get among 'em with a whip!" Extravagant words of that 'old guinea-pig's,' but expressive, somehow!

At last the Chairman, whose voice always reminded Soames of a raw salad with oil poured over it, said ironically:

"Well, gentlemen, we await your pleasure."

That stout, red-faced fellow, next to Michael, stood up, opening his pug's mouth.

"To put it shortly, Mr. Chairman, we're not at all satisfied; but before we take any resolution, we want to 'ear what you've got to say."

Just below Soames, some one jumped up and added: "We'd like to know, sir, what assurances you can offer us against anything of this sort in the future."

Soames saw the Chairman smile — no real backbone in that fellow!

"In the nature of things, sir," he said, "none whatever! You can hardly suppose that if we had known our manager was not worthy of our confidence, we should have continued him in the post for a moment!"

Soames thought: 'That won't do — he's gone back on himself!' Yes, and that other pug-faced chap had seen it!

"That's just the point, sir," he was saying: "Two of you DID know, and yet, there the fellow was for months afterwards, playin' 'is own 'and, cheatin' the Society for all he was worth, I shouldn't wonder."

One after another, they were yelping now:

"What about your own words?"

"You admitted collective responsibility."

"You said you were perfectly satisfied with the attitude of your co-directors in the matter." Regular pack!

Soames saw the Chairman incline his head as if he wanted to shake it; old Fontenoy muttering, old Mothergill blowing his nose, Meyricke shrugging his sharp shoulders. Suddenly he was cut off from view of them — Sir Lawrence was standing up between.

"Allow me a word! Speaking for myself, I find it impossible to accept the generous attempt of the Chairman to shoulder a responsibility which clearly rests on me. If I made a mistake of judgment in not disclosing our suspicions, I must pay the penalty; and I think it will clear the — er — situation if I tender my resignation to the meeting."

Soames saw him give a little bow, place his monocle in his eye, and sit down.

A murmur greeted the words — approval, surprise, deprecation, admiration? It had been gallantly done. Soames distrusted gallantry — there was always a dash of the peacock about it. He felt curiously savage.

"I, apparently," he said, rising, "am the other incriminated director. Very good! I am not conscious of having done anything but my duty from beginning to end of this affair. I am confident that I made no mistake of judgment. And I consider it entirely unjust that I should be penalised. I have had worry and anxiety enough, without being made a scapegoat by shareholders who accepted this policy without a murmur, before ever I came on the Board, and are now angry because they have lost by it. You owe it to me that the policy has been dropped: You owe it to me that you have no longer a fraudulent person for a manager. And you owe it to me that you were called together today to pass judgment on the matter. I have no intention whatever of singing small. But there is another aspect to this affair. I am not prepared to go on giving my services to people who don't value them. I have no patience with the attitude displayed this afternoon. If any one here thinks he has a grievance against me, let him bring an action. I shall be happy to carry it to the House of Lords, if necessary. I have been familiar with the City all my life, and I have not been in the habit of meeting with suspicions and ingratitude. If this is an instance of present manners, I have been familiar with the City long enough. I do not tender my resignation to the meeting; I resign."

Bowing to the Chairman, and pushing back his chair, he walked doggedly to the door, opened it and passed through.

He sought his hat. He had not the slightest doubt but that he had astonished their weak nerves! Those pug-faced fellows had their mouths open! He would have liked to see what he had left behind, but it was hardly consistent with dignity to open the door again. He took a sandwich instead, and began to eat it with his back to the door and his hat on. He felt better than he had for months. A voice said:

"'And the subsequent proceedings interested him no more!' I'd no idea, Forsyte, you were such an orator! You gave it 'em between the eyes! Never saw a meeting so knocked out! Well, you've saved the Board by focussing their resentment entirely on yourself. It was very gallant, Forsyte!"

Soames growled through his sandwich:

"Nothing of the sort! Are you out, too?"

"Yes. I pressed my resignation. That red-faced fellow was proposing a vote of confidence in the Board when I left — and they'll pass it, Forsyte — they'll pass it! Something was said about financial liability, by the way!"

"Was there?" said Soames, with a grim smile: "That cock won't fight. Their only chance was to claim against the Board for initiating foreign assurance ultra vires; if they're re-affirming the Board, after the question's been raised in open meeting, they're dished. Nothing'll lie against you and me, for not disclosing our suspicions — that's certain."

“A relief, I confess,” said Sir Lawrence, with a sigh. “It was the speech of your life, Forsyte!”

Perfectly well aware of that, Soames shook his head. Apart from the horror of seeing himself in print, he was beginning to feel that he had been extravagant. It was always a mistake to lose your temper! A bitter little smile came on his lips. Nobody, not even Mont, would see how unjustly he had been treated.

“Well,” he said, “I shall go.”

“I think I shall wait, Forsyte, and hear the upshot.”

“Upshot? They’ll appoint two other fools, and slaver over each other. Shareholders! Good-bye!” He moved to the door.

Passing the Bank of England, he had a feeling of walking away from his own life. His acumen, his judgment, his manner of dealing with affairs — aspersed! They didn’t like it; well — he would leave it! Catch him meddling, in future! It was all of a piece with the modern state of things. Hand to mouth, and the steady men pushed to the wall! The men to whom a pound was a pound, and not a mess of chance and paper. The men who knew that the good of the country was the strict, straight conduct of their own affairs. They were not wanted. One by one, they would get the go-by — as he had got it — in favour of Jack-o’-lanterns, revolutionaries, restless chaps, or clever, unscrupulous fellows, like Elderson. It was in the air. No amount of eating your cake and wanting to have it could take the place of common honesty.

He turned into the Poultry before he knew why he had come there. Well, he might as well tell Gradman at once that he must exercise his own judgment in the future. At the mouth of the backwater he paused for a second, as if to print its buffness on his brain. He would resign his trusts, private and all! He had no notion of being sneered at in the family. But a sudden wave of remembrance almost washed his heart into his boots. What a tale of trust deeds executed, leases renewed, houses sold, investments decided on — in that back room up there; what a mint of quiet satisfaction in estates well managed! Ah! well! He would continue to manage his own. As for the others, they must look out for themselves, now. And a precious time they’d have of it, in face of the spirit there was about!

He mounted the stone steps slowly.

In the repository of Forsyte affairs, he was faced by the unusual — not Gradman, but, on the large ripe table, a large ripe melon alongside a straw bag. Soames sniffed. The thing smelled delicious. He held it to the light. Its greeny yellow tinge, its network of threads — quite Chinese! Was old Gradman going to throw its rind about, like that white monkey?

He was still holding it when a voice said:

“Aoh! I wasn’t expecting you today, Mr. Soames. I was going early; my wife’s got a little party.”

“So I see!” said Soames, restoring the melon to the table. “There’s nothing for you to do at the moment, but I came in to tell you to draw my resignations from the Forsyte trusts.”

The old chap’s face was such a study that he could not help a smile.

“You can keep me in Timothy’s; but the rest must go. Young Roger can attend to them. He’s got nothing to do.”

A gruff and deprecating: “Dear me! They won’t like it!” irritated Soames.

“Then they must lump it! I want a rest.”

He did not mean to enter into the reason — Gradman could read it for himself in the Financial News, or whatever he took in.

“Then I shan’t be seeing you so often, Mr. Soames; there’s never anything in Mr. Timothy’s. Dear me! I’m quite upset. Won’t you keep your sister’s?”

Soames looked at the old fellow, and compunction stirred within him — as ever, at any sign that he was appreciated.

“Well,” he said, “keep me in hers; I shall be in about my own affairs, of course. Good afternoon, Gradman. That’s a fine melon.”

He waited for no more words. The old chap! HE couldn’t last much longer, anyway, sturdy as he looked! Well, they would find it hard to match him!

On reaching the Poultry, he decided to go to Green Street and see Winifred — queerly and suddenly homesick for the proximity of Park Lane, for the old secure days, the efflorescent privacy of his youth under the wings of James and Emily. Winifred alone represented for him now, the past; her solid nature never varied, however much she kept up with the fashions.

He found her, a little youthful in costume, drinking China tea, which she did not like — but what could one do, other teas were ‘common!’ She had taken to a parrot. Parrots were coming in again. The bird made a dreadful noise. Whether under its influence or that of the China tea — which, made in the English way, of a brand the Chinese grew for foreign stomachs, always upset him — he was soon telling her the whole story.

When he had finished, Winifred said comfortably:

“Well, Soames, I think you did splendidly; it serves them right!”

Conscious that his narrative must have presented the truth as it would not appear to the public, Soames muttered:

“That’s all very well; you’ll find a very different version in the financial papers.”

“Oh! but nobody reads them. I shouldn’t worry. Do you do Coue? Such a comfortable little man, Soames; I went to hear him. It’s rather a bore sometimes, but it’s quite the latest thing.”

Soames became inaudible — he never confessed a weakness.

“And how,” asked Winifred, “is Fleur’s little affair?”

“‘Little affair!’” echoed a voice above his head. That bird! It was clinging to the brocade curtains, moving its neck up and down.

“Polly!” said Winifred: “don’t be naughty!”

“Soames!” said the bird.

“I’ve taught him that. Isn’t he rather sweet?”

“No,” said Soames. “I should shut him up; he’ll spoil your curtains.”

The vexation of the afternoon had revived within him suddenly. What was life, but parrotry? What did people see of the real truth? They just repeated each other, like a lot of shareholders, or got their precious sentiments out of The Daily Liar. For one person who took a line, a hundred followed on, like sheep!

“You’ll stay and dine, dear boy!” said Winifred.

Yes! he would dine. Had she a melon, by any chance? He’d no inclination to go and sit opposite his wife at South Square. Ten to one Fleur would not be down. And as to young Michael — the fellow had been there that afternoon and witnessed the whole thing; he’d no wish to go over it again.

He was washing his hands for dinner, when a maid, outside, said:

“You’re wanted on the ‘phone, sir.”

Michael’s voice came over the wire, strained and husky:

“That you, sir?”

“Yes. What is it?”

“Fleur. It began this afternoon at three. I’ve been trying to reach you.”

“What?” cried Soames. “How? Quick!”

“They say it’s all normal. But it’s so awful. They say quite soon, now.” The voice broke off.

“My God!” said Soames. “My hat!”

By the front door the maid was asking: “Shall you be back to dinner, sir?”

“Dinner!” muttered Soames, and was gone.

He hurried along, almost running, his eyes searching for a cab. None to be had, of course! None to be had! Opposite the ‘Iseeum’ Club he got one, open in the fine weather after last night’s storm. That storm! He might have known. Ten days before her time. Why on earth hadn’t he gone straight back, or at least telephoned where he would be? All that he had been through that afternoon was gone like smoke. Poor child! Poor little thing! And what about twilight sleep? Why hadn’t he been there? He might have — nature! Damn it! Nature — as if it couldn’t leave even her alone!

“Get on!” he said, leaning out: “Double fare!”

Past the Connoisseurs, and the Palace, and Whitehall; past all preserves whence nature was excluded, deep in the waters of primitive emotion Soames sat, grey, breathless. Past Big Ben — eight o’clock! Five hours! Five hours of it!

“Let it be over!” he muttered aloud: “Let it be over, God!”

Chapter XIV

On the Rack

When his father-inlaw bowed to the Chairman and withdrew, Michael had restrained a strong desire to shout: "Bravo!" Who'd have thought the 'old man' could let fly like that? He had 'got their goats' with a vengeance. Quite an interval of fine mixed vociferation followed, before his neighbour, Mr. Sawdry, made himself heard at last.

"Now that the director implicated has resigned, I shall 'ave pleasure in proposing a vote of confidence in the rest of the Board."

Michael saw his father rise, a little finicky and smiling, and bow to the Chairman. "I take my resignation as accepted also; if you permit me, I will join Mr. Forsyte in retirement."

Some one was saying:

"I shall be glad to second that vote of confidence."

And brushing past the knees of Mr. Sawdry, Michael sought the door. From there he could see that nearly every hand was raised in favour of the vote of confidence; and with the thought: 'Thrown to the shareholders!' he made his way out of the hotel. Delicacy prevented him from seeking out those two. They had saved their dignity; but the dogs had had the rest.

Hurrying west, he reflected on the rough ways of justice. The shareholders had a grievance, of course; and some one had to get it in the neck to satisfy their sense of equity. They had pitched on Old Forsyte, who, of all, was least to blame; for if Bart had only held his tongue, they would certainly have lumped him into the vote of confidence. All very natural and illogical; and four o'clock already!

'Counterfeits!' The old feeling for Wilfrid was strong in him this day of publication. One must do everything one could for his book — poor old son! There simply must not be a frost.

After calling in at two big booksellers, he made for his club, and closeted himself in the telephone booth. In old days they 'took cabs and went about.' Ringing-up was quicker — was it? With endless vexations, he tracked down Sibley, Nazing, Upshire, Master, and half-a-dozen others of the elect. He struck a considered note likely to move them. The book — he said — was bound to 'get the goat of the old guard and the duds generally'; it would want a bit of drum-beating from the cognoscenti. To each of them he appealed as the only one whose praise really mattered. "If you haven't reviewed the book, old chap, will you? It's you who count, of course." And to each he added: "I don't care two straws whether it sells, but I do want old Wilfrid to get his due." And he meant it. The publisher in Michael was dead during that hour in the telephone booth, the friend alive and kicking hard. He came out with sweat running down his forehead, quite exhausted; and it was half-past five.

'Cup of tea — and home!' he thought. He reached his door at six. Ting-a-ling, absolutely unimportant, was cowering in the far corner of the hall.

"What's the matter, old man?"

A sound from above, which made his blood run cold, answered — a long, low moaning.

"Oh, God!" he gasped, and ran upstairs.

Annette met him at the door. He was conscious of her speaking in French, of being called "mon cher," of the words "vers trois heures. . . . The doctor says one must not worry — all goes for the best." Again that moan, and the door shut in his face; she was gone. Michael remained standing on the rug with perfectly cold sweat oozing from him, and his nails dug deep into his palms.

'This is how one becomes a father!' he thought: 'This is how I became a son!' That moaning! He could not bear to stay there, and he could not bear to go away. It might be hours, yet! He kept repeating to himself: "One must not worry — must not worry!" How easily said! How meaningless! His brain, his heart, ranging for relief, lighted on the strangest relief which could possibly have come to him. Suppose this child being born, had not been his — had been — been Wilfrid's; how would he have been feeling, here, outside this door? It might — it might so easily have been — since nothing was sacred, now!

Nothing except — yes, just that which was dearer than oneself — just that which was in there, moaning. He could not bear it on the rug, and went downstairs. Across and across the copper floor, a cigar in his mouth, he strode in vague, rebellious agony. Why should birth be like this? And the answer was: It isn't — not in China! To have the creed that nothing mattered — and then run into it like this! Something born at such a cost, must matter, should matter. One must see to that! Speculation ceased in Michael's brain; he stood, listening terribly. Nothing! He could not bear it down there, and went up again. No sound at first, and then another moan! This time he fled into his study, and ranged round the room, looking at the cartoons of Aubrey Greene. He did not see a single one, and suddenly bethought him of 'Old Forsyte.' He ought to be told!

He rang up the 'Connoisseurs,' the 'Remove,' and his own father's clubs, in case they might have gone there together after the meeting. He drew blank everywhere. It was half-past seven. How much longer was this going on? He went back to the bedroom door; could hear nothing. Then down again to the hall. Ting-a-ling was lying by the front door, now. 'Fed-up!' thought Michael, stroking his back, and mechanically clearing the letter-box. Just one letter — Wilfrid's writing! He took it to the foot of the stairs and read it with half his brain, the other half wondering — wandering up there.

"DEAR MONT — I start tomorrow to try and cross Arabia. I thought you might like a line in case Arabia crosses me. I have recovered my senses. The air here is too clear for sentiment of any kind; and passion in exile soon becomes sickly. I am sorry I made you so much disturbance. It was a mistake for me to go back to England after the war, and hang about writing drivel for smart young women and inky folk to read. Poor old England — she's in for a bad time. Give her my love; the same to yourselves.

"Yours ever,

"WILFRID DESERT.

"P. S. — If you've published the things I left behind, send any royalties to me care of my governor. — W. D."

Half Michael's brain thought: 'Well, that's that! And the book coming out today!' Queer! Was Wilfrid right — was it all a blooming gaff — the inky stream? Was one just helping on England's sickness? Ought they all to get on camels and ride the sun down? And yet, in books were comfort and diversion; and they were wanted! England had to go on — go on! 'No retreat, no retreat, they must conquer or die who have no retreat!' . . . God! There it was again! Back he flew upstairs, with his ears covered and his eyes wild. The sounds ceased; Annette came out to him.

"Her father, mon cher; try to find her father!"

"I have — I can't!" gasped Michael.

"Try Green Street — Mrs. Dartie. Courage! All is normal — it will be quite sewn, now."

When he had rung up Green Street and been answered at last, he sat with the door of his study open, waiting for 'Old Forsyte' to come. Half his sight remarked a round hole burnt in his trouser leg — he hadn't even noticed the smell; hadn't even realised that he had been smoking. He must pull himself together for the 'old man.' He heard the bell ring, and ran down to open.

"Well?" said Soames.

"Not yet, sir. Come up to my study. It's nearer."

They went up side by side. That trim grey head, with the deep furrow between the eyes, and those eyes staring as if at pain behind them, steadied Michael. Poor old chap! He was 'for it,' too! They were both on 'their uppers!'

"Have a peg, sir? I've got brandy here."

"Yes," said Soames. "Anything."

With the brandies in their hands, half-raised, they listened — jerked their hands up, drank. They were automatic, like two doll figures worked by the same string.

"Cigarette, sir?" said Michael.

Soames nodded.

With the lighted cigarettes just not in their mouths, they listened, put them in, took them out, puffed smoke. Michael had his right arm tight across his chest. Soames his left. They formed a pattern, thus, side by side.

"Bad to stick, sir. Sorry!"

Soames nodded. His teeth were clenched. Suddenly his hand relaxed.

“Listen!” he said. Sounds — different — confused!

Michael’s hand seized something, gripped it hard; it was cold, thin — the hand of Soames. They sat thus, hand in hand, staring at the doorway, for how long neither knew.

Suddenly that doorway darkened; a figure in grey stood there — Annette!

“It is all r-right! A son!”

❦

CHAPTER XV

CALM

On waking from deep sleep next morning, Michael's first thought was: 'Fleur is back!' He then remembered.

To his: "O. K.?" whispered at her door, he received an emphatic nod from the nurse.

In the midst of excited expectation he retained enough modernity to think: 'No more blurb! Go and eat your breakfast quietly!'

In the dining-room Soames was despising the broken egg before him. He looked up as Michael entered, and buried his face in his cup. Michael understood perfectly; they had sat hand in hand! He saw, too, that the journal opened by his plate was of a financial nature.

"Anything about the meeting, sir? Your speech must read like one o'clock!"

With a queer little sound Soames held out the paper. The headlines ran: "Stormy meeting — resignation of two directors — a vote of confidence." Michael skimmed down till he came to:

"Mr. Forsyte, the director involved, in a speech of some length, said he had no intention of singing small. He deprecated the behaviour of the shareholders; he had not been accustomed to meet with suspicions. He tendered his resignation."

Michael dropped the sheet.

"By Jove!" he said —"'Involved — suspicions.' They've given it a turn, as though —!"

"The papers!" said Soames, and resumed his egg.

Michael sat down, and stripped the skin off a banana. '"Nothing became him like his death,"' he thought: 'Poor old boy!'

"Well, sir," he said, "I was there, and all I can say is: You and my father were the only two people who excited my respect."

"That!" said Soames, putting down his spoon.

Michael perceived that he wished to be alone, and swallowing the banana, went to his study. Waiting for his summons, he rang up his father.

"None the worse for yesterday, sir?"

Sir Lawrence's voice came clear and thin, rather high.

"Poorer and wiser. What's the bulletin?"

"Top-hole."

"Our love to both. Your mother wants to know if he has any hair?"

"Haven't seen him yet. I'm just going."

Annette, indeed, was beckoning him from the doorway.

"She wants you to bring the little dog, mon cher."

With Ting-a-ling under his arm, and treading on tiptoe, Michael entered. The eleventh baronet! He did not seem to amount to much, beneath her head bent over him. And surely her hair was darker! He walked up to the bed, and touched it reverently.

Fleur raised her head, and revealed the baby sucking vigorously at her little finger. "Isn't he a monkey?" said her faint voice.

Michael nodded. A monkey clearly — but whether white — that was the question!

"And you, sweetheart?"

"All right now, but it was —" She drew her breath in, and her eyes darkened: "Ting, look!"

The Chinese dog, with nostrils delicately moving, drew backward under Michael's arm. His whole demeanour displayed a knowing criticism. "Puppies," he seemed to say, "we do it in China. Judgment reserved!"

"What eyes!" said Michael: "We needn't tell HIM that this was brought from Chelsea by the doctor."

Fleur gave the tiniest laugh.

"Put him down, Michael."

Michael put him down, and he went to his corner.

"I mustn't talk," said Fleur, "but I want to, frightfully; as if I'd been dumb for months."

'Just as I felt,' thought Michael, 'she's been away, away somewhere, utterly away.'

"It was like being held down, Michael. Months of not being yourself."

Michael said softly: "Yes! the process IS behind the times! Has he got any hair? My mother wants to know."

Fleur revealed the head of the eleventh baronet, covered with dark down.

"Like my grandmother's; but it'll get lighter. His eyes are going to be grey. Oh! and, Michael, about godparents? Alison, of course — but men?"

Michael dwelled a little before answering:

"I had a letter from Wilfrid yesterday. Would you like him? He's still out there, but I could hold the sponge for him in church."

"Is he all right again?"

"He says so."

He could not read the expression of her eyes, but her lips were pouted slightly.

"Yes," she said: "and I think one's enough, don't you? Mine never gave me anything."

"One of mine gave me a bible, and the other gave me a wigging. Wilfrid, then." And he bent over her.

Her eyes seemed to make him a little ironic apology. He kissed her hair, and moved hurriedly away.

By the door Soames was standing, awaiting his turn.

"Just a minute only, sir," the nurse was saying.

Soames walked up to the bedside, and stood looking at his daughter.

"Dad, dear!" Michael heard her say.

Soames just touched her hand, nodded, as if implying approval of the baby, and came walking back, but, in a mirror, Michael saw his lips quivering.

On the ground floor once more, he had the most intense desire to sing. It would not do; and, entering the Chinese room, he stood staring out into the sunlit square. Gosh! It was good to be alive! Say what you liked, you couldn't beat it! They might turn their noses up at life, and look down them at it; they might bolster up the future and the past, but — give him the present!

'I'll have that white monkey up again!' he thought. 'I'll see the brute further before he shall depress me!'

He went out to a closet under the stairs, and, from beneath four pairs of curtains done up in moth-preserver and brown paper, took out the picture. He held it away from him in the dim light. The creature's eyes! It was all in those eyes!

"Never mind, old son!" he said: "Up you go!" And he carried it into the Chinese room.

Soames was there.

"I'm going to put him up again, sir."

Soames nodded.

"Would you hold him, while I hook the wire?"

Soames held the picture.

Returning to the copper floor, Michael said:

"All right, sir!" and stood back.

Soames joined him. Side by side they contemplated the white monkey.

"He won't be happy till he gets it," said Michael at last: "The only thing is, you see, he doesn't know what IT is."

A SILENT WOOING

The first of February, 1924, Jon Forsyte, convalescing from the ‘flu, was sitting in the lounge of an hotel at Camden, South Carolina, with his bright hair slowly rising on his scalp. He was reading about a lynching.

A voice behind him said:

“Will you join our picnic over at those old-time mounds today?”

Looking up, he saw a young acquaintance called Francis Wilmot, who came from further south.

“Very glad to. Who’s going?”

“Why, just Mr. and Mrs. Pulmore Hurrison, and that English novelist, Gurdon Minho, and the Blair girls and their friends, and my sister Anne and I. You could ride over horseback, if you want exercise.”

“All right; they’ve got some new horses in this morning from Columbia.”

“Why, that’s fine! My sister and I’ll ride horseback too, and some of the Blair girls. The Hurrisons can take the others.”

“I say,” said Jon, “this is a pretty bad case of lynching.”

The young man to whom he spoke leaned in the window. Jon admired his face, as of ivory, with dark hair and eyes, and narrow nose and lips, and his lissom attitude.

“All you Britishers go off the deep-end when you read of a lynching. You haven’t got the negro problem up where you are at Southern Pines. They don’t have it any to speak of in North Carolina.”

“No, and I don’t profess to understand it. But I can’t see why negroes shouldn’t be tried the same as white men. There may be cases where you’ve got to shoot at sight; but how can you defend mob law? Once you catch a man, he ought to be tried properly.”

“We’re not taking any chances with that particular kind of trouble.”

“But without trial, how can you tell he’s guilty?”

“Well, we’d sooner do without an innocent darkie now and again than risk our women.”

“But killing a man for a thing he hasn’t done is the limit.”

“Maybe, in Europe. But, here, things are in the large, still.”

“What do they think about lynching in the north?”

“They squeal a bit, but they’ve no call to. If we’ve got negroes, they’ve got the Reds, and they surely have a wholesale way with them.”

Jon Forsyte tilted back his rocking-chair, with a puzzled frown.

“I reckon there’s too much space left in this country,” said Francis Wilmot; “a man has all the chances to get off. So where we feel strong about a thing, we take the law into our own hands.”

“Well, every country to its own fashions. What are these mounds we’re going to?”

“Old Indian remains that go way back thousands of years, they say. You haven’t met my sister? She only came last night.”

“No. What time do we start?”

“Noon; it’s about an hour’s ride by the woods.”

At noon then, in riding kit, Jon came out to the five horses, for more than one of the Blair girls had elected to ride. He started between them, Francis Wilmot going ahead with his sister.

The Blair girls were young and pretty with a medium-coloured, short-faced, well-complexioned, American prettiness, of a type to which he had become accustomed during the two and a half years he had spent in the United States. They were at first extremely silent, and then extremely vocal. They rode astride, and very well. Jon learned that they, as well as the givers of the picnic, Mr. and Mrs. Pulmore Hurrison, inhabited Long Island. They asked him many questions about England, to which Jon, who had left it at the age of nineteen, invented many answers. He began to look longingly between his horse’s ears at Francis Wilmot and his sister, cantering ahead in a silence that, from a distance, seemed extremely restful. Their way led through pine woods — of trees spindly and sparse, and over a rather sandy soil; the sunlight was clear and warm, the air still crisp. Jon rode a single-footing bay horse, and felt as one feels on the first day of recovered health.

The Blair girls wished to know what he thought of the English novelist — they were dying to see a real highbrow. Jon had only read one of his books, and of the characters therein could only remember a cat. The Blair girls had read none; but they had heard that his cats were "just too cunning."

Francis Wilmot, reining up in front, pointed at a large mound which certainly seemed to be unnaturally formed. They all reined up, looked at it for two minutes in silence, remarked that it was "very interesting," and rode on. In a hollow the occupants of two cars were disembarking food. Jon led the horses away to tether them alongside the horses of Wilmot and his sister.

"My sister," said Francis Wilmot.

"Mr. Forsyte," said the sister.

She looked at Jon, and Jon looked at her. She was slim but distinctly firm, in a long dark-brown coat and breeches and boots; her hair was bobbed and dark under a soft brown felt hat. Her face was pale, rather browned, and had a sort of restrained eagerness — the brow broad and clear, the nose straight and slightly sudden, the mouth unreddened, rather wide and pretty. But what struck Jon were her eyes, which were exactly his idea of a water nymph's. They slanted a little, and were steady and brown and enticing; whether there was ever such a slight squint in them he could not tell, but if there were it was an improvement. He felt shy. Neither of them spoke.

Francis Wilmot reckoned that he was hungry, and they walked side by side towards the eatables.

Jon said suddenly to the sister:

"You've just come then, Miss Wilmot?"

"Yes, Mr. Forsyte."

"Where from?"

"From Naseby. It's way down between Charleston and Savannah."

"Oh, Charleston! I liked Charleston."

"Anne likes Savannah best," said Francis Wilmot.

Anne nodded. She was not talkative, it seemed, though her voice had sounded pleasant in small quantities.

"It's kind of lonely where we live," said Francis. "Mostly darkies. Anne's never seen an Englishman to speak to."

Anne smiled. Jon also smiled. Neither pursued the subject. They arrived at the eatables, spread in a manner calculated to give the maximum of muscular and digestive exertion. Mrs. Pulmore Hurrison, a lady of forty or so, and of defined features, was seated with her feet turned up; next to her, Gurdon Minho, the English novelist, had his legs in a more reserved position; and then came quantities of seated girls, all with pretty, unreserved legs; Mr. Pulmore Hurrison, somewhat apart, was pursing a small mouth over the cork of a large bottle. Jon and the Wilmots also sat down. The picnic had begun.

Jon soon realised that everybody was expecting Gurdon Minho to say something beyond "Yes" "Really!" "Ah!" "Quite!" This did not occur. The celebrated novelist was at first almost painfully attentive to what everybody else said, and then seemed to go into a coma. Jon felt a patriotic disappointment, for he himself was, if anything, even more silent. He could see that, among the three Blair girls and their two girl friends, a sort of conspiracy was brewing, to quiz the silent English in the privacy of the future. Francis Wilmot's speechless sister was a comfort to him, therefore, for he felt that she would neither be entitled nor inclined to join that conspiracy. He took refuge in handing victuals and was glad when the period of eating on constricted stomachs was over. Picnics were like Christmas Day, better in the future and the past than in the present. After the normal period of separation into genders, the baskets were repacked, and all resorted to their vehicles. The two cars departed for another mound said to be two miles off. Francis Wilmot and the two Blair girls believed that they would get back and watch the polo. Jon asked Anne Wilmot which she wished to do. She elected to see the other mound.

They mounted and pursued a track through the woods in silence, till Jon said:

"Do you like picnics?"

"I certainty do not."

"Nor do I. But riding?"

"I just adore it more than anything in the world."

"More than dancing?"

"Surely. Riding and swimming."

"Ah! I THOUGHT—" And he was silent.

"What did you think?"

"Well, I thought somehow you were a good swimmer."

"Why?"

Jon said with embarrassment:

"By your eyes —"

"What! Are they fishy?"

Jon laughed.

"Not exactly. They're like a water nymph's."

"I don't just know if that's a compliment."

"Of course it is."

"I thought nymphs weren't respectable."

"Oh! WATER nymphs — very! Shy, of course."

"Do you have many in England?"

"No. As a matter of fact I've never seen one before."

"Then how do you know?"

"Just a general sense of what's fitting."

"I suppose you had a classical education. Don't you all have that in England?"

"Far from it."

"And how do you like America, Mr. Forsyte?"

"Very much. I get homesick sometimes."

"I'd love to travel."

"You never have?"

She shook her head. "I just stay at home and look after things. But I reckon we'll have to sell the old home — cotton doesn't pay any more."

"I grow peaches near Southern Pines, you know, up in North Carolina; that's paying at present."

"D'you live there alone?"

"No; with my mother."

"Is she English?"

"Yes."

"Have you a father?"

"He died four years ago."

"Francis and I have been orphans ten years."

"I wish you'd both come and stay with us some day; my mother would be awfully glad."

"Is she like you?"

Jon laughed.

"No. She's beautiful."

The eyes regarded him gravely, the lips smiled faintly.

"I'd just love to come, but Francis and I can't ever be away together."

"But," said Jon, "you're both here."

"We go back tomorrow; I wanted to see Camden." The eyes resumed their steady consideration of Jon's face. "Won't you come back with us and see our home — it's old? Francis would like to have you come."

"Do you always know what your brother would like?"

"Surely."

"That must be jolly. But do you really mean you want me?"

"I certainly do."

"I'd enjoy it awfully; I hate hotels. I mean — well, you know —" But as HE didn't, he was not so sure that she did.

She touched her horse, and the single-footing animal broke into a canter.

Along the alleys of the eternal pinewood the sun was in their eyes; a warmed scent rose from pine needles, gum and herbs; the going was sandy and soft; the horses in good mood. Jon felt happy. This girl had strange eyes, enticing; and she rode better even than the Blair girls.

"I suppose all the English ride well?" she said.

"Most do, when they ride at all; but we don't ride much nowadays."

"I'd love to see England; our folk came from England in 1700 — Worcestershire. Where is that?"

"It's our middle west," said Jon. "But as unlike as ever you can imagine. It's a fruit-growing county — very pretty; white timbered houses, pastures, orchards, woods, green hills. I went there walking one holiday with a school friend."

"It sounds just lovely. Our ancestors were Roman Catholics. They had a place called Naseby; that's why we call ours Naseby. But my grandmother was French Creole, from Louisiana. Is it true that in England they think Creoles have negro blood in them?"

"We're very ignorant," said Jon. "*I* know the Creoles are the old French and Spanish families. You both look as if you had French blood."

"Francis does. Do you think we've passed that mound? We've come all of four miles, and I thought it was only two."

"Does it matter? The other mound was rather over-rated."

The lips smiled; she didn't ever quite laugh, it seemed.

"What Indians hereabouts?" asked Jon.

"I'm not too sure; Seminoles, if any, I think. But Francis says these mounds would be from way back before the present tribes. What made you come to America, Mr. Forsyte?"

Jon bit his lip. To give the reason — family feud — broken love affair — was not exactly possible.

"I went first to British Columbia; but I didn't get on too well. Then I heard of peaches in North Carolina."

"But why did you leave England?"

"I suppose I just wanted to see the world."

"Yes," she said. It was a quiet but comprehending sound; Jon was the more gratified, because she had not comprehended. The image of his first love did not often haunt him now — had not for a year or more. He had been so busy with his peaches. Besides, Holly had written that Fleur had a boy. He said suddenly: "I think we ought to turn. Look at the sun!" The sun, indeed, was well down behind the trees.

"My — yes!"

Jon turned his steed. "Let's gallop, it'll be down in half an hour; and there's no moon till late."

They galloped back along the track. The sun went down even faster than he had thought, the air grew cold, the light grey. Jon reined up suddenly.

"I'm awfully sorry; I don't believe we're on the track we came by from the picnic. I feel we've gone off to the right. The tracks are all alike and these horses only came in from Columbia yesterday; they don't know the country any more than we do."

The girl laughed.

"We'll be lost."

"M'm! That'll be no joke in these woods. Don't they ever end?"

"I reckon not, in these parts. It's an adventure."

"Yes; but you'll catch cold. It's jolly cold at night."

"And you've had 'flu!"

"Oh! That's all right. Here's a track to the left. Shall we go on, or shall we take it?"

"Take it."

They cantered on. It was too dark now for galloping, and soon too dark for cantering. And the track wound on and on.

"This is a pretty business," said Jon. "I am sorry." He peered towards her riding beside him, and could just see her smile.

"Why! It's lots of fun."

He was glad she thought so, but he could not see it.

"I HAVE been an ass. Your brother'll be pretty sick with me."

"He'll know I'm with you."

"If we only had a compass. We may be out all night at this rate. Here's another fork! Gosh, it is going to be dark."

And, almost as he spoke, the last of the light failed; he could barely see her five yards away.

He came up close alongside, and she touched his sleeve.

"Don't worry," she said; "that spoils it."

Shifting his reins, he gave her hand a squeeze.

"You're splendid, Miss Wilmot."

"Oh! do call me Anne. Surnames seem kind of chilly when you're lost."

"Thank you very much. My name's Jon. Without an h, you know — short for Jolyon."

"Jolyon — Jon; I like it."

"Well, Anne's always been my favourite name. Shall we stop till the moon rises, or ride on?"

"When will the moon rise?"

"Not for hours, judging from last night."

"Let's ride on and leave it to the horses."

"Right! Only if they make for anywhere I'm pretty sure it'll be towards Columbia, which must be miles and miles."

They pursued the narrow track at a foot's pace. It was really dark now. Jon said: "Are you cold? You'd be warmer walking. I'll go ahead; stick close enough to see me."

He went ahead, and soon dismounted, feeling cold himself; there was utter silence among unending trees.

"I'm cold now," said the voice of Anne. "I'll get off too."

They had trailed on perhaps half an hour like this, leading their horses, and almost feeling their way, when Jon said: "Look! There's some sort of a clearing here! And what's that blackness on the left?"

"It's a mound."

"Which mound, I wonder? The one we saw, or the other, or neither?"

"I reckon we'd better stop here till the moon rises, then maybe we'll see which it is, and know our way."

"You're right. There'll be swamps, I expect. I'll tether the horses to leeward, and we'll try to find a nook. It IS cold."

He tethered the horses out of the wind, and, turning back, found her beside him.

"It's creepy here," she said.

"We'll find a snug place, and sit down."

He put his hand through her arm, and they moved round the foot of the mound.

"Here," said Jon suddenly; "they've been digging. This'll be sheltered." He felt the ground — dry enough. "Let's squat here and talk."

Side by side, with their backs to the wall of the excavated hollow, they lighted cigarettes, and sat listening to the silence. But for a snuffle or soft stamp now and then from the horses, there was not a sound. Trees and wind, both, were too sparse for melody, and nothing but their two selves and their horses seemed alive. A sprinkle of stars in a very dark sky and the deeper blackness of the pine stems was all they could see. Ah! and the glowing tips of their cigarettes, and each other's faces thereby illumined, now and then.

"I don't expect you'll ever forgive me for this," said Jon, with gloom.

"Why! I'm just loving it."

"Very sweet of you to say so; but you must be awfully cold. Look here — have my coat!"

He had begun to take it off when she said: "If you do that I'll run out into the woods and get really lost."

Jon resumed his coat.

"It might have been one of those Blair girls," he said.

"Would you rather?"

"For your sake, of course. Not for my own — no, indeed!"

They were looking round at each other so that the tips of their cigarettes were almost touching. Just able to see her eyes, he had a very distinct impulse to put his arm round her. It seemed the natural and proper thing to do, but of course it was not "done"!

"Have some chocolate," she said.

Jon ate a very little. The chocolate should be reserved for her!

"This is a real adventure. It IS black. I'd have been scared alone — seems kind of spooky here."

"Spirits of the old Indians," muttered Jon. "Only I don't believe in spirits."

"You would if you'd had a coloured nanny."

"Did you have one?"

"Surely, with a voice as soft as mush melon. We have one old darkie still, who was a slave as a boy. He's the best of all the negroes round — nearly eighty, with quite white hair."

"Your father couldn't have been in the Civil War, could he?"

"No; my two grandfathers and my great-grandfather."

"And how old are you, Anne?"

"Nineteen."

"I'm twenty-three."

"Tell me about your home in England."

"I haven't one now." He began an expurgated edition of his youth, and it seemed to him that she listened beautifully. He asked for her story in return; and, while she was telling it, wondered whether he liked her voice or not. It dwelled and slurred, but was soft and had great flavour. When she had finished her simple tale, for she had hardly been away from home, there was silence, till Jon said:

"I'll go and see that the horses are all right; then perhaps you could get a snooze."

He moved round the foot of the mound till he came to the horses, and stayed a little talking to them and stroking their noses. A feeling, warm and protective, stirred within him. This was a nice child, and a brave one. A face to remember, with lots behind it. Suddenly he heard her voice, low and as if pretending not to call: "Jon, oh, Jon!" He felt his way back through the darkness. Her hands were stretched out.

"It IS so spooky! That funny rustling! I've got creeps down my back!"

"The wind's got up a bit. Let's sit back to back — it'll keep you warm. Or, look here, I'll sit against the bank; if you lean up against me you could go to sleep. It's only an hour or two now before we can ride on by moonlight."

They took up the suggested postures, her back against his side, and her head in the hollow of his arm and shoulder.

"Comfy?"

"Surely. It stops the creeps."

They smoked and talked a little more. The stars were brighter now, and their eyes more accustomed to the darkness. And they were grateful for each other's warmth. Jon enjoyed the scent, as of hay, that rose from her hair not far below his nose. Then came a long silence, while the warm protective feeling grew and grew within him. He would have liked to slip his arms round and hold her closer. But of course he did not. It was, however, as much as he could do to remain a piece of warmth impersonal enough for her to recline against. This was the very first time since he left England that he had felt an inclination to put his arms round anyone, so badly burnt had he been in that old affair. The wind rose, talked in the trees, died away again; the stillness was greater than ever. He was very wide awake, and it seemed curious to him that she should sleep, for, surely, she was asleep — so still. The stars twinkled, and he gazed up at them. His limbs began to ache and twitch, and suddenly he realised that she was no more asleep than he. She slowly turned her head till he could see her eyes, grave, enticing.

"I'm cramping you," she said, and raised herself; but his arm restored her.

"Not a bit; so long as you're warm and comfy."

Her head settled in again; and the vigil was resumed. They talked a little now, of nothing important, and he thought: 'It's queer — one could live months knowing people and not know them half so well as we shall know each other now.'

Again a long silence fell; but this time his arm was round her, it was more comfortable so, for both of them. And Jon began to have the feeling that it would be inadvisable for the moon to rise. Had she that feeling too? He wondered. But if she had, the moon in its courses paid no attention. For suddenly he became conscious that it was there, behind the trees somewhere lurking, a curious kind of stilly glimmer creeping about the air, along the ground, in and out of the tree-stems.

"The moon!" he said. She did not stir, and his heart beat rather fast. So! She did not want the moon to rise any more than he! And slowly the creeping glimmer became light, and, between the tree-stems, stole, invading their bodies till they were visible. And still they sat, unstirring, as if afraid to break a spell. The moon gained power and a cold glory, and rose above the trees; the world was alive once more. Jon thought, 'Could I kiss her?' and at once recoiled. As if she would want! But, as though she divined his thought, she turned her head, and her eyes looked into his.

"I'm in charge of you!" he did not exactly say.

Her answer was a little sigh, and she got up. They stood, gazing into the whitened mysterious wood.

"Look!" said Jon; "It IS the mound. There's the path down to the hollow where we had the picnic. Now we can find the way all right."

She made a sound that he could not interpret, and they went towards the horses, untethered them, and mounted. They set forth, riding side by side.

"This'll be something to remember," said Jon.

"Yes, I shall always remember it."

They said no more, except to consult about the way, but this was soon so clear, that they cantered till they came out on the polo ground close to the hotel.

"Go in and relieve your brother's mind. I'll take the horses round, and then come on."

When he entered the hotel lounge Francis Wilmot, still in riding clothes, was alone. His expression was peculiar, not exactly hostile, but certainly not friendly.

"Anne's gone up," he said, "I reckon you haven't much bump of locality. You surely had me scared."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Jon humbly, "I forgot the horses were new to the country."

"Well!" said Francis Wilmot, and shrugged his shoulders. Jon looked at the young man steadily.

"You don't think that I got bushed on purpose? Because you look as if you did."

Again Francis Wilmot shrugged his shoulders.

"Forgive me," said Jon, "but aren't you forgetting that your sister's a lady, and that one doesn't behave like a cad with a lady?"

Francis Wilmot did not answer; he went to a window and stood looking out. Jon felt very angry. He sat down on the arm of a long chair, suddenly extremely tired. He sat there looking at the ground, and frowning heavily. Damn the fellow! Had he been bullying Anne? If he had —! A voice behind him said: "I reckon I didn't mean it. I certainly am sorry. It was just the scare. Shake hands!"

Jon stretched out his own impulsively, and they shook hands, looking straight into each other's eyes.

"You must be about through," said Francis Wilmot. "Come on to my room; I've gotten a flask. I've given Anne a dram already."

They went up. Jon sat in the only chair, Francis Wilmot on the bed.

"Anne tells me she's asked you to come home with us tomorrow. I surely hope you will."

"I should simply love to."

"That's fine!"

They drank, talked a little, smoked.

"Good night," said Jon, suddenly, "or I shall go to sleep here."

They shook hands again, and Jon staggered to his room. He fell asleep at once.

They travelled next day, all three, through Columbia and Charleston, to the Wilmot's place. It stood in the bend of a red river, with cotton fields around, and swampy ground where live oaks grew, melancholy, festooned with Florida moss. The old slave quarters, disused except as kennels, were still standing; the two-storied house had flights of wooden steps running up on each side, on to the wide wisteria-covered porch, and needed a coat of paint; and, within, rooms ran one into the other, hung with old portraits of dead Wilmots and de Frevilles; and darkies wandered around and talked their soft drawled speech.

Jon was happier than he had been since he landed in the New World three and a half years ago. In the mornings he sauntered with the dogs in the sunlight or tried to write poetry — for the two young Wilmots were busy. After the midday meal he rode with them or with Anne alone. In the evening he learned from her to play the ukulele before a wood fire lighted at sundown, or heard about cotton culture from Francis, with whom, since that moment of animosity, he was on the best of terms.

Between Anne and himself there was little talk; they had, as it were, resumed the silence which had fallen when they sat in the dark under the old Indian mound. But he watched her; indeed, he was always trying to catch the grave enticing look in her dark eyes. More and more she seemed to him unlike any girl he had ever known; quicker, more silent, and with more "sand." The days went on, in warm sun, and the nightly scent of wood smoke; and his holiday drew to an end. He could play the ukulele now, and they sang to it — negro spirituals, songs from comic operas, and other immortal works. The last day came, and dismay descended on Jon. To-morrow, early, he was going back to his peaches at Southern Pines! That afternoon, riding with her for the last time, the silence was almost unnatural, and she did not even look at him. Jon went up to change, with panic in his heart. He knew now that he wanted to take her back with him, and he thought he knew that she did not want to come. How he would miss watching for those eyes to be fixed on him. He was thirsty with the wish to kiss her. He went down moodily, and sat in a long chair before the wood fire, pulling a spaniel's ears and watching the room darken. Perhaps she wouldn't even come for a last sing-song. Perhaps there would be nothing more but dinner and an evening a trois; not even a chance to say he loved her and be told that she didn't love him. And he thought, miserably: 'It's my fault — I'm a silent fool; I've missed my chance.' The room darkened till there was nothing but firelight, and the spaniel went to sleep. Jon, too, closed his eyes. It was as if he could wait better, thus — for the worst. When he opened them she was standing in front of him with the ukuleles in her hands.

"Do you want to play, Jon?"

"Yes," said Jon, "let's play. It's the last time"; and he took his ukulele.

She sat down on the rug before the fire, and began to tune hers. Jon slipped down beside the spaniel and began to tune his. The spaniel got up and went away.

"What shall we sing?"

"I don't want to sing, Anne. You sing; I'll just accompany."

She didn't look at him! She would not look at him! It was all up! What a fool he'd been!

Anne sang. She sang a crooning phrase — some Spanish air. Jon plucked his strings, and the tune plucked his heart. She sang it through. She sang it again, and her eyes slid round. God! She WAS looking at him. She mustn't see that he knew she was! It was too good — that long dark look over the ukulele. Between him and her were her ukulele and his own. He dropped the beastly thing. And, suddenly shifting along the floor, he put his arm round her. Without a word she drooped her head against his shoulder, as when they sat under the Indian mound. He bent his cheek down to her hair. It smelled, as it had then, of hay. And, just as she had screwed her face round in the moonlight, she turned it to him now. But this time Jon kissed her lips.

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THE SILVER SPOON

PART I

"But O, the thorns we stand upon!"
— Winter's Tale

CHAPTER I

A STRANGER

The young man, who, at the end of September, 1924, dismounted from a taxicab in South Square, Westminster, was so unobtrusively American that his driver had some hesitation in asking for double his fare. The young man had no hesitation in refusing it.

"Are you unable to read?" he said, softly. "Here's four shillings."

With that he turned his back and looked at the house before which he had descended. This, the first private English house he had ever proposed to enter, inspired him with a certain uneasiness, as of a man who expects to part with a family ghost. Comparing a letter with the number chased in pale brass on the door, he murmured: "It surely is," and rang the bell.

While waiting for the door to be opened, he was conscious of extreme quietude, broken by a clock chiming four as if with the voice of Time itself. When the last boom died, the door yawned inward, and a man, almost hairless, said:

"Yes, sir?"

The young man removed a soft hat from a dark head.

"This is Mrs. Michael Mont's house?"

"Correct, sir."

"Will you give her my card, and this letter?"

"'Mr. Francis Wilmot, Naseby, S. C.' Will you wait in here, sir?"

Ushered through the doorway of a room on the right, Francis Wilmot was conscious of a commotion close to the ground, and some teeth grazing the calf of his leg.

"Dandie!" said the voice of the hairless man, "you little devil! That dog is a proper little brute with strangers, sir. Stand still! I've known him bite clean through a lady's stockings."

Francis Wilmot saw with interest a silver-grey dog nine inches high and nearly as broad, looking up at him with lustrous eyes above teeth of extreme beauty.

"It's the baby, sir," said the hairless man, pointing to a sort of nest on the floor before the fireless hearth; "he WILL go for people when he's with the baby. But once he gets to smelling your trousers, he's all right. Better not touch the baby, though. Mrs. Mont was here a minute ago; I'll take your card up to her."

Francis Wilmot sat down on a settee in the middle of the room; and the dog lay between him and the baby.

And while the young man sat he gazed around him. The room was painted in panels of a sub-golden hue, with a silver-coloured ceiling. A clavichord, little golden ghost of a piano, stood at one end. Glass lustres, pictures of flowers and of a silvery-necked lady swinging a skirt and her golden slippers, adorned the walls. The curtains were of gold and silver. The silver-coloured carpet felt wonderfully soft beneath his feet, the furniture was of a golden wood.

The young man felt suddenly quite homesick. He was back in the living-room of an old "Colonial" house, in the bend of a lonely South Carolina river, reddish in hue. He was staring at the effigy of his high-collared, red-coated great-grandfather, Francis Wilmot, Royalist major in the War of Independence. They always said it was like the effigy he saw when shaving every morning; the smooth dark hair drooping across his right temple, the narrow nose and lips, the narrow dark hand on the sword-hilt or the razor, the slits of dark eyes gazing steadily out. Young Francis was seeing the darkies working in the cotton-fields under a sun that he did not seem to have seen since he came over here; he was walking with his setter along the swamp edge, where Florida moss festooned the tall dolorous trees; he was thinking of the Wilmot inheritance, ruined in the Civil War, still decayed yet precious, and whether to struggle on with it, or to sell it to the Yank who wanted a week-end run-to from his Charleston dock job, and would improve it out of recognition. It would be lonely there, now that Anne had married that young Britisher, Jon Forsyte, and gone away north, to Southern Pines. And he thought of his sister, thus lost to him, dark, pale, vivid, ‘full of sand.’ Yes! this room made him homesick, with its perfection, such as he had never beheld, where the only object out of keeping was that dog, lying on its side now, and so thick through that all its little legs were in the air. Softly he said:

“It’s the prettiest room I ever was in.”

“What a perfectly charming thing to overhear!”

A young woman, with crinkly chestnut hair above a creamy face, with smiling lips, a short straight nose, and very white dark-lashed eyelids active over dark hazel eyes, stood near the door. She came towards him, and held out her hand.

Francis Wilmot bowed over it, and said, gravely:

“Mrs. Michael Mont?”

“So Jon’s married your sister. Is she pretty?”

“She is.”

“Very?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“I hope baby has been entertaining you.”

“He’s just great.”

“He is, rather. I hear Dandie bit you?”

“I reckon he didn’t break the cuticle.”

“Haven’t you looked? But he’s quite healthy. Sit down, and tell me all about your sister and Jon. Is it a marriage of true minds?”

Francis Wilmot sat down.

“It certainly is. Young Jon is a pretty white man, and Anne —”

He heard a sigh.

“I’m very glad. He says in his letter that he’s awfully happy. You must come and stay here. You can be as free as you like. Look on us as an hotel.”

The young man’s dark eyes smiled.

“That’s too good of you! I’ve never been on this side before. They got through the war too soon.”

Fleur took the baby out of its nest.

“THIS creature doesn’t bite. Look — two teeth, but they don’t antagonise — isn’t that how you put it?”

“What is its name?”

“Kit — for Christopher. We agreed about its name, luckily. Michael — my husband — will be in directly. He’s in Parliament, you know. They’re not sitting till Monday — Ireland, of course. We only came back for it from Italy yesterday. Italy’s so wonderful — you must see it.”

“Pardon me, but is that the Parliament clock that chimes so loud?”

“Big Ben — yes. He marks time for them. Michael says Parliament is the best drag on Progress ever invented. With our first Labour Government, it’s been specially interesting this year. Don’t you think it’s rather touching the way this dog watches my baby? He’s got the most terrific jaw!”

“What kind of dog is he?”

“A Dandie Dinmont. We did have a Peke. It was a terrible tragedy. He WOULD go after cats; and one day he struck a fighting Tom, and got clawed over both eyes — quite blinded — and so —”

The young man saw her eyes suddenly too bright. He made a soft noise, and said gently: “That was too bad.”

“I had to change this room completely. It used to be Chinese. It reminded me too much.”

“This little fellow would chaw any cat.”

"Luckily he was brought up with kittens. We got him for his legs — they're so bowed in front that he can hardly run, so he just suits the pram. Dan, show your legs!"

The Dandie looked up with a negative sound.

"He's a terrible little 'character.' Do tell me, what's Jon like now? Is he still English?"

The young man was conscious that she had uttered at last something really in her mind.

"He is; but he's a dandy fellow."

"And his mother? She used to be beautiful."

"And is to this day."

"She would be. Grey, I suppose, by now?"

"Yes. You don't like her?"

"Well, I hope she won't be jealous of your sister!"

"I think, perhaps, you're unjust."

"I think, perhaps, I am."

She sat very still, her face hard above the baby's. And the young man, aware of thoughts beyond his reach, got up.

"When you write to Jon," she said, suddenly, "tell him that I'm awfully glad, and that I wish him luck. I shan't write to him myself. May I call you Francis?"

Francis Wilmot bowed. "I shall be proud, ma'am."

"Yes; but you must call me Fleur. We're sort of related, you know."

The young man smiled, and touched the name with his lips.

"Fleur! It's a beautiful name!"

"Your room will be ready when you come back. You'll have a bathroom to yourself, of course."

He put his lips to the hand held out.

"It's wonderful," he said. "I was feeling kind of homesick; I miss the sun over here."

In going out, he looked back. Fleur had put her baby back in its nest, and was staring straight before her.

❦

CHAPTER II

CHANGE

But more than the death of a dog had caused the regarnishing of Fleur's Chinese room. On the evening of her twenty-second birth-day Michael had come home saying:

"Well, my child, I've chucked publishing. With old Danby always in the right — it isn't a career."

"Oh! Michael, you'll be bored to death."

"I'll go into Parliament. It's quite usual, and about the same screw."

He had spoken in jest. Six days later it became apparent that she had listened in earnest.

"You were absolutely right, Michael. It's the very thing for you. You've got ideas."

"Other people's."

"And the gift of the gab. We're frightfully handy for the House, here."

"It costs money, Fleur."

"Yes; I've spoken to father. It was rather funny — there's never been a Forsyte, you know, anywhere near Parliament. But he thinks it'll be good for me; and that it's all baronets are fit for."

"One has to have a Seat, unfortunately."

"Well, I've sounded your father, too. He'll speak to people. They want young men."

"Ah! And what are my politics?"

"My dear boy, you must know — at thirty."

"I'm not a Liberal. But am I Labour or Tory?"

"You can think it out before the next election!"

Next day, while he was shaving, and she was in her bath, he cut himself slightly and said:

"The land and this unemployment is what I really care about. I'm a Foggartist."

"What?"

"Old Sir James Foggart's book, that he published after all. You read it."

"No."

"Well, you said so."

"So did others."

"Never mind — his eyes are fixed on 1944, and his policy's according. Safety in the Air, the Land, and Child Emigration; adjustment of Supply and Demand within the Empire; cut our losses in Europe; and endure a worse Present for the sake of a better Future. Everything, in fact, that's unpopular, and said to be impossible."

"Well, you could keep all that to yourself till you get in. You'll have to stand as a Tory."

"How lovely you look!"

"If you get in, you can disagree with everybody. That'll give you a position from the start."

"Some scheme!" murmured Michael.

"You can initiate this — this Foggartism. He isn't mad, is he?"

"No, only too sane, which is much the same thing, of course. You see we've got a higher wage-scale than any other country except America and the Dominions; and it isn't coming down again; we really group in with the new countries. He's for growing as much of our food as we can, and pumping British town children, before they're spoiled, into the Colonies, till Colonial demand for goods equals our supply. It's no earthly, of course, without whole-hearted co-operation between the Governments within the Empire."

"It sounds very sensible."

"We published him, you know, but at his own expense. It's a 'faith and the mountain' stunt. He's got the faith all right, but the mountain shows no signs of moving up to now."

Fleur stood up. "Well," she said, "that's settled. Your father says he can get you a nomination as a Tory, and you can keep your own views to yourself. You'll get in on the human touch, Michael."

"Thank you, ducky. Can I help dry you?" . . .

Before redecorating her Chinese room, however, Fleur had waited till after Michael was comfortably seated for a division which professed to be interested in agriculture. She chose a blend between Adam and Louis Quinze. Michael called it the 'bimetallic parlour'; and carried off "The White Monkey" to his study. The creature's pessimism was not, he felt, suited to political life.

Fleur had initiated her 'salon' with a gathering in February. The soul of society had passed away since the Liberal debacle and Lady Alison's politico-legal coterie no longer counted. Plainer people were in the ascendant. Her Wednesday evenings were youthful, with age represented by her father-inlaw, two minor ambassadors, and Pevensey Blythe, editor of The Outpost. So unlike his literary style that he was usually mistaken for a Colonial Prime Minister, Blythe was a tall man with a beard, and grey bloodshot eyes, who expressed knowledge in paragraphs that few could really understand. "What Blythe thinks today, the Conservative Party will not think tomorrow," was said of him. He spoke in a small voice, and constantly used the impersonal pronoun.

"One is walking in one's sleep," he would say of the political situation, "and will wake up without any clothes on."

A warm supporter of Sir James Foggart's book, characterising it as "the masterpiece of a blind archangel," he had a passion for listening to the clavichord, and was invaluable in Fleur's 'salon.'

Freed from poetry and modern music, from Sibley Swan, Walter Nazing and Hugo Solstis, Fleur was finding time for her son — the eleventh baronet. He represented for her the reality of things. Michael might have posthumous theories, and Labour predatory hopes, but for her the year 1944 would see the eleventh baronet come of age. That Kit should inherit an England worth living in was of more intrinsic importance than anything they proposed in the Commons and were unable to perform. All those houses they were going to build, for instance — very proper, but a little unnecessary if Kit still had Lippinghall Manor and South Square, Westminster, to dwell in. Not that Fleur voiced such cynical convictions, or admitted them even to herself. She did orthodox lip-service to the great god Progress.

The Peace of the World, Hygiene, Trade, and the End of Unemployment, preoccupied all, irrespective of Party, and Fleur was in the fashion; but instinct, rather than Michael and Sir James Foggart, told her that the time-honoured motto: 'Eat your cake and have it,' which underlay the platforms of all Parties, was not 'too frightfully' sound. So long as Kit had cake, it was no good bothering too deeply about the rest; though, of course, one must seem to. Fluttering about her 'salon'— this to that person, and that to the other, and to all so pretty, she charmed by her grace, her common-sense, her pliancy. Not infrequently she attended at the House, and sat, not listening too much to the speeches, yet picking up, as it were, by a sort of seventh sense (if women in Society all had six, surely Fleur had seven) what was necessary to the conduct of that 'salon'— the rise and fall of the Governmental barometer, the catchwords and cliches of policy; and, more valuable, impressions of personality, of the residuary man within the Member. She watched Michael's career, with the fostering eye of a godmother who has given her godchild a blue morocco prayer-book, in the hope that some day he may remember its existence. Although a sedulous attendant at the House all through the Spring and summer, Michael had not yet opened his mouth, and so far she had approved of his silence, while nurturing his desire to know his own mind by listening to his wanderings in Foggartism. If it were indeed the only permanent cure for Unemployment, as he said, she too was a Foggartist; common-sense assuring her that the only real danger to Kit's future lay in that national malady. Eliminate Unemployment, and nobody would have time to make a fuss. But her criticisms were often pertinent:

"My dear boy, does a country ever sacrifice the present for the sake of the future?" or: "Do you really think country life is better than town life?" or: "Can you imagine sending Kit out of England at fourteen to some Godforsaken end of the world?" or: "Do you suppose the towns will have it?" And they roused Michael to such persistence and fluency that she felt he would really catch on in time — like old Sir Giles Snoreham, whom they would soon be making a peer, because he had always worn low-crowned hats and advocated a return to hansom cabs. Hats, buttonholes, an eyeglass — she turned over in her mind all such little realities as help a political career.

"Plain glass doesn't harm the sight; and it really has a focussing value, Michael."

"My child, it's never done my Dad a bit of good; I doubt, if it's sold three copies of any of his books. No! If I get on, it'll be by talking."

But still she encouraged him to keep his mouth shut.

"It's no good starting wrong, Michael. These Labour people aren't going to last out the year."

"Why not?"

"Their heads are swelling, and their tempers going. They're only on sufferance; people on sufferance have got to be pleasant or they won't be suffered. When they go out, the Tories will get in again and probably last. You'll have several years to be eccentric in, and by the time they're out again, you'll have your licence. Just go on working the human touch in your constituency; I'm sure it's a mistake to forget you've got constituents."

Michael spent most week-ends that summer working the human touch in mid-Bucks; and Fleur spent most week-ends with the eleventh baronet at her father's house near Mapledurham.

Since wiping the dust of the city off his feet, after that affair of Elderson and the P. P. R. S., Soames had become almost too countrified for a Forsyte. He had bought the meadows on the far side of the river and several Jersey cows. Not that he was going in for farming or nonsense of that sort, but it gave him an interest to punt himself over and see them milked. He had put up a good deal of glass, too, and was laying down melons. The English melon was superior to any other, and every year's connection with a French wife made him more and more inclined to eat what he grew himself. After Michael was returned for Parliament, Fleur had sent him Sir James Foggart's book, "The Parlous State of England." When it came, he said to Annette:

"I don't know what she thinks I want with this great thing!"

"To read it, Soames, I suppose."

Soames sniffed, turning the pages.

"I can't tell what it's all about."

"I will sell it at my bazaar, Soames. It will do for some good man who can read English."

From that moment Soames began almost unconsciously to read the book. He found it a peculiar affair, which gave most people some good hard knocks. He began to enjoy them, especially the chapter deprecating the workman's dislike of parting with his children at a reasonable age. Having never been outside Europe, he had a somewhat sketchy idea of places like South Africa, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand; but this old fellow Foggart, it appeared, had been there, and knew what he was talking about. What he said about their development seemed quite sensible. Children who went out there put on weight at once, and became owners of property at an age when in England they were still delivering parcels, popping in and out of jobs, hanging about street corners, and qualifying for unemployment and Communism. Get them out of England! There was a startling attraction in the idea for one who was English to a degree. He was in favour, too, of what was said about growing food and making England safe in the air. And then, slowly, he turned against it. The fellow was too much of a Jeremiah altogether. He complained to Fleur that the book dealt with nothing but birds in the bush; it was unpractical. What did 'Old Mont' say?

"He won't read it; he says he knows old Foggart."

"H'm!" said Soames, "I shouldn't be surprised if there were something in it, then." That little-headed baronet was old-fashioned! "Anyway it shows that Michael's given up those Labour fellows."

"Michael says Foggartism will be Labour's policy when they understand all it means."

"How's that?"

"He thinks it's going to do them much more good than anybody else. He says one or two of their leaders are beginning to smell it out, and that the rest of the leaders are bound to follow in time."

"In that case," said Soames, "it'll never go down with their rank and file." And for two minutes he sat in a sort of trance. Had he said something profound, or had he not?

Fleur's presence at week-ends with the eleventh baronet was extremely agreeable to him. Though at first he had felt a sort of disappointment that his grandchild was not a girl — an eleventh baronet belonged too definitely to the Monts — he began, as the months wore on, to find him 'an engaging little chap,' and in any case, to have him down at Mapledurham kept him away from Lippinghall. It tried him at times, of course, to see how the women hung about the baby — there was something very excessive about motherhood. He had noticed it with Annette; he noticed it now with Fleur. French —

perhaps! He had not remembered his own mother making such a fuss; indeed, he could not remember anything that happened when he was one. A week-end, when Madame Lamotte, Annette and Fleur were all hanging over his grandson, three generations of maternity concentrated on that pudgy morsel, reduced him to a punt, fishing for what he felt sure nobody would eat.

By the time he had finished Sir James Foggart's book, the disagreeable summer of 1924 was over, and a more disagreeable September had set in. The mellow golden days that glow up out of a haze which stars with dewdrops every cobweb on a gate, simply did not come. It rained, and the river was so unnaturally full, that the newspapers were at first unnaturally empty — there was literally no news of drought; they filled up again slowly with reports of the wettest summer 'for thirty years.' Calm, greenish with weed and tree shadow, the river flowed unendingly between Soames' damp lawn and his damp meadows. There were no mushrooms. Blackberries tasted of rain. Soames made a point of eating one every year, and, by the flavour, could tell what sort of year it had been. There was a good deal of 'old-man's-beard.' In spite of all this, however, he was more cheerful than he had been for ages. Labour had been 'in,' if not in real power, for months, and the heavens had only lowered. Forced by Labour-inoffice to take some notice of politics, he would utter prophecies at the breakfast-table. They varied somewhat, according to the news; and, since he always forgot those which did not come true, he was constantly able to tell Annette that he had told her so. She took no interest, however, occupied, like a woman, with her bazaars and jam-making, running about in the car, shopping in London, attending garden-parties; and, in spite of her tendency to put on flesh, still remarkably handsome. Jack Cardigan, his niece Imogen's husband, had made him a sixty-ninth-birthday present of a set of golf-clubs. This was more puzzling to Soames than anything that had ever happened to him. What on earth was he to do with them? Annette, with that French quickness which so often annoyed him, suggested that he should use them. She was uncomfortable! At his age —! And then, one week-end in May the fellow himself had come down with Imogen, and, teeing a ball up on half a molehill, had driven it across the river.

"I'll bet you a box of cigars, Uncle Soames, that you don't do that before we leave on Monday."

"I never bet," said Soames, "and I don't smoke."

"Time you began both. Look here, we'll spend tomorrow learning to knock the ball!'

"Absurd!" said Soames.

But in his room that night he had stood in his pyjamas swinging his arms in imitation of Jack Cardigan. The next day he sent the women out in the car with their lunch; he was not going to have them grinning at him. He had seldom spent more annoying hours than those which followed. They culminated in a moment when at last he hit the ball, and it fell into the river three yards from the near bank. He was so stiff next morning in arms and ribs, that Annette had to rub him till he said:

"Look out! you're taking the skin off!"

He had, however, become infected. After destroying some further portions of his lawn, he joined the nearest Golf Club, and began to go round by himself during the luncheon-hour, accompanied by a little boy. He kept at it with characteristic tenacity, till by July he had attained a certain proficiency; and he began to say to Annette that it would do her all the good in the world to take it up, and keep her weight down.

"Merci, Soames," she would reply; "I have no wish to be the figure of your English Misses, flat as a board before and behind." She was reactionary, 'like her nation'; and Soames, who at heart had a certain sympathy with curves, did not seriously press the point. He found that the exercise jogged both his liver and his temper. He began to have colour in his cheeks. The day after his first nine-hole round with Jack Cardigan, who had given him three strokes a hole and beaten him by nine holes, he received a package which, to his dismay, contained a box of cigars. What the fellow was about, he could not imagine! He only discovered when, one evening a few days later, sitting at the window of his picture gallery, he found that he had one in his mouth. Curiously enough, it did not make him sick. It produced rather something of the feeling he used to enjoy after 'doing Coue'— now comparatively out of fashion, since an American, so his sister Winifred said, had found a shorter cut. A suspicion, however, that the family had set Jack Cardigan on, prevented him from indulging his new sensation anywhere but in his picture gallery; so that cigars gathered the halo of a secret vice. He renewed his store stealthily. Only when he found that Annette, Fleur, and others had known for weeks, did he relax his rule, and say openly that the vice of the present day was cigarettes.

"My dear boy," said Winifred, when she next saw him, "everybody's saying you're a different man!"

Soames raised his eyebrows. He was not conscious of any change.

“That chap Cardigan,” he said, “is a funny fellow! . . . I’m going to dine and sleep at Fleur’s; they’re just back from Italy. The House sits on Monday.”

“Yes,” said Winifred; “very fussy of them — sitting in the Long Vacation.”

“Ireland!” said Soames, deeply. “A pretty pair of shoes again!” Always had been; always would be!

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CHAPTER III

MICHAEL TAKES 'A LUNAR'

Michael had returned from Italy with the longing to 'get on with it,' which results from Southern holidays. Countryman by upbringing, still deeply absorbed by the unemployment problem, and committed to Foggartism, as its remedy, he had taken up no other hobby in the House, and was eating the country's bread, if somewhat unbuttered, and doing nothing for it. He desired, therefore, to know where he stood, and how long he was going to stand there.

Bent on 'taking this lunar'— as 'Old Forsyte' would call it — at his own position, he walked away from the House that same day, after dealing with an accumulated correspondence. He walked towards Pevensey Blythe, in the office of that self-sufficing weekly: The Outpost. Sunburnt from his Italian holiday and thinned by Italian cookery, he moved briskly, and thought of many things. Passing down on to the Embankment, where a number of unemployed birds on a number of trees were also wondering, it seemed, where they stood and how long they were going to stand there, he took a letter from his pocket to read a second time.

"12 SAPPER'S ROW, "CAMDEN TOWN.

HONOURABLE SIR,

"Being young in 'Who's Who,' you will not be hard, I think, to those in suffering. I am an Austrian woman who married a German eleven years ago. He was an actor on the English stage, for his father and mother, who are no more living, brought him to England quite young. Interned he was, and his health broken up. He has the neurasthenie very bad so he cannot be trusted for any work. Before the war he was always in a part, and we had some good money; but this went partly when I was left with my child alone, and the rest was taken by the P. T., and we got very little back, neither of us being English. What we did get has all been to the doctor, and for our debts, and for burying our little child, which died happily, for though I loved it much this life which we have is not fit for a child to live. We live on my needle, and that is not earning much, a pound a week and sometimes nothing. The managers will not look at my husband all these years, because he shakes suddenly, so they think he drinks, but, Sir, he has not the money to buy it. We do not know where to turn, or what to do. So I thought, dear Sir, whether you could do anything for us with the P. T.; they have been quite sympatical; but they say they administrate an order and cannot do more. Or if you could get my husband some work where he will be in open air — the doctor say that is what he want. We have nowhere to go in Germany or in Austria, our well-loved families being no more alive. I think we are like many, but I cannot help asking you, Sir, because we want to keep living if we can, and now we are hardly having any food. Please to forgive me my writing, and to believe your very anxious and humble

"ANNA BERGFELD."

'God help them!' thought Michael, under a plane-tree close to Cleopatra's Needle, but without conviction. For in his view God was not so much interested in the fate of individual aliens as the Governor of the Bank of England in the fate of a pound of sugar bought with the fraction of a Bradbury; He would not arbitrarily interfere with a ripple of the tides set loose by His arrangement of the Spheres. God, to Michael, was a monarch strictly limited by His own Constitution. He restored the letter to his pocket. Poor creatures! But really, with 1,200,000 and more English unemployed, mostly due to that confounded Kaiser and his Navy stunt —! If that fellow and his gang had not started their Naval rivalry in 1899, England would have been out of the whole mess, or, perhaps, there never would have been a mess!

He turned up from the Temple station towards the offices of The Outpost. He had 'taken' that Weekly for some years now. It knew everything, and managed to convey a slight impression that nobody else knew anything; so that it seemed more weighty than any other Weekly. Having no particular Party to patronise, it could patronise the lot. Without Imperial bias, it professed a special knowledge of the Empire. Not literary, it made a point of reducing the heads of literary men — Michael, in his publishing days, had enjoyed every opportunity of noticing that. Professing respect for Church and the Law, it was an adept at giving them 'what-for.' It fancied itself on Drama, striking a somewhat Irish attitude towards it. But, perhaps above all, it excelled in neat detraction from political reputations, keeping them in their place, and that place a little lower than The Outpost's. Moreover, from its editorials emanated that 'holy ghost' of inspired knowledge in periods just a little beyond average comprehension, without which no such periodical had real importance.

Michael went up the stairs two at a time, and entered a large square room, where Mr. Blythe, back to the door, was pointing with a ruler to a circle drawn on a map.

“This is a bee map,” said Mr. Blythe to himself. “Quite the bee-est map I ever saw.”

Michael could not contain a gurgle, and the eyes of Mr. Blythe came round, prominent, epileptic, richly encircled by pouches.

“Hallo!” he said defiantly: “You? The Colonial Office prepared this map specially to show the best spots for Settlement schemes. And they’ve left out Baggersfontein — the very hub.”

Michael seated himself on the table.

“I’ve come in to ask what you think of the situation? My wife says Labour will be out in no time.”

“Our charming little lady!” said Mr. Blythe; “Labour will survive Ireland; they will survive Russia; they will linger on in their precarious way. One hesitates to predict their decease. Fear of their Budget may bring them down in February. After the smell of Russian fat has died away — say in November, Mont — one may make a start.”

“This first speech,” said Michael, “is a nightmare to me. How, exactly, am I to start Foggartism?”

“One will have achieved the impression of a body of opinion before then.”

“But will there be one?”

“No,” said Mr. Blythe.

“Oh!” said Michael. “And, by the way, what about Free Trade?”

“One will profess Free Trade, and put on duties.”

“God and Mammon.”

“Necessary in England, before any new departure, Mont. Witness Liberal-Unionism, Tory-Socialism, and —”

“Other ramps,” said Michael, gently.

“One will glide, deprecate Protection till there is more Protection than Free Trade, then deprecate Free Trade. Foggartism is an end, not a means; Free Trade and Protection are means, not the ends politicians have made them.”

Roused by the word politician, Michael got off the table; he was coming to have a certain sympathy with those poor devils. They were supposed to have no feeling for the country, and to be wise only after the event. But, really, who could tell what was good for the country, among the mists of talk? Not even old Foggart, Michael sometimes thought.

“You know, Blythe,” he said, “that we politicians don’t think ahead, simply because we know it’s no earthly. Every elector thinks his own immediate good is the good of the country. Only their own shoes pinching will change electors’ views. If Foggartism means adding to the price of living now, and taking wage-earning children away from workmen’s families for the sake of benefit — ten or twenty years hence — who’s going to stand for it?”

“My dear young man,” said Mr. Blythe, “conversion is our job. At present our trade-unionists despise the outside world. They’ve never seen it. Their philosophy is bounded by their smoky little streets. But five million pounds spent on the organised travel of a hundred thousand working men would do the trick in five years. It would infect the working class with a feverish desire for a place in the sun. The world is their children’s for the taking. But who can blame them, when they know nothing of it?”

“Some thought!” said Michael: “Only — what Government will think it? Can I take those maps? . . . By the way,” he said at the door, “there are Societies, you know, for sending out children.”

Mr. Blythe grunted. “Yes. Excellent little affairs! A few hundred children doing well — concrete example of what might be. Multiply it a hundredfold, and you’ve got a beginning. You can’t fill pails with a teaspoon. Good-bye!”

Out on the Embankment Michael wondered if one could love one’s country with a passion for getting people to leave it. But this over-bloated town condition, with its blight and smoky ugliness; the children without a chance from birth; these swarms of poor devils without work, who dragged about and hadn’t an earthly, and never would, on present lines; this unbalanced, hand-to-mouth, dependent state of things — surely that wasn’t to be for ever the state of the country one loved! He stared at the towers of Westminster, with the setting sun behind them. And there started up before him the thousand familiars of his past — trees, fields and streams, towers, churches, bridges; the English breeds of beasts, the singing birds, the owls, the jays and rooks at Lippinghall, the little differences from foreign sorts in shrub, flower, lichen, and winged life; the English scents, the English haze, the English grass; the eggs and bacon; the slow good humour, the moderation and the pluck; the smell of rain; the apple-blossom, the heather, and the sea. His country, and his breed — unspoilable at heart! He passed the Clock Tower. The House looked lacy and imposing, more beautiful than fashion granted. Did they spin the web of England's future in that House? Or were they painting camouflage — a screen, over old England?

A familiar voice said: "This is a monstrous great thing!"

And Michael saw his father-inlaw staring up at the Lincoln statue. "What did they want to put it here for?" said Soames. "It's not English." He walked along at Michael's side. "Fleur well?"

"Splendid. Italy suited her like everything."

Soames sniffed. "They're a theatrical lot," he said. "Did you see Milan cathedral!"

"Yes, sir. It's about the only thing we didn't take to."

"H'm! Their cooking gave me the collywobbles in '79. I dare say it's better now. How's the boy?"

"A1, sir."

Soames made a sound of gratification, and they turned the corner into South Square.

"What's this?" said Soames.

Outside the front door were two battered-looking trunks, a young man, grasping a bag, and ringing the bell, and a taxicab turning away.

"I can't tell you, sir," murmured Michael. "Unless it's the angel Gabriel."

"He's got the wrong house," said Soames, moving forward.

But just then the young man disappeared within.

Soames walked up to the trunks. "Francis Wilmot," he read out. "'S. S. Amphibian.' There's some mistake!"

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CHAPTER IV

MERE CONVERSATION

When they came in, Fleur was returning down-stairs from showing the young man to his room. Already fully dressed for the evening, she had but little on, and her hair was shingled . . . .

"My dear girl," Michael had said, when shingling came in, "to please me, don't! Your nuque will be too bristly for kisses."

"My dear boy," she had answered, "as if one could help it! You're always the same with any new fashion!"

She had been one of the first twelve to shingle, and was just feeling that without care she would miss being one of the first twelve to grow some hair again. Marjorie Ferrar, 'the Pet of the Panjoys,' as Michael called her, already had more than an inch. Somehow, one hated being distanced by Marjorie Ferrar . . . .

Advancing to her father, she said:

"I've asked a young American to stay, Dad; Jon Forsyte has married his sister, out there. You're quite brown, darling. How's mother?"

Soames only gazed at her.

And Fleur passed through one of those shamed moments, when the dumb quality of his love for her seemed accusing the glib quality of her love for him. It was not fair — she felt — that he should look at her like that; as if she had not suffered in that old business with Jon more than he; if she could take it lightly now, surely he could! As for Michael — not a word! — not even a joke! She bit her lips, shook her shingled head, and passed into the 'bimetallic parlour.'

Dinner began with soup and Soames deprecating his own cows for not being Herefords. He supposed that in America they had plenty of Herefords?

Francis Wilmot believed that they were going in for Holsteins now.

"Holsteins!" repeated Soames. "They're new since my young days. What's their colour?"

"Parti-coloured," said Francis Wilmot. "The English grass is just wonderful."

"Too damp, with us," said Soames. "We're on the river."

"The river Thames? What size will that be, where it hasn't a tide?"

"Just there — not more than a hundred yards."

"Will it have fish?"

"Plenty."

"And it'll run clear — not red; our Southern rivers have a red colour. And your trees will be willows, and poplars, and elms."

Soames was a good deal puzzled. He had never been in America. The inhabitants were human, of course, but peculiar and all alike, with more face than feature, heads fastened upright on their backs, and shoulders too square to be real. Their voices clanged in their mouths; they pronounced the words 'very' and 'America' in a way that he had tried to imitate without success; their dollar was too high, and they all had motor-cars; they despised Europe, came over in great quantities, and took back all they could; they talked all the time, and were not allowed to drink. This young man cut across all these preconceptions. He drank sherry and only spoke when he was spoken to. His shoulders looked natural; he had more feature than face; and his voice was soft. Perhaps, at least, he despised Europe.

"I suppose," he said, "you find England very small."

"No, sir. I find London very large; and you certainly have the loveliest kind of a countryside."

Soames looked down one side of his nose. "Pretty enough!" he said.

Then came turbot and a silence, broken, low down, behind his chair.

"That dog!" said Soames, impaling a morsel of fish he had set aside as uneatable.

"No, no, Dad! He just wants to know you've seen him!"

Soames stretched down a finger, and the Dandie fell on his side.

"He never eats," said Fleur; "but he has to be noticed."

A small covey of partridges came in, cooked.

"Is there any particular thing you want to see over here, Mr. Wilmot?" said Michael. "There's nothing very unAmerican left. You're just too late for Regent Street."

"I want to see the Beefeaters; and Cruft's Dog Show; and your blood horses; and the Derby."

"Darby!" Soames corrected. "You can't stay for that — it's not till next June."

"My cousin Val will show you race-horses," said Fleur. "He married Jon's sister, you know."

A 'bombe' appeared. "You have more of this in America, I believe," said Soames.

"We don't have much ice-cream in the South, sir; but we have special cooking — very tasty."

"I've heard of terrapin."

"Well, *I* don't get frills like that. I live away back, and have to work pretty hard. My place is kind of homey; but I've got some mighty nice darkies that can cook fine — old folk that knew my grannies. The old-time darky is getting scarce, but he's the real thing."

A Southerner!

Soames had been told that the Southerner was a gentleman. He remembered the 'Alabama,' too; and his father, James, saying: "I told you so" when the Government ate humble pie over that business.

In the savoury silence that accompanied soft roes on toast, the patter of the Dandie's feet on the parquet floor could be plainly heard.

"This is the only thing he likes," said Fleur, "Dan! go to your master. Give him a little bit, Michael." And she stole a look at Michael, but he did not answer it.

On their Italian holiday, with Fleur in the throes of novelty, sun and wine warmed, disposed to junketing, amenable to his caresses, he had been having his real honeymoon, enjoying, for the first time since his marriage, a sense of being the chosen companion of his adored. And now had come this stranger, bringing reminder that one played but second fiddle to that young second cousin and first lover; and he couldn't help feeling the cup withdrawn again from his lips. She had invited this young man because he came from that past of hers whose tune one could not play. And, without looking up, he fed the Dandie with tid-bits of his favourite edible.

Soames broke the silence.

"Take some nutmeg, Mr. Wilmot. Melon without nutmeg — beats ginger hollow."

When Fleur rose, Soames followed her to the drawing-room; while Michael led the young American to his study.

"You knew Jon?" said Francis Wilmot.

"No; I never met him."

"He's a great little fellow; and some poet. He's growing dandy peaches."

"Is he going on with that, now he's married?"

"Surely."

"Not coming to England?"

"Not this year. They have a nice home — horses and dogs. They have some hunting there, too. Perhaps he'll bring my sister over for a trip, next fall."

"Oh!" said Michael. "And are you staying long, yourself?"

"Why! I'll go back for Christmas. I'd like to see Rome and Seville; and I want to visit the old home of my people, down in Worcestershire."

"When did they go over?"

"William and Mary. Catholics — they were. Is it a nice part, Worcestershire?"

"Very; especially in the Spring. It grows a lot of fruit."

"Oh! You still grow things in this country?"

“Not many.”

“I thought that was so, coming on the cars, from Liverpool. I saw a lot of grass and one or two sheep, but I didn’t see anybody working. The people all live in the towns, then?”

“Except a few unconsidered trifles. You must come down to my father’s; they still grow a turnip or two thereabouts.”

“It’s sad,” said Francis Wilmot.

“It is. We began to grow wheat again in the war; but they’ve let it all slip back — and worse.”

“Why was that?”

Michael shrugged his shoulders: “No accounting for statesmanship. It lets the Land go to blazes when in office; and beats the drum of it when in opposition. At the end of the war we had the best air force in the world, and agriculture was well on its way to recovery. And what did they do? Dropped them both like hot potatoes. It was tragic. What do you grow in Carolina?”

“Just cotton, on my place. But it’s mighty hard to make cotton pay nowadays. Labour’s high.”

“High with you, too?”

“Yes, sir. Do they let strangers into your Parliament?”

“Rather. Would you like to hear the Irish debate? I can get you a seat in the Distinguished Strangers’ gallery.”

“I thought the English were stiff; but it’s wonderful the way you make me feel at home. Is that your father-inlaw — the old gentleman?”

“Yes.”

“He seems kind of rarefied. Is he a banker?”

“No. But now you mention it — he ought to be.”

Francis Wilmot’s eyes roved round the room and came to rest on “The White Monkey.”

“Well, now,” he said, softly, “that, surely, is a wonderful picture. Could I get a picture painted by that man, for Jon and my sister?”

“I’m afraid not,” said Michael. “You see, he was a Chink — not quite of the best period; but he must have gone West five hundred years ago at least.”

“Ah! Well, he had a great sense of animals.”

“We think he had a great sense of human beings.”

Francis Wilmot stared.

There was something, Michael decided, in this young man unresponsive to satire.

“So you want to see Cruft’s Dog Show?” he said. “You’re keen on dogs, then?”

“I’ll be taking a bloodhound back for Jon, and two for myself. I want to raise bloodhounds.”

Michael leaned back, and blew out smoke. To Francis Wilmot, he felt, the world was young, and life running on good tires to some desirable destination. In England —!

“What is it you Americans want out of life?” he said abruptly.

“Well, I suppose you might say we want success — in the North at all events.”

“WE wanted that in 1824,” said Michael.

“Oh! And nowadays?”

“We’ve had success, and now we’re wondering whether it hasn’t cooked our goose.”

“Well,” said Francis Wilmot, “we’re sort of thinly populated, compared with you.”

“That’s it,” said Michael. “Every seat here is booked in advance; and a good many sit on their own knees. Will you have another cigar, or shall we join the lady?”

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CHAPTER V

SIDE-SLIPS

If Providence was completely satisfied with Sapper's Row, Camden Town, Michael was not. What could justify those twin dismal rows of three-storied houses, so begrimed that they might have been collars washed in Italy? What possible attention to business could make these little ground-floor shops do anything but lose money? From the thronged and tram-lined thoroughfare so pregnantly scented with fried fish, petrol and old clothes, who would turn into this small back water for sweetness or for profit? Even the children, made with heroic constancy on its second and third floors, sought the sweets of life outside its precincts; for in Sapper's Row they could neither be run over nor stare at the outside of Cinemas. Hand-carts, bicycles, light vans which had lost their nerve and taxicabs which had lost their way, provided all the traffic; potted geraniums and spotted cats supplied all the beauty. Sapper's Row drooped and dithered.

Michael entered from its west end, and against his principles. Here was overcrowded England, at its most dismal, and here was he, who advocated a reduction of its population, about to visit some broken-down aliens with the view of keeping them alive. He looked into three of the little shops. Not a soul! Which was worst? Such little shops frequented, or — deserted? He came to No. 12, and, looking up, saw a face looking down. It was wax white, movingly listless, above a pair of hands sewing at a garment. 'That,' he thought, 'is my "obedient humble" and her needle.' He entered the shop below, a hair-dresser's, containing a dirty basin below a dusty mirror, suspicious towels, bottles, and two dingy chairs. In his shirt-sleeves, astride one of them, reading The Daily Mail, sat a shadowy fellow with pale hollow cheeks, twisted moustache, lank hair, and the eyes, at once knowing and tragic, of a philosopher.

"Hair cut, sir?"

Michael shook his head.

"Do Mr. and Mrs. Bergfeld live here?"

"Up-stairs, top floor."

"How do I get up?"

"Through there."

Passing through a curtained aperture, Michael found a stairway, and at its top, stood, hesitating. His conscience was echoing Fleur's comment on Anna Bergfeld's letter: "Yes, I dare say; but what's the good?" when the door was opened, and it seemed to him almost as if a corpse were standing there, with a face as though some one had come knocking on its grave, so eager and so white.

"Mrs. Bergfeld? My name's Mont. You wrote to me."

The woman trembled so, that Michael thought she was going to faint.

"Will you excuse me, sir, that I sit down?" And she dropped on to the end of the bed. The room was spotless, but, besides the bed, held only a small deal wash-stand, a pot of geranium, a tin trunk with a pair of trousers folded on it, a woman's hat on a peg, and a chair in the window covered with her sewing.

The woman stood up again. She seemed not more than thirty, thin but prettily formed; and her oval face, without colour except in her dark eyes, suggested Rafael rather than Sapper's Row.

"It is like seeing an angel," she said. "Excuse me, sir."

"Queer angel, Mrs. Bergfeld. Your husband not in?"

"No, sir. Fritz has gone to walk."

"Tell me, Mrs. Bergfeld. If I pay your passages to Germany, will you go?"

"We cannot hope from that now, Fritz has been here twenty years, and never back; he has lost his German nationality, sir; they do not want people like us, you know."

Michael stivered up his hair.

"Where are you from yourself?"

"From Salzburg."

“What about going back there?”

“I would like to, but what would we do? In Austria every one is poor now, and I have no relative left. Here at least we have my sewing.”

“How much is that a week?”

“Sometimes a pound; sometimes fifteen shillings. It is bread and the rent.”

“Don’t you get the dole?”

“No, sir. We are not registered.”

Michael took out a five-pound note and laid it with his card on the wash-stand. “I’ve got to think this over, Mrs. Bergfeld. Perhaps your husband will come and see me.” He went out quickly, for the ghostly woman had flushed pink.

Repassing through the curtained aperture, he caught the hair-dresser wiping out the basin.

“Find em in, sir?”

“The lady.”

“Ah! Seen better days, I should say. The ‘usband’s a queer customer; ‘alf off his nut. Wanted to come in here with me, but I’ve got to give this job up.”

“Oh! How’s that?”

“I’ve got to have fresh air — only got one lung, and that’s not very gaudy. I’ll have to find something else.”

“That’s bad, in these days.”

The hair-dresser shrugged his bony shoulders. “Ah!” he said. “I’ve been a hair-dresser from a boy, except for the war. Funny place this, to fetch up in after where I’ve been. The war knocked me out.” He twisted his little thin moustache.

“No pension?” said Michael.

“Not a bob. What I want to keep me alive is something in the open.”

Michael took him in from head to foot. Shadowy, narrow-headed, with one lung.

“But do you know anything about country life?”

“Not a blessed thing. Still, I’ve got to find something, or peg out.”

His tragic and knowing eyes searched Michael’s face.

“I’m awfully sorry,” said Michael. “Good-bye!”

The hair-dresser made a queer jerky little movement.

Emerging from Sapper’s Row into the crowded, roaring thoroughfare, Michael thought of a speech in a play he had seen a year or two before. “The condition of the people leaves much to be desired. I shall make a point of taking up the cudgels in the House. I shall move —!” The condition of the people! What a remote thing! The sportive nightmare of a few dreaming nights, the skeleton in a well-locked cupboard, the discomforting rare howl of a hungry dog! And probably no folk in England less disturbed by it than the gallant six hundred odd who sat with him in ‘that House.’ For to improve the condition of the people was their job, and that relieved them of a sense of nightmare. Since Oliver Cromwell some sixteen thousand, perhaps, had sat there before them, to the same end. And was the trick done — not bee likely! Still THEY were really working for it, and other people were only looking on and telling them how to do it!

Thus was he thinking when a voice said:

“Not got a job about you, sir?”

Michael quickened his steps, then stood still. He saw that the man who had spoken, having cast his eyes down again, had missed this sign of weakness; and he went back to him. They were black eyes in a face round and pasty like a mince pie. Decent and shabby, quiet and forlorn, he wore an ex-Service-man’s badge.

“You spoke to me?” said Michael.

“I’m sure I don’t know why, sir; it just hopped out of me.”

“No work?”

“No; and pretty low.”

“Married?”

"Widower, sir; two children."

"Dole?"

"Yes; and fair sick of it."

"In the war, I see?"

"Yes, Mespot."

"What sort of job do you want?"

"Any mortal thing."

"Give me your name and address."

"Henry Boddick, 94 Waltham Buildings, Gunnersbury."

Michael took it down.

"Can't promise anything," he said.

"No, sir."

"Good luck, anyway. Have a cigar?"

"Thank you, and good luck to you, sir."

Michael saluted, and resumed his progress; once out of sight of Henry Boddick, he took a taxi. A little more of this, and he would lose the sweet reasonableness without which one could not sit in 'that House'!

'For Sale or to Let' recorded recurrently in Portland Place, somewhat restored his sense of balance.

That same afternoon he took Francis Wilmot with him to the House, and leaving him at the foot of the Distinguished Strangers' stairway, made his way on to the floor.

He had never been in Ireland, so that the debate had for him little relation to reality. It seemed to illustrate, however, the obstacles in the way of agreement on any mortal subject. Almost every speech emphasized the paramount need for a settlement, but declared the impossibility of 'going back' on this, that, or the other factor which precluded such settlement. Still, for a debate on Ireland it seemed good-tempered; and presently they would all go out and record the votes they had determined on before it all began. He remembered the thrill with which he had listened to the first debates after his election; the impression each speech had given him that somebody must certainly be converted to something; and the reluctance with which he had discovered that nobody ever was. Some force was at work far stronger than any eloquence, however striking or sincere. The clothes were washed elsewhere; in here they were but aired before being put on. Still, until people put thoughts into words, they didn't know what they thought, and sometimes they didn't know afterwards. And for the hundredth time Michael was seized by a weak feeling in his legs. In a few weeks he himself must rise on them. Would the House accord him its 'customary indulgence'; or would it say: 'Young fellow — teaching your grandmother to suck eggs — shut up!'

He looked around him.

His fellow members were sitting in all shapes. Chosen of the people, they confirmed the doctrine that human nature did not change, or so slowly that one could not see the process — he had seen their prototypes in Roman statues, in mediaeval pictures. . . . 'Plain but pleasant,' he thought, unconsciously reproducing George Forsyte's description of himself in his palmy days. But did they take themselves seriously, as under Burke, as under Gladstone even?

The words 'customary indulgence' roused him from reverie; for they meant a maiden speech. Ha! yes! The member for Cornmarket. He composed himself to listen. Delivering himself with restraint and clarity, the speaker seemed suggesting that the doctrine 'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you' need not be entirely neglected, even in Ireland; but it was long — too long — Michael watched the House grow restive. 'Alas! poor brother!' he thought, as the speaker somewhat hastily sat down. A very handsome man rose in his place. He congratulated his honourable friend on his able and well-delivered effort, he only regretted that it had nothing to do with the business in hand. Exactly! Michael slipped out. Recovering his 'distinguished stranger,' he walked away with him to South Square.

Francis Wilmot was in a state of some enthusiasm.

"That was fine," he said. "Who was the gentleman under the curtains?"

"The Speaker?"

“No; I mean the one who didn’t speak.”

“Exactly; he’s the dignity of the House.”

“They ought to feed him oxygen; it must be sleepy under there. I liked the delegate who spoke last but one. He would ‘go’ in America; he had big ideas.”

“The idealism which keeps you out of the League of Nations, eh?” said Michael with a grin.

Francis Wilmot turned his head rather sharply.

“Well,” he said, “we’re like any other people when it comes down to bed-rock.”

“Quite so,” said Michael. “Idealism is just a by-product of geography — it’s the haze that lies in the middle distance. The farther you are from bed-rock, the less quick you need be to see it. We’re twenty sea-miles more idealistic about the European situation than the French are. And you’re three thousand sea-miles more idealistic than we are. But when it’s a matter of niggers, we’re three thousand sea-miles more idealistic than you; isn’t that so?”

Francis Wilmot narrowed his dark eyes.

“It is,” he said. “The farther North we go in the States, the more idealistic we get about the negro. Anne and I’ve lived all our life with darkies, and never had trouble; we love them, and they love us; but I wouldn’t trust myself not to join in lynching one that laid his hands on her. I’ve talked that over many times with Jon. He doesn’t see it that way; he says a darky should be tried like a white man; but he doesn’t know the real South. His mind is still three thousand sea-miles away.”

Michael was silent. Something within him always closed up at mention of a name which he still spelt mentally with an h.

Francis Wilmot added ruminatively: “There are a few saints in every country proof against your theory; but the rest of us, I reckon, aren’t above human nature.”

“Talking of human nature,” said Michael, “here’s my father-inlaw!”

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CHAPTER VI

SOAMES KEEPS HIS EYES OPEN

Soames, having prolonged his week-end visit, had been spending the afternoon at the Zoological Gardens, removing his great-nephews, the little Cardigans, from the too close proximity of monkeys and cats. After standing them once more in Imogen's hall, he had roosted at his Club till, idly turning his evening paper, he had come on this paragraph, in the "Chiff-chaff" column:

"A surprise for the coming Session is being confectioned at the Wednesday gatherings of a young hostess not a hundred miles from Westminster. Her husband, a prospective baronet lately connected with literature, is to be entrusted with the launching in Parliament of a policy which enjoys the peculiar label of Foggartism, derived from Sir James Foggart's book called "The Parlous State of England." This amusing alarum is attributed to the somewhat fantastic brain which guides a well-known weekly. We shall see what comes of it. In the meantime the enterprising little lady in question is losing no chance of building up her 'salon' on the curiosity which ever surrounds any buccaneering in politics."

Soames rubbed his eyes; then read it again with rising anger. 'Enterprising little lady is losing no chance of building up her "salon."' Who had written that? He put the paper in his pocket — almost the first theft he had ever committed — and all the way across St. James's Park in the gathering twilight he brooded on that anonymous paragraph. The allusion seemed to him unmistakable, and malicious into the bargain. 'Lion-hunter' would not have been plainer. Unfortunately, in a primary sense 'lion-hunter' was a compliment, and Soames doubted whether its secondary sense had ever been 'laid down' as libellous. He was still brooding deeply, when the young men ranged alongside.

"Well, sir?"

"Ah!" said Soames. "I want to speak to you. You've got a traitor in the camp." And, without meaning to at all, he looked angrily at Francis Wilmot.

"Now, sir?" said Michael, when they were in his study.

Soames held out the folded paper.

Michael read the paragraph and made a face.

"Whoever wrote that comes to your evenings," said Soames; "that's clear. Who is he?"

"Very likely a she."

"D'you mean to say they print such things by women?"

Michael did not answer. Old Forsyte was behind the times.

"Will they tell me who it is, if I go down to them?" asked Soames.

"No, fortunately."

"How d'you mean 'fortunately'?"

"Well, sir, the Press is a sensitive plant. I'm afraid you might make it curl up. Besides, it's always saying nice things that aren't deserved."

"But this —" began Soames; he stopped in time, and substituted: "Do you mean that we've got to sit down under it?"

"To lie down, I'm afraid."

"Fleur has an evening tomorrow."

"Yes."

"I shall stay up for it, and keep my eyes open."

Michael had a vision of his father-inlaw, like a plainclothes man in the neighbourhood of wedding-presents.

But in spite of assumed levity, Michael had been hit. The knowledge that his adored one had the collector's habit, and flitted, alluring, among the profitable, had, so far, caused him only indulgent wonder. But now it seemed more than an amusing foible. The swiftness with which she turned her smile off and on as though controlled by a switch under her shingled hair; the quick turns of her neck, so charming and exposed; the clever roving, disguised so well but not quite well enough, of the pretty eyes; the droop and flutter of their white lids; the expressive hands grasping, if one could so call such slim and dainty apprehensions, her career — all this suddenly caused Michael pain. Still she was doing it for him and Kit! French women, they said, co-operated with their husbands in the family career. It was the French blood in her. Or perhaps just idealism, the desire to have and be the best of whatever bunch there was about! Thus Michael, loyally. But his uneasy eyes roved from face to face of the Wednesday gathering, trying to detect signs of quizzicality.

Soames followed another method. His mind, indeed, was uncomplicated by the currents awash in that of one who goes to bed with the object of his criticism. For him there was no reason why Fleur should not know as many aristocrats, Labour members, painters, ambassadors, young fools, and even writing fellows, as might flutter her fancy. The higher up they were, the less likely, he thought with a certain naivete would they be to borrow money or get her into a mess. His daughter was as good or better than any of them, and his deep pride was stung to the quick by the notion that people should think she had to claw and scrape to get them round her. It was not she who was after them, but they who were after her! Standing under the Fragonard which he had given her, grizzled, neatly moustached, close-faced, chinny, with a gaze concentrated on nothing in particular, as of one who has looked over much and found little in it, he might have been one of her ambassadors.

A young woman, with red-gold hair, about an inch long on her de-shingled neck, came and stood with her back to him, beside a soft man, who kept washing his hands. Soames could hear every word of their talk.

"Isn't the little Mont amusing? Look at her now, with 'Don Fernando'— you'd think he was her only joy. Ah! There's young Rashly! Off she goes. She's a born little snob. But that doesn't make this a 'salon,' as she thinks. To found a 'salon' you want personality, and wit, and the 'don't care a damn' spirit. She hasn't got a scrap. Besides, who is she?"

"Money?" said the soft man.

"Not so very much. Michael's such dead nuts on her that he's getting dull; though it's partly Parliament, of course. Have you heard them talk this Foggartism? All food, children, and the future — the very dregs of dulness."

"Novelty," purred the soft man, "is the vice of our age."

"One resents a nobody like her climbing in on piffle like this Foggartism. Did you read the book?"

"Hardly. Did you?"

"No jolly fear! I'm sorry for Michael. He's being exploited by that little snob."

Penned without an outlet, Soames had begun breathing hard. Feeling a draught, perhaps, the young woman turned to encounter a pair of eyes so grey, so cold, in a face so concentrated, that she moved away. "Who was that old buffer?" she asked of the soft man; "he gave me 'the jim-jams.'"

The soft man thought it might be a poor relation — he didn't seem to know anybody.

But Soames had already gone across to Michael.

"Who's that young woman with the red hair?"

"Marjorie Ferrar."

"She's the traitress — turn her out!"

Michael stared.

"But we know her quite well — she's a daughter of Lord Charles Ferrar, and —"

"Turn her out!" said Soames again.

"How do you know that she's the traitress, sir?"

"I've just heard her use the very words of that paragraph, and worse."

"But she's our guest."

"Pretty guest!" growled Soames through his teeth.

"One can't turn a guest out. Besides, she's the grand-daughter of a marquess and the pet of the Panjoys — it would make the deuce of a scandal."

"Make it, then!"

"We won't ask her again; but really, that's all one can do."

"Is it?" said Soames; and walking past his son-inlaw, he went towards the object of his denunciation. Michael followed, much perturbed. He had never yet seen his father-inlaw with his teeth bared. He arrived in time to hear him say in a low but quite audible voice:

"You were good enough, madam, to call my daughter a snob in her own house."

Michael saw the de-shingled neck turn and rear, the hard blue eyes stare with a sort of outraged impudence; he heard her laugh, then Soames saying:

"You are a traitress; be so kind as to withdraw."

Of the half-dozen people round, not a soul was missing it! Oh, hell! And he the master of the house! Stepping forward, he put his arm through that of Soames:

"That'll do, sir," he said, quietly; "this is not a Peace Conference."

There was a horrid hush; and in all the group only the soft man's white hands, washing each other, moved.

Marjorie Ferrar took a step towards the door.

"I don't know who this person is," she said; "but he's a liar."

"I reckon not."

At the edge of the little group was a dark young man. His eyes were fixed on Marjorie Ferrar's, whose eyes in turn were fixed on his.

And, suddenly, Michael saw Fleur, very pale, standing just behind him. She must have heard it all! She smiled, waved her hand, and said:

"Madame Carelli's going to play."

Marjorie Ferrar walked on towards the door, and the soft man followed her, still washing those hands, as if trying to rid them of the incident. Soames, like a slow dog making sure, walked after them; Michael walked after him. The words "How amusing!" floated back, and a soft echoing snigger. Slam! Both outer door and incident were closed.

Michael wiped his forehead. One half of the brain behind admired his father-inlaw; the other thought: 'Well, the old man HAS gone and done it!' He went back into the drawing-room. Fleur was standing near the clavichord, as if nothing had happened. But Michael could see her fingers crisping at her dress; and his heart felt sore. He waited, quivering, for the last chord.

Soames had gone up-stairs. Before "The White Monkey" in Michael's study, he reviewed his own conduct. He regretted nothing. Red-headed cat! 'Born snob!' 'Money? Not very much.' Ha! 'A nobody like her!' Grand-daughter of a marquess, was she? Well, he had shown the insolent baggage the door. All that was sturdy in his fibre, all that was acrid in his blood, all that resented patronage and privilege, the inherited spirit of his forefathers, moved within him. Who were the aristocracy, to give themselves airs? Jackanapes! Half of 'em descendants of those who had got what they had by robbery or jobbery! That one of them should call his daughter, HIS daughter, a snob! He wouldn't lift a finger, wouldn't cross a road, to meet the Duke of Seven Dials himself! If Fleur liked to amuse herself by having people round her, why shouldn't she? His blood ran suddenly a little cold. Would she say that he had spoiled her 'salon'? Well! He couldn't help it if she did; better to have had the thing out, and got rid of that cat, and know where they all were. 'I shan't wait up for her,' he thought. 'Storm in a teacup!'

The thin strumming of the clavichord came up to him out on the landing, waiting to climb to his room. He wondered if these evenings woke the baby. A gruff sound at his feet made him jump. That dog lying outside the baby's door! He wished the little beggar had been down-stairs just now — he would have known how to put his teeth through that red-haired cat's nude stockings. He passed on up, looking at Francis Wilmot's door, which was opposite his own.

That young American chap must have overheard something too; but he shouldn't allude to the matter with him; not dignified. And, shutting his door on the strumming of the clavichord, Soames closed his eyes again as best he could.

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Chapter VII

Sounds in the Night

Michael had never heard Fleur cry, and to see her, flung down across the bed, smothering her sobs in the quilt, gave him a feeling akin to panic. She stopped at his touch on her hair, and lay still.

"Buck up, darling!" he said, gently. "If you aren't one, what does it matter?"

She struggled up, and sat cross-legged, her flushed face smudged with tears, her hair disordered.

"Who cares what one is? It's what one's labelled."

"Well, we've labelled her 'Traitress.'"

"As if that made it better! We all talk behind people's backs. Who minds that? But how can I go on when everybody is sniggering and thinking me a lion-hunting snob? She'll cry it all over London in revenge. How can I have any more evenings?"

Was it for her career, or his, that she was sorrowing? Michael went round to the other side of the bed and put his arms about her from behind.

"Never mind what people think, my child. Sooner or later one's got to face that anyway."

"It's you who aren't facing it. If I'm not thought nice, I can't BE nice."

"Only the people who really know one matter."

"Nobody knows one," said Fleur, sullenly. "The fonder they are, the less they know, and the less it matters what they think."

Michael withdrew his arms.

She sat silent for so long that he went back to the other side of the bed to see if he could tell anything from her face resting moodily on her hands. The grace of her body thus cramped was such that his senses ached. And since caresses would only worry her, they ached the more.

"I hate her," she said, at last; "and if I can hurt her, I will."

He would have liked to hurt the 'pet of the Panjoys' himself, but it did not console him to hear Fleur utter that sentiment; it meant more from her than from himself, who, when it came to the point, was a poor hand at hurting people.

"Well, darling," he said, "shall we sleep on it?"

"I said I wouldn't have any more evenings; but I shall."

"Good!" said Michael; "that's the spirit."

She laughed. It was a funny hard little sound in the night. And with it Michael had to remain discontented.

All through the house it was a wakeful night. Soames had the three o'clock tremors, which cigars and the fresh air wherein he was obliged to play his golf had subdued for some time past. He was disturbed, too, by that confounded great clock from hour to hour, and by a stealthy noise between three and four, as of some one at large in the house.

This was, in fact, Francis Wilmot. Ever since his impulsive denial that Soames was a liar, the young man had been in a peculiar state of mind. As Soames surmised, he too had overheard Marjorie Ferrar slandering her hostess; but in the very moment of his refutation, like Saul setting forth to attack the Christians, he had been smitten by blindness. Those blue eyes, pouring into his the light of defiance, had finished with a gleam which seemed to say: 'Young man, you please me!' And it haunted him. That lissome nymph — with her white skin and red-gold hair, her blue eyes full of insolence, her red lips full of joy, her white neck fragrant as a pine-wood in sunshine — the vision was abiding. He had been watching her all through the evening; but it was uncanny the way she had left her image on his senses in that one long moment, so that now he got no sleep. Though he had not been introduced, he knew her name to be Marjorie Ferrar, and he thought it 'fine.' Countryman that he was and with little knowledge of women — she was unlike any woman he had known. And he had given her the lie direct! This made him so restless that he drank the contents of his water-bottle, put on his clothes, and stole down-stairs. Passing the Dandie, who stirred as though muttering: 'Unusual! But I know those legs!' he reached the hall, where a milky glimmer came in through the fanlight. Lighting a cigarette, he sat down on the marble coat-sarcophagus. It cooled his anatomy, so that he got off it, turned up the light, saw a telephone directory resting beside him, and mechanically sought the letter ‘F.’ There she was! “Ferrar, Marjorie, 3, River Studios, Wren Street.” Switching off the light, he slipped back the door-chain, and stole out. He knew his way to the river, and went towards it.

It was the hour when sound, exhausted, has trailed away, and one can hear a moth pass. London, in clear air, with no smoke going up, slept beneath the moon. Bridges, towers, water, all silvered, had a look as if withdrawn from man. Even the houses and the trees enjoyed their moony hour apart, and seemed to breathe out with Francis Wilmot a stanza from “The Ancient Mariner”:

> ‘O Sleep, it is a gentle thing,
> Beloved from pole to pole!
> To Mary Queen the praise be given,
> She sent the gentle sleep from heaven
> That slid into my soul!’

He turned at random to the right along the river. Never in his life had he walked through a great city at the dead hour. Not a passion alive, nor a thought of gain; haste asleep, and terrors dreaming; here and there would be one turning on his bed; perchance a soul passing. Down on the water lighters and barges lay shadowy and abandoned, with red lights burning; the lamps along the Embankment shone without purpose, as if they had been freed. Man was away. In the whole town only himself up and doing — what? Natively shrewd and resourceful in all active situations, the young Southerner had little power of diagnosis, and certainly did not consider himself ridiculous wandering about like this at night, not even when he suddenly felt that if he could ‘locate’ her windows, he could go home and sleep. He passed the Tate Gallery and saw a human being with moonlit buttons.

“Pardon me, officer,” he said, “but where is Wren Street?”

“Straight on and fifth to the right.”

Francis Wilmot resumed his march. The ‘moving’ moon was heeling down, the stars were gaining light, the trees had begun to shiver. He found the fifth turning, walked down ‘the block,’ and was no wiser; it was too dark to read names or numbers. He passed another buttoned human effigy and said:

“Pardon me, officer, but where are River Studios?”

“Comin’ away from them; last house on the right.”

Francis Wilmot retraced his steps. There it was, then — by itself, back from the street. He stood before it and gazed at dark windows. She might be behind any one of them! Well! He had ‘located’ her; and, in the rising wind, he turned and walked home. He went up-stairs stealthily as he had come down, past the Dandie, who again raised his head, muttered: ‘Still more unusual, but the same legs!’ entered his room, lay down, and fell asleep like a baby.

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https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/g/galsworthy/john/silver/chapter7.html
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CHAPTER VIII

ROUND AND ABOUT

General reticence at breakfast concerning the incident of the night before, made little impression on Soames, because the young American was present, before whom, naturally, one would not discuss it; but he noted that Fleur was pale. In his early-morning vigil legal misgivings had assailed him. Could one call even a red-haired baggage 'traitress' in the hearing of some half-dozen persons with impunity? He went off to his sister Winifred's after breakfast, and told her the whole story.

"Quite right, my dear boy," was her comment. "They tell me that young woman is as fast as they're made. Her father, you know, owned the horse that didn't beat the French horse — I never can remember its name — in that race, the Something Stakes, at — dear me! what was the meeting?"

"I know nothing about racing," said Soames.

But that afternoon at 'The Connoisseurs Club' a card was brought to him:

LORD CHARLES FERRAR

High Marshes,
Nr. Newmarket. Burton's Club.

For a moment his knees felt a little weak; but the word 'snob' coming to his assistance, he said drily: "Show him into the strangers' room." He was not going to hurry himself for this fellow, and finished his tea before repairing to that forlorn corner.

A tallish man was standing in the middle of the little room, thin and upright, with a moustache brushed arrogantly off his lips, and a single eyeglass which seemed to have grown over the right eye, so unaided was it. There were corrugations in his thin weathered cheeks, and in his thick hair flecked at the sides with grey. Soames had no difficulty in disliking him at sight.

"Mr. Forsyte, I believe?"

Soames inclined his head.

"You made use of an insulting word to my daughter last night in the presence of several people."

"Yes; it was richly deserved."

"You were not drunk, then?"

"Not at all," said Soames.

His dry precision seemed to disconcert the visitor, who twisted his moustache, frowned his eyeglass closer to his eye, and said:

"I have the names of those who overheard it. You will be good enough to write to each of them separately withdrawing your expression unreservedly."

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

A moment's silence ensued.

"You are an attorney, I believe?"

"A solicitor."

"Then you know the consequences of refusal."

"If your daughter likes to go into Court, I shall be happy to meet her there."

"You refuse to withdraw?"

"Absolutely."

"Good evening, then!"

"Good evening!"

For two pins he would have walked round the fellow, the bristles rising on his back, but, instead, he stood a little to one side to let him out. Insolent brute! He could so easily hear again the voice of old Uncle Jolyon, characterising some person of the eighties as 'a pettifogging little attorney.' And he felt that, somehow or other, he must relieve his mind. 'Old Mont' would know about this fellow — he would go across and ask him.

At 'The Aeroplane' he found not only Sir Lawrence Mont, looking almost grave, but Michael, who had evidently been detailing to his father last evening's incident. This was a relief to Soames, who felt the insults to his daughter too bitterly to talk of them. Describing the visit he had just received, he ended with the words:

"This fellow — Ferrar — what's his standing?"

"Charlie Ferrar? He owes money everywhere, has some useful horses, and is a very good shot."

"He didn't strike me as a gentleman," said Soames.

Sir Lawrence cocked his eyebrow, as if debating whether he ought to answer this remark about one who had ancestors, from one who had none.

"And his daughter," said Soames, "isn't a lady."

Sir Lawrence wagged his head.

"Single-minded, Forsyte, single-minded; but you're right; there's a queer streak in that blood. Old Shropshire's a dear old man; it skipped his generation, but it's there — it's there. His aunt —"

"He called me an attorney," said Soames with a grim smile, "and she called me a liar. I don't know which is worse."

Sir Lawrence got up and looked into St. James's Street. Soames had the feeling that the narrow head perched up on that straight thin back counted for more than his own, in this affair. One was dealing here with people who said and did what they liked and damned the consequences; this baronet chap had been brought up in that way himself, no doubt, he ought to know how their minds worked.

Sir Lawrence turned.

"She may bring an action, Forsyte; it was very public. What evidence have you?"

"My own ears."

Sir Lawrence looked at the ears, as if to gauge their length.

"M'm! Anything else?"

"That paragraph."

"She'll get at the paper. Yes?"

"The man she was talking to."

Michael ejaculated: "Philip Quinsey — put not your trust in Gath!"

"What more?"

"Well," said Soames, "there's what that young American overheard, whatever it was."

"Ah!" said Sir Lawrence: "Take care she doesn't get at HIM. Is that all?"

Soames nodded. It didn't seem much, now he came to think of it!

"You say she called you a liar. How would it be to take the offensive?"

There was a silence; then Soames said: "Women? No!"

"Quite right, Forsyte! They have their privileges still. There's nothing for it but to wait and see how the cat jumps. Traitress! I suppose you know how much the word costs?"

"The cost," said Soames, "is nothing; it's the publicity!"

His imagination was playing streets ahead of him. He saw himself already in 'the box,' retailing the spiteful purrings of that cat, casting forth to the public and the papers the word 'snob,' of his own daughter; for if he didn't, he would have no defence. Too painful!

"What does Fleur say?" he asked, suddenly, of Michael.

"War to the knife."

Soames jumped in his chair.

"Ah!" he said: "That's a woman all over — no imagination!"

"That's what I thought at first, sir, but I'm not so sure. She says if Marjorie Ferrar is not taken by the short hairs, she'll put it across everybody — and that the more public the thing is, the less harm she can do."

"I think," said Sir Lawrence, coming back to his chair, "I'll go and see old Shropshire. My father and his shot woodcock together in Albania in 'fifty-four."

Soames could not see the connection, but did not snub the proposal. A marquess was a sort of gone-off duke; even in this democratic age, he would have some influence, one supposed.

"He's eighty," went on Sir Lawrence, "and gets gout in the stomach, but he's as brisk as a bee."

Soames could not be sure whether it was a comfort.

"The grass shall not grow, Forsyte. I'll go there now."

They parted in the street, Sir Lawrence moving north — towards Mayfair.

The Marquess of Shropshire was dictating to his secretary a letter to his County Council, urging on them an item of his lifelong programme for the electrification of everything. One of the very first to take up electricity, he had remained faithful to it all his brisk and optimistic days. A short, bird-like old man, in shaggy Lovat tweeds, with a blue tie of knitted silk passed through a ring, bright cheeks and well-trimmed white beard and moustache, he was standing in his favourite attitude, with one foot on a chair, his elbow on his knee, and his chin on his hand.

"Ah! young Mont!" he said: "Sit down."

Sir Lawrence took a chair, crossed his knees, and threaded his finger-tips. He found it pleasing to be called 'young Mont,' at sixty-six or so.

"Have you brought me another of your excellent books?"

"No, Marquess; I've come for your advice."

"Ah! Go on, Mr. Mersey: 'In this way, gentlemen, you will save at least three thousand a year to your rate-payers; confer a blessing on the countryside by abolishing the smoke of four filthy chimneys; and make me your obliged servant,

'SHROPSHIRE.'

Thank you, Mr. Mersey. Now, my dear young Mont?"

Having watched the back of the secretary till it vanished, and the old peer pivot his bright eyes, with their expression of one who means to see more every day, on the face of his visitor, Sir Lawrence took his eyeglass between thumb and finger, and said:

"Your granddaughter, sir, and my daughter-inlaw want to fight like billy-o."

"Marjorie?" said the old man, and his head fell to one side like a bird's. "I draw the line — a charming young woman to look at, but I draw the line. What has she done now?"

"Called my daughter-inlaw a snob and a lion-hunter; and my daughter-inlaw's father has called your granddaughter a traitress to her face."

"Bold man," said the marquess; "bold man! Who is he?"

"His name is Forsyte."

"Forsyte?" repeated the old peer; "Forsyte? The name's familiar — now where would that be? Ah! Forsyte and Treffry — the big tea men. My father had his tea from them direct — real caravan; no such tea now. Is that the —?"

"Some relation, perhaps. This man is a solicitor — retired; chiefly renowned for his pictures. A man of some substance, and probity."

"Indeed! And IS his daughter a — a lion-hunter?"

Sir Lawrence smiled.

"She's a charmer. Likes to have people about her. Very pretty. Excellent little mother; some French blood."

"Ah!" said the marquess: "the French! Better built round the middle than our people. What do you want me to do?"

"Speak to your son Charles."

The old man took his foot off the chair, and stood nearly upright. His head moved sideways with a slight continuous motion.

"I never speak to Charlie," he said, gravely. "We haven't spoken for six years."

"I beg your pardon, sir. Didn't know. Sorry to have bothered you."

"No, no; pleasure to see you. If I run across Marjorie, I'll see — I'll see. But, my dear Mont, what shall we do with these young women — no sense of service; no continuity; no hair; no figures? By the way, do you know this Power Scheme on the Severn?" He held up a pamphlet: "I've been at them to do it for years. My Colliery among others could be made to pay with electricity; but they won't move. We want some Americans over here."

Sir Lawrence had risen; the old man's sense of service had so clearly taken the bit between its teeth again. He held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Marquess; delighted to see you looking so well."

"Good-bye, my dear young Mont; command me at any time, and let me have another of your nice books."

They shook hands; and from the Lovat clothes was disengaged a strong whiff of peat. Sir Lawrence, looking back, saw the old man back in his favourite attitude, foot on chair and chin on hand, already reading the pamphlet. 'Some boy!' he thought; 'as Michael would say. But what has Charlie Ferrar done not to be spoken to for six years? Old Forsyte ought to be told about that.' . . .

In the meantime 'Old Forsyte' and Michael were walking homeward across St. James's Park.

"That young American," said Soames; "what do you suppose made him put his oar in?"

"I don't know, sir; and I don't like to ask."

"Exactly," said Soames, glumly. There was, indeed, something repulsive to him in treating with an American over a matter of personal dignity.

"Do they use the word 'snob' over there?"

"I'm not sure; but, in the States to hunt lions is a form of idealism. They want to associate with what they think better than themselves. It's rather fine."

Soames did not agree; but found difficulty in explaining why. Not to recognise any one as better than himself or his daughter had been a sort of guiding principle, and guiding principles were not talked about. In fact, it was so deep in him that he hadn't known of it.

"I shan't mention it," he said, "unless he does. What more can this young woman do? She's in a set, I suppose?"

"The Panjoys —"

"Panjoys!"

"Yes, sir; out for a good time at any cost — they don't really count, of course. But Marjorie Ferrar is frightfully in the limelight. She paints a bit; she's got some standing with the Press; she dances; she hunts; she's something of an actress; she goes everywhere week-ending. It's the week-ends that matter, where people have nothing to do but talk. Were you ever at a weekend party, sir?"

"I?" said Soames: "Good Lord — no!"

Michael smiled — incongruity, indeed, could go no farther.

"We must get one up for you at Lippinghall."

"No, thank you."

"You're right, sir; nothing more boring. But they're the coulisses of politics. Fleur thinks they're good for me. And Marjorie Ferrar knows all the people we know, and lots more. It IS awkward."

"I should go on as if nothing had happened," said Soames: "But about that paper? They ought to be warned that this woman is venomous."

Michael regarded his father-inlaw quizzically.

On entering, they found the man-servant in the hall.

"There's a man to see you, sir, by the name of Bugfill."

"Oh! Ah! Where have you put him, Coaker?"

"Well, I didn't know what to make of him, sir, he shakes all over. I've stood him in the dining-room."

"Excuse me, sir," said Michael.

Soames passed into the 'parlour,' where he found his daughter and Francis Wilmot.

“Mr. Wilmot is leaving us, Father. You’re just in time to say good-bye.”

If there were moments when Soames felt cordial, they were such as these. He had nothing against the young man; indeed, he rather liked the look of him; but to see the last of almost anybody was in a sense a relief; besides, there was this question of what he had overheard, and to have him about the place without knowing would be a continual temptation to compromise with one’s dignity and ask him what it was.

“Good-bye, Mr. Wilmot,” he said; “if you’re interested in pictures —” he paused, and, holding out, his hand, added, “you should look in at the British Museum.”

Francis Wilmot shook the hand deferentially.

“I will. It’s been a privilege to know you, sir.” Soames was wondering why, when the young man turned to Fleur.

“I’ll be writing to Jon from Paris, and I’ll surely send your love. You’ve been perfectly wonderful to me. I’ll be glad to have you and Michael visit me at any time you come across to the States; and if you bring the little dog, why — I’ll just be honoured to let him bite me again.”

He bowed over Fleur’s hand and was gone, leaving Soames staring at the back of his daughter’s neck.

“That’s rather sudden,” he said, when the door was closed; “anything upset him?”

She turned on him, and said coldly:

“Why did you make that fuss last night, Father?”

The injustice of her attack was so palpable, that Soames bit his moustache in silence. As if he could help himself, when she was insulted in his hearing!

“What good do you think you’ve done?”

Soames, who had no notion, made no attempt to enlighten her. He only felt sore inside.

“You’ve made me feel as if I couldn’t look anybody in the face. But I’m going to, all the same. If I’m a lion-hunter and a snob, I’ll do it thoroughly. Only I do wish you wouldn’t go on thinking I’m a child and can’t defend myself.”

And still Soames was silent, sore to the soles of his boots.

Fleur flashed a look at him, and said:

“I’m sorry, but I can’t help it; everything’s queered;” and she too went out of the room.

Soames moved blindly to the window and stood looking out. He saw a cab with luggage drive away; saw some pigeons alight, peck at the pavement, and fly off again; he saw a man kissing a woman in the dusk; a policeman light his pipe and go off duty. He saw many human and interesting things; he heard Big Ben chime. Nothing in it all! He was staring at a silver spoon. He himself had put it in her mouth at birth.

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https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/g/galsworthy/john/silver/chapter8.html
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CHAPTER IX

POULTRY AND CATS

He who had been stood in the dining-room, under the name of Bugfill, was still upright. Rather older than Michael, with an inclination to side-whisker, darkish hair, and a pale face stamped with that look of schooled quickness common to so many actors but unfamiliar to Michael, he was grasping the edge of the dining-table with one hand, and a wide-brimmed black hat with the other. The expression of his large, dark-circled eyes was such that Michael smiled and said:

"It's all right, Mr. Bergfeld, I'm not a Manager. Do sit down, and smoke."

The visitor silently took the proffered chair and cigarette with an attempt at a fixed smile. Michael sat on the table.

"I gather from Mrs. Bergfeld that you're on the rocks."

"Fast," said the shaking lips.

"Your health, and your name, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You want an open-air job, I believe? I haven't been able to think of anything very gaudy, but an idea did strike me last night in the stilly watches. How about raising poultry — everybody's doing it."

"If I had my savings."

"Yes, Mrs. Bergfeld told me about them. I can inquire, but I'm afraid —"

"It's robbery." The chattered sound let Michael at once into the confidence of the many Managers who had refused to employ him who uttered it.

"I know," he said, soothingly, "robbing Peter to pay Paul. That clause in the Treaty was a bit of rank barbarism, of course, camouflage it as they like. Still, it's no good to let it prey on your mind, is it?"

But his visitor had risen. "To take from civilian to pay civilian! Then why not take civilian life for civilian life? What is the difference? And England does it — the leading nation to respect the individual. It is abominable."

Michael began to feel that he was overdoing it.

"You forget," he said, "that the war made us all into barbarians, for the time being; we haven't quite got over it yet. And your country dropped the spark into the powder magazine, you know. But what about this poultry stunt?"

Bergfeld seemed to make a violent effort to control himself.

"For my wife's sake," he said, "I will do anything; but unless I get my savings back, how can I start?"

"I can't promise; but perhaps I could start you. That hair-dresser below you wants an open-air job, too. What's his name, by the way?"

"Swain."

"How do you get on with him?"

"He is an opinionated man, but we are good friends enough."

Michael got off the table. "Well, leave it to me to think it out. We shall be able to do something, I hope;" and he held out his hand.

Bergfeld took it silently, and his eyes resumed the expression with which they had first looked at Michael.

'That man,' thought Michael, 'will be committing suicide some day, if he doesn't look out.' And he showed him to the door. He stood there some minutes gazing after the German actor's vanishing form, with a feeling as if the dusk were formed out of the dark stories of such as he and the hair-dresser and the man who had whispered to him to stand and deliver a job. Well, Bart must lend him that bit of land beyond the coppice at Lippinghall. He would buy a War hut if there were any left and some poultry stock, and start a colony — the Bergfelds, the hair-dresser, and Henry Boddick. They could cut the timber in the coppice, and put up the fowl-houses for themselves. It would be growing food — a practical experiment in Foggartism! Fleur would laugh at him. But was there anything one could do nowadays that somebody couldn’t laugh at? He turned back into the house. Fleur was in the hall.

“Francis Wilmot has gone,” she said.

“Why?”

“He’s off to Paris.”

“What was it he overheard last night?”

“Do you suppose I asked?”

“Well, no,” said Michael, humbly. “Let’s go up and look at Kit, it’s about his bath time.”

The eleventh baronet, indeed, was already in his bath.

“All right, nurse,” said Fleur, “I’ll finish him.”

“He’s been in three minutes, ma’am.”

“Lightly boiled,” said Michael.

For one aged only fourteen months this naked infant had incredible vigour — from lips to feet he was all sound and motion. He seemed to lend a meaning to life. His vitality was absolute, not relative. His kicks and crows and splashings had the joy of a gnat’s dance, or a jackdaw’s gambols in the air. They gave thanks not for what he was about to receive, but for what he was receiving. White as a turtle-dove, with pink toes, darker in eyes and hair than he would be presently, he grabbed at the soap, at his mother, at the bath-towelling — he seemed only to need a tail. Michael watched him, musing. This manikin, born with all that he could possibly wish for within his reach — how were they to bring him up? Were they fit to bring him up, they who had been born — like all their generation in the richer classes — emancipated, to parents properly broken-in to worship the fetich — Liberty? Born to everything they wanted, so that they were at wits’ end to invent something they could not get; driven to restive searching by having their own way? The war had deprived one of one’s own way, but the war had overdone it, and left one grasping at license. And for those, like Fleur, born a little late for the war, the tale of it had only lowered what respect they could have for anything. With veneration killed, and self-denial ‘off,’ with atavism buried, sentiment derided, and the future in the air, hardly a wonder that modernity should be a dance of gnats, taking itself damned seriously! Such were the reflections of Michael, sitting there above the steam, and frowning at his progeny. Without faith was one fit to be a parent? Well, people were looking for faith again. Only they were bound to hatch the egg of it so hard that it would be addled long before it was a chicken. ‘Too self-conscious!’ he thought. ‘That’s our trouble!’

Fleur had finished drying the eleventh baronet, and was dabbing powder over him; her eyes seemed penetrating his skin, as if to gauge the state of health behind it. He watched her take the feet and hands one by one and examine each nail, lost in her scrutiny, unselfconscious in her momentary devotion! And oppressed by the difficulty, as a Member of Parliament, of being devoted, Michael snapped his fingers at the baby and left the nursery. He went to his study and took down a volume of the Encyclopaedia Britannica containing the word Poultry. He read about Leghorns, Orpingtons, White Sussex, Bramaputras, and was little the wiser. He remembered that if you drew a chalk-line to the beak of a hen, the hen thought it was tied up. He wished somebody would draw a chalk-line to his beak. Was Foggartism a chalk-line? A voice said:

“Tell Fleur I’m going to her aunt’s.”

“Leaving us, sir?”

“Yes, I’m not wanted.”

What had happened?

“You’ll see her before you go, sir?”

“No,” said Soames.

Had somebody rubbed out the chalk-line to Old Forsyte’s nose?

“Is there any money in poultry-farming, sir?”

“There’s no money in anything nowadays.”

“And yet the Income Tax returns continue to rise.”

“Yes,” said Soames; “there’s something wrong there.”

“You don’t think people make their incomes out more than they are?”

Soames blinked. Pessimistic though he felt at the moment, he could not take quite that low view of human nature.

“You’d better see that Fleur doesn’t go about abusing that red-haired baggage,” he said. “She was born with a silver spoon in her mouth; she thinks she can do what she likes.” And he shut Michael in again.

Silver spoon in her mouth! How apropos! . . .

After putting her baby into its cot Fleur had gone to the marqueterie bureau in the little sanctuary that would have been called a boudoir in old days. She sat there brooding. How could her father have made it all glaringly public? Couldn’t he have seen that it was nothing so long as it was not public, but everything the moment it was? She longed to pour out her heart, and tell people her opinion of Marjorie Ferrar.

She wrote three letters — one to Lady Alison, and two to women in the group who had overheard it all last night. She concluded her third letter with the words: “A woman like that, who pretends to be a friend and sneaks into one’s house to sting one behind one’s back, is a snake of the first water. How Society can stick her, I can’t think; she hasn’t a moral about her nor a decent impulse. As for her charm — Good Lord!” Yes! And there was Francis Wilmot! She had not said all she wanted to say to him.

“MY DEAR FRANCIS,” she wrote:

“I am so sorry you have to run away like this. I wanted to thank you for standing up for me last night. Marjorie Ferrar is just about the limit. But in London society one doesn’t pay attention to backbiting. It has been so jolly to know you. Don’t forget us; and do come and see me again when you come back from Paris.

“Your very good friend,

“FLEUR MONT.”

In future she would have nothing but men at her evenings! But would they come if there were no women? And men like Philip Quinsey were just as snakelike. Besides, it would look as if she were really hurt. No! She would have to go on as before, just dropping people who were ‘catty.’ But who wasn’t? Except Alison, and heavyweights like Mr. Blythe, the minor Ambassadors, and three or four earnest politicians, she couldn’t be sure about any of them. It was the thing to be ‘catty.’ They all scratched other people’s backs, and their faces too when they weren’t looking. Who in Society was exempt from scratches, and who didn’t scratch? Not to scratch a little was so dreadfully dull. She could not imagine a scratchless life except perhaps in Italy. Those Fra Angelico frescoes in the San Marco monastery! THERE was a man who did not scratch. St. Francis, too, talking to his birds, among his little flowers, with the sun and the moon and the stars for near relations. Ste. Claire! Ste. Fleur — little sister of St. Francis! To be unworldly and quite good! To be one who lived to make other people happy! How new! How exciting, even — for about a week; and how dull afterwards! She drew aside the curtains and looked out into the Square. Two cats were standing in the light of a lamp — narrow, marvellously graceful, with their heads turned towards each other. Suddenly they began uttering horrible noises, and became all claws. Fleur dropped the curtain.

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CHAPTER X

FRANCIS WILMOT REVERSES

About that moment Francis Wilmot sat down in the lounge of the Cosmopolis Hotel, and as suddenly sat up. In the middle of the parquet floor, sliding and lunging, backing and filling, twisting and turning in the arms of a man with a face like a mask, was she, to avoid whom, out of loyalty to Fleur and Michael, he had decided to go to Paris. Fate! For he could hardly know that she came there most afternoons during the dancing hours. She and her partner were easily the show couple; and, fond of dancing, Francis Wilmot knew he was looking at something special. When they stopped, quite close to him, he said in his soft drawl:

"That was beautiful."

"How do you do, Mr. Wilmot?"

Why! She knew his name! This was the moment to exhibit loyalty! But she had sunk into a chair next his.

"And so you thought me a traitress last night?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"Because I heard you call your hostess a snob."

Marjorie Ferrar uttered an amused sound.

"My dear young man, if one never called one's friends anything worse than that —! I didn't mean you to hear, or that poptious old person with the chin!"

"He was her father," said Francis Wilmot, gravely. "It hurt him."

"Well! I'm sorry!"

A hand without a glove, warm but dry, was put into his. When it was withdrawn the whole of his hand and arm were tingling.

"Do you dance?"

"Yes, indeed, but I wouldn't presume to dance with you."

"Oh! but you must."

Francis Wilmot's head went round, and his body began going round too.

"You dance better than an Englishman, unless he's professional," said her lips six inches from his own.

"I'm proud to hear you say so, ma'am."

"Don't you know my name? or do you always call women ma'am? It's ever so pretty."

"Certainly I know your name and where you live. I wasn't six yards from you this morning at four o'clock."

"What were you doing there?"

"I just thought I'd like to be near you."

Marjorie Ferrar said, as if to herself:

"The prettiest speech I ever heard. Come and have tea with me there tomorrow."

Reversing, side-stepping, doing all he knew, Francis Wilmot said, slowly:

"I have to be in Paris."

"Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you."

"I'm not afraid, but —"

"Well, I shall expect you." And, transferring herself again to her mask-faced partner, she looked back at him over her shoulder.

Francis Wilmot wiped his brow. An astonishing experience, another blow to his preconception of a stiff and formal race! If he had not known she was the daughter of a lord, he would have thought her an American. Would she ask him to dance with her again? But she left the lounge without another glance.

An up-to-date young man, a typical young man, would have felt the more jaunty. But he was neither. Six months' training for the Air Service in 1918, one visit to New York, and a few trips to Charleston and Savannah, had left him still a countryman, with a tradition of good manners, work, and simple living. Women, of whom he had known few, were to him worthy of considerable respect. He judged them by his sister, or by the friends of his dead mother, in Savannah, who were all of a certain age. A Northern lady on the boat had told him that Southern girls measured life by the number of men they could attract; she had given him an amusing take-off of a Southern girl. It had been a surprise to this young Southerner. Anne was not like that; she had never had the chance to be, anyway, having married at nineteen the first young man who had asked her!

By the morning's post he received Fleur's little letter. 'Limit!' Limit of what? He felt indignant. He did not go to Paris, and at four o'clock he was at Wren Street.

In her studio Marjorie Ferrar, clad in a flax-blue overall, was scraping at a picture with a little knife. An hour later he was her slave. Cruft's Dog Show, the Beefeaters, the Derby — he could not even remember his desire to see them; he only desired to see one English thing — Marjorie Ferrar. He hardly remembered which way the river flowed, and by mere accident walked East instead of West. Her hair, her eyes, her voice — he 'had fallen for her!' He knew himself for a fool, and did not mind; farther man cannot go. She passed him in a little open car, driving it herself, on her way to a rehearsal. She waved her hand. Blood rushed to his heart and rushed away; he trembled and went pale. And, as the car vanished, he felt lost, as if in a world of shadows, grey and dreary! Ah! There was Parliament! And, near by, the one spot in London where he could go and talk of Marjorie Ferrar, and that was where she had misbehaved herself! He itched to defend her from the charge of being 'the limit.' He could perceive the inappropriateness of going back there to talk to Fleur of her enemy, but anything was better than not talking of her. So, turning into South Square, he rang the bell.

Fleur was in her 'parlour,' if not precisely eating bread and honey, at least having tea.

"Not in Paris? How nice! Tea?"

"I've had it," said Francis Wilmot, colouring. "I had it with HER."

Fleur stared.

"Oh!" she said, with a laugh. "How interesting! Where did she pick you up?"

Without taking in the implication of the words, Francis Wilmot was conscious of something deadly in them.

"She was at the 'the dansant' at my hotel yesterday. She's a wonderful dancer. I think she's a wonderful person altogether; I'd like to have you tell me what you mean by calling her 'the limit'?"

"I'd like to have you tell me why this volte face since Wednesday night?"

Francis Wilmot smiled: "You people have been ever so kind to me, and I want you to be friends with her again. I'm sure she didn't mean what she said that night."

"Indeed! Did she tell you that?"

"Why — not exactly! She said she didn't mean us to hear them."

"No?"

He looked at her smiling face, conscious, perhaps, of deep waters, but youthfully, Americanly, unconscious of serious obstacle to his desire to smooth things out.

"I just hate to think you two are out after each other. Won't you come and meet her at my hotel, and shake hands?"

Fleur's eyes moved slowly over him from head to toe.

"You look as if you might have some French blood in you. Have you?"

"Yes. My grandmother was of French stock."

"Well, I have more. The French, you know, don't forgive easily. And they don't persuade themselves into believing what they want to."

Francis Wilmot rose, and spoke with a kind of masterfulness.

"You're going to tell me what you meant in your letter."

"Am I? My dear young man, the limit of perfection, of course. Aren't you a living proof?"

Aware that he was being mocked, and mixed in his feelings, Francis Wilmot made for the door.

“Good-bye,” he said. “I suppose you’ll have no use for me in future.”

“Good-bye!” said Fleur.

He went out rueful, puzzled, lonelier even than when he went in. He was guideless, with no one to ‘put him wise’! No directness and simplicity in this town. People did not say what they meant; and his goddess — as enigmatic and twisting as the rest! More so — more so — for what did the rest matter?

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CHAPTER XI

SOAMES VISITS THE PRESS

Soames had gone off to his sister's in Green Street thoroughly upset. That Fleur should have a declared enemy, powerful in Society, filled him with uneasiness; that she should hold him accountable for it, seemed the more unjust, because in fact he was.

An evening spent under the calming influence of Winifred Dartie's common-sense, and Turkish coffee, which, though 'liverish stuff,' he always drank with relish, restored in him something of the feeling that it was a storm in a teacup.

"But that paper paragraph," he said, "sticks in my gizzard."

"Very tiresome, Soames, the whole thing; but I shouldn't bother. People skim those 'chiff-chaff' little notes and forget them the next moment. They're just put in for fun."

"Pretty sort of fun! That paper says it has a million readers."

"There's no name mentioned."

"These political people and whipper-snappers in Society all know each other," said Soames.

"Yes, my dear boy," said Winifred in her comfortable voice, so cosey, and above disturbance, "but nobody takes anything seriously nowadays."

She was sensible. He went up to bed in more cheerful mood.

But retirement from affairs had effected in Soames a deeper change than he was at all aware of. Lacking professional issues to anchor the faculty for worrying he had inherited from James Forsyte, he was inclined to pet any trouble that came along. The more he thought of that paragraph, the more he felt inclined for a friendly talk with the editor. If he could go to Fleur and say: "I've made it all right with those fellows, anyway. There'll be no more of that sort of thing," he would wipe out her vexation. If you couldn't make people in private think well of your daughter, you could surely check public expression of the opposite opinion.

Except that he did not like to get into them, Soames took on the whole a favourable view of 'the papers.' He read The Times; his father had read it before him, and he had been brought up on its crackle. It had news — more news for his money than he could get through. He respected its leading articles; and if its great supplements had at times appeared to him too much of a good thing, still it was a gentleman's paper. Annette and Winifred took The Morning Post. That also was a gentleman's paper, but it had bees in its bonnet. Bees in bonnets were respectable things, but personally Soames did not care for them. He knew little of the other papers except that those he saw about had bigger headlines and seemed cut up into little bits. Of the Press as a whole he took the English view: It was an institution. It had its virtues and its vices — anyway you had to put up with it.

About eleven o'clock he was walking towards Fleet Street.

At the office of The Evening Sun he handed in his card and asked to see the Editor. After a moment's inspection of his top-hat, he was taken down a corridor and deposited in a small room. It seemed a 'wandering great place.' Some one would see him!

"Some one?" said Soames: "I want the Editor."

The Editor was very busy; could he come again when the rush was over?

"No," said Soames.

Would he state his business? Soames wouldn't.

The attendant again looked at his top-hat and went away.

Soames waited a quarter of an hour, and was then taken to an even smaller room, where a cheery-looking man in eye-glasses was turning over a book of filed cuttings. He glanced up as Soames entered, took his card from the table, and read from it:

"Mr. Soames Forsyte? Yes?"

"Are you the Editor?" asked Soames.

"One of them. Take a seat. What can I do for you?"

Impressed by a certain speed in the air, and desirous of making a good impression, Soames did not sit down, but took from his pocket-book the paragraph.

"I've come about this in your issue of last Thursday."

The cheery man put it up to his eyes, seemed to chew the sense of it a little with his mouth, and said: "Yes?"

"Would you kindly tell me who wrote it?"

"We never disclose the names of correspondents, sir."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I know."

The cheery man's mouth opened, as if to emit the words: "Then why did you ask?" but closed in a smile instead.

"You'll forgive me," said Soames; "it quite clearly refers to my daughter, Mrs. Michael Mont, and her husband."

"Indeed! You have the advantage of me; but what's the matter with it? Seems rather a harmless piece of gossip."

Soames looked at him. He was too cheery;

"You think so?" he said, drily. "May I ask if you would like to have your daughter alluded to as an enterprising little lady?"

"Why not? It's quite a pleasant word. Besides, there's no name mentioned."

"Do you put things in," asked Soames, shrewdly, "in order that they may be Greek to all your readers?"

The cheery man laughed: "Well," he said, "hardly. But really, sir, aren't you rather thin-skinned?"

This was an aspect of the affair that Soames had not foreseen. Before he could ask this Editor chap not to repeat his offence, he had apparently to convince him that it WAS an offence; but to do that he must expose the real meaning of the paragraph.

"Well," he said, "if you can't see that the tone of the thing's unpleasant, I can't make you. But I beg you won't let any more such paragraphs appear. I happen to know that your correspondent is actuated by malevolence."

The cheery man again ran his eye over the cutting.

"I shouldn't have judged that. People in politics are taking and giving knocks all the time — they're not mealy-mouthed. This seems perfectly innocuous as gossip goes."

Thus backhanded by the words 'thin-skinned' and 'mealy-mouthed,' Soames said testily:

"The whole thing's extremely petty."

"Well, sir, you know, I rather agree. Good morning!" and the cheery man blandly returned to his file.

The fellow was like an india-rubber ball! Soames clenched his top-hat. Now or never he must make him bound.

"If your correspondent thinks she can vent her spleen in print with impunity, she will find herself very much mistaken." He waited for the effect. There was absolutely none. "Good morning!" he said, and turned on his heel.

Somehow it had not been so friendly as he had expected. Michael's words "The Press is a sensitive plant" came into his mind. He shouldn't mention his visit.

Two days later, picking up The Evening Sun at The Connoisseurs, he saw the word "Foggartism." H'm! A leader!

"Of the panaceas rife among the young hopefuls in politics, perhaps the most absurd is one which goes by the name of Foggartism. We are in a position to explain the nature of this patent remedy for what is supposed to be the national ill-health before it has been put on the market. Based on Sir James Foggart's book, "The Parlous State of England," the main article of faith in this crazy creed would appear to be the depletion of British man-power. According to its prophets, we are to despatch to the ends of the Empire hundreds of thousands of our boys and girls as soon as they leave school. Quite apart from the rank impossibility of absorbing them into the life of the slowly developing Dominions, we are to lose this vital stream of labour and defensive material, in order that twenty years hence the demand from our Dominions may equal the supplying power of Great Britain. A crazier proposition was never conceived in woolly brains. Well does the word Foggartism characterise such a proposition. Alongside this emigration 'stunt'— for there is no other term which suits its sensational character — rises a feeble back-to-the-land propaganda. The keystone of the whole professes to be the doctrine that the standard of British wages and living now preclude us from any attempt to rival German production, or to recover our trade with Europe. Such a turning of the tail on our industrial supremacy has probably never before been mooted in this country. The sooner these cheap-jack gerrymanders of British policy realise that the British voter will have nothing to do with so crack-brained a scheme, the sooner it will come to the still birth which is its inevitable fate.”

Whatever attention Soames had given to “The Parlous State of England,” he could not be accused of anything so rash as a faith in Foggartism. If Foggartism were killed tomorrow, he, with his inherent distrust of theories and ideas, his truly English pragmatism, could not help feeling that Michael would be well rid of a white elephant. What disquieted him, however, was the suspicion that he himself had inspired this article. Was this that too-cheery fellow’s retort?

Decidedly, he should not mention his visit when he dined in South Square that evening.

The presence of a strange hat on the sarcophagus warned him of a fourth party. Mr. Blythe, in fact, with a cocktail in his hand, and an olive in his mouth, was talking to Fleur, who was curled up on a cushion by the fire.

“You know Mr. Blythe, Dad?”

Another Editor! Soames extended his hand with caution.

Mr. Blythe swallowed the olive. “It’s of no importance,” he said.

“Well,” said Fleur, “*I* think you ought to put it all off, and let them feel they’ve made fools of themselves.”

“Does Michael think that, Mrs. Mont?”

“No; Michael’s got his shirt out!” And they all looked round at Michael, who was coming in.

He certainly had a somewhat headstrong air.

According to Michael, they must take it by the short hairs and give as good as they got, or they might as well put up the shutters. They were sent to Parliament to hold their own opinions, not those stuck into them by Fleet Street. If they genuinely believed the Foggart policy to be the only way to cure unemployment, and stem the steady drain into the towns, they must say so, and not be stampeded by every little newspaper attack that came along. Common-sense was on their side, and common-sense, if you aired it enough, won through in the end. The opposition to Foggartism was really based on an intention to force lower wages and longer hours on Labour, only they daren’t say so in so many words. Let the papers jump through their hoops as much as they liked. He would bet that when Foggartism had been six months before the public, they would be eating half their words with an air of eating some one else’s! And suddenly he turned to Soames:

“I suppose, sir, you didn’t go down about that paragraph?”

Soames, privately, and as a business man, had always so conducted himself that, if cornered, he need never tell a direct untruth. Lies were not English, not even good form. Looking down his nose, he said slowly:

“Well, I let them know that I knew that woman’s name.”

Fleur frowned; Mr. Blythe reached out and took some salted almonds.

“What did I tell you, sir?” said Michael. “They always get back on you. The Press has a tremendous sense of dignity; and corns on both feet; eh, Mr. Blythe?”

Mr. Blythe said weightily: “It’s a very human institution, young man. It prefers to criticise rather than to be criticised.”

“I thought,” said Fleur, icily, “that I was to be left to my own cudgels.”

The discussion broke back to Foggartism, but Soames sat brooding. He would never again interfere in what didn’t concern himself. Then, like all who love, he perceived the bitterness of his fate. He had only meddled with what DID concern himself — her name, her happiness; and she resented it. Basket in which were all his eggs, to the end of his days he must go on walking gingerly, balancing her so that she was not upset, spilling his only treasure.

She left them over the wine that only Mr. Blythe was drinking. Soames heard an odd word now and then, gathered that this great frog-chap was going to burst next week in The Outpost, gathered that Michael was to get on to his hind legs in the House at the first opportunity. It was all a muzz of words to him. When they rose, he said to Michael:

“I’ll take myself off.”

“We’re going down to the House, sir: won’t you stay with Fleur?”

“No,” said Soames: “I must be getting back.”

Michael looked at him closely.

“I’ll just tell her you’re going.”

Soames had wrapped himself into his coat, and was opening the door when he smelled violet soap. A bare arm had come round his neck. He felt soft pressure against his back. “Sorry, Dad, for being such a pig.”

Soames shook his head.

“No,” said her voice; “you’re not going like that.”

She slipped between him and the door. Her clear eyes looked into his; her teeth gleamed, very white. “Say you forgive me!”

“There’s no end to it,” said Soames.

She thrust her lips against his nose. “There! Good night, ducky! I know I’m spoiled!”

Soames gave her body a convulsive little squeeze, opened the door and went out without a word.

Under Big Ben boys were calling — political news, he supposed. Those Labour chaps were going to fall — some Editor had got them into trouble. He would! Well — one down, t’other come on! It was all remote to him. She alone — she alone mattered.

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CHAPTER XII

MICHAEL MUSES

Michael and Mr. Blythe sought the Mother of Parliaments and found her in commotion. Liberalism had refused, and Labour was falling from its back. A considerable number of people were in Parliament Square contemplating Big Ben and hoping for sensation.

"I'm not going in," said Michael. "There won't be a division to-night. General Election's a foregone conclusion, now. I want to think."

"One will go up for a bit," said Mr. Blythe; and they parted, Michael returning to the streets. The night was clear, and he had a longing to hear the voice of his country. But — where? For his countrymen would be discussing this pro and that con, would be mentioning each his personal 'grief'— here the Income Tax, there the dole, the names of leaders, the word Communism. Nowhere would he catch the echo of the uneasiness in the hearts of all. The Tories — as Fleur had predicted — would come in now. The country would catch at the anodyne of 'strong stable government.' But could strong stable government remove the inherent canker, the lack of balance in the top-heavy realm? Could it still the gnawing ache which everybody felt, and nobody would express?

'Spoiled,' thought Michael, 'by our past prosperity. We shall never admit it,' he thought, 'never! And yet in our bones we feel it!'

England with the silver spoon in her mouth and no longer the teeth to hold it there, or the will to part with it! And her very qualities — the latent 'grit,' the power to take things smiling, the lack of nerves and imagination! Almost vices, now, perpetuating the rash belief that England could still 'muddle through' without special effort, although with every year there was less chance of recovering from shock, less time in which to exercise the British 'virtues.' 'Slow in the uptak',' thought Michael, 'it's a bad fault in 1924.'

Thus musing, he turned East. Mid-theatre-hour, and the 'Great Parasite'— as Sir James Foggart called it — was lying inert, and bright. He walked the length of wakeful Fleet Street into the City so delirious by day, so dead by night. Here England's wealth was snoozing off the day's debauch. Here were all the frame and filaments of English credit. And based on — what? On food and raw material from which England, undefended in the air, might be cut off by a fresh war; on Labour, too big for European boots. And yet that credit stood high still, soothing all with its 'panache'— save, perhaps, receivers of the dole. With her promise to pay, England could still purchase anything, except a quiet heart.

And Michael walked on — through Whitechapel, busy still and coloured — into Mile End. The houses had become low, as if to give the dwellers a better view of stars they couldn't reach. He had crossed a frontier. Here was a different race almost; another England, but as happy-go-lucky and as hand-to-mouth as the England of Fleet Street and the City. Aye, and more! For the England in Mile End knew that whatever she felt could have no effect on policy. Mile on mile, without an end, the low grey streets stretched towards the ultimate deserted grass. Michael did not follow them, but coming to a Cinema, turned in.

The show was far advanced. Bound and seated in front of the bad cowboy on a bronco, the heroine was crossing what Michael shrewdly suspected to be the film company's pet paddock. Every ten seconds she gave way to John T. Bronson, Manager of the Tucsonville Copper Mine, devouring the road in his 60 h. p. Packard, to cut her off before she reached the Pima river. Michael contemplated his fellow gazers. Lapping it up! Strong stable government — not much! This was their anodyne and they could not have enough of it. He saw the bronco fall, dropped by a shot from John T. Bronson, and the screen disclose the words: "Hairy Pete grows desperate. . . . 'You shall not have her, Bronson.'" Quite! He was throwing her into the river instead, to the words: "John T. Bronson dives." There he goes! He has her by her flowing hair! But Hairy Pete is kneeling on the bank. The bullets chip the water. Through the heroine's fair perforated shoulder the landscape is almost visible. What is that sound? Yes! John T. Bronson is setting his teeth! He lands, he drags her out. From his cap he takes his automatic. Still dry — thank God!

"Look to yourself, Hairy Pete!" A puff of smoke. Pete squirms and bites the sand — he seems almost to absorb the desert. "Hairy Pete gets it for keeps!" Slow music, slower! John T. Bronson raises the reviving form. Upon the bank of the

Pima river they stand embraced, and the sun sets. "At last, my dinky love!"

'Pom, pom! that's the stuff!' thought Michael, returning to the light of night: 'Back to the Land! "Plough the fields and scatter"— when they can get this? Not much!' And he turned West again, taking a seat on the top of a 'bus beside a man with grease-stains on his clothes. They travelled in silence till Michael said:

"What do you make of the political situation, sir?"

The possible plumber replied, without turning his head:

"I should say they've overreached theirselves."

"Ought to have fought on Russia — oughtn't they?"

"Russia — that cock won't fight either. Nao — ought to 'ave 'eld on to the Spring, an' fought on a good stiff Budget."

"Real class issue?"

"Yus!"

"But do you think class politics can wipe out unemployment?"

The man's mouth moved under his moustache as if mumbling a new idea.

"Ah! I'm fed up with politics; in work today and out tomorrow — what's the good of politics that can't give you a permanent job?"

"That's it."

"Reparations," said his neighbour; "WE'RE not goin' to benefit by reparations. The workin' classes ought to stand together in every country." And he looked at Michael to see how he liked THAT.

"A good many people thought so before the war; and see what happened."

"Ah!" said the man, "and what good's it done us?"

"Have you thought of emigrating to the Dominions?"

The man shook his head.

"Don't like what I see of the Austrylians and Canydians."

"Confirmed Englishman — like myself."

"That's right," said the man. "So long, Mister," and he got off.

Michael travelled till the 'bus put him down under Big Ben, and it was nearly twelve. Another election! Could he stand a second time without showing his true colours? Not the faintest hope of making Foggartism clear to a rural constituency in three weeks! If he spoke from now till the day of the election, they would merely think he held rather extreme views on Imperial Preference, which, by the way, he did. He could never tell the electorate that he thought England was on the wrong tack — one might just as well not stand. He could never buttonhole the ordinary voter, and say to him: "Look here, you know, there's no earthly hope of any real improvement for another ten years; in the meantime we must face the music, and pay more for everything, so that twenty years hence we may be safe from possible starvation, and self-supporting within the Empire." It wasn't done. Nor could he say to his Committee: "My friends, I represent a policy that no one else does, so far."

No! If he meant to stand again, he must just get the old wheezes off his chest. But did he mean to stand again? Few people had less conceit than Michael — he knew himself for a lightweight. But he had got this bee into his bonnet; the longer he lived the more it buzzed, the more its buzz seemed the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and that wilderness his country. To stop up that buzzing in his ears; to turn his back on old Blythe; to stifle his convictions, and yet remain in Parliament — he could not! It was like the war over again. Once in, you couldn't get out. And he was 'in'— committed to something deeper far than the top dressings of Party politics. Foggartism had a definite solution of England's troubles to work towards — an independent, balanced Empire; an England safe in the air, and free from unemployment — with Town and Country once more in some sort of due proportion! Was it such a hopeless dream? Apparently!

'Well,' thought Michael, putting his latchkey in his door, 'they may call me what kind of a bee fool they like — I shan't budge.' He went up to his dressing-room and, opening the window, leaned out.

The rumourous town still hummed; the sky was faintly coloured by reflection from its million lights. A spire was visible, some stars; the tree foliage in the Square hung flat, unstirred by wind. Peaceful and almost warm — the night.

Michael remembered a certain evening — the last London air raid of the war. From his convalescent hospital he had watched it for three hours.

‘What fools we all are not to drop fighting in the air,’ he thought: ‘Well, if we don’t, I shall go all out for a great air force — all hangs, for us, on safety from air attack. Even the wise can understand that.’

Two men had stopped beneath his window, talking. One was his next-door neighbour.

“Mark my words,” said his neighbour, “the election’ll see a big turnover.”

“Yes; and what are you going to do with it?” said the other.

“Let things alone; they’ll right themselves. I’m sick of all this depressing twaddle. A shilling off the Income Tax, and you’ll see.”

“How are you going to deal with the Land?”

“Oh! damn the Land! Leave it to itself, that’s all the farmers really want. The more you touch it, the worse it gets.”

“Let the grass grow under your feet?”

The neighbour laughed. “That’s about it. Well, what else CAN you do — the Country won’t have it. Good night!”

Sounds of a door, of footsteps. A car drove by; a moth flew in Michael’s face. “The Country won’t have it!” Policies! What but mental yawns, long shrugs of the shoulders, trustings to Luck! What else could they be? THE COUNTRY WOULDN’T HAVE IT! And Big Ben struck twelve.

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CHAPTER XIII

INCEPTION OF THE CASE

There are people in every human hive born to focus talk; perhaps their magnetism draws the human tongue, or their lives are lived at an acute angle. Of such was Marjorie Ferrar — one of the most talked-of young women in London. Whatever happened to her was rumoured at once in that collection of the busy and the idle called Society. That she had been ejected from a drawing-room was swiftly known. Fleur's letters about her became current gossip. The reasons for ejectment varied from truth to a legend that she had lifted Michael from the arms of his wife.

The origins of lawsuits are seldom simple. And when Soames called it all 'a storm in a teacup,' he might have been right if Lord Charles Ferrar had not been so heavily in debt that he had withdrawn his daughter's allowance; if, too, a Member for a Scottish borough, Sir Alexander MacGown, had not for some time past been pursuing her with the idea of marriage. Wealth made out of jute, a rising Parliamentary repute, powerful physique, and a determined character, had not advanced Sir Alexander's claims in twelve months so much as the withdrawal of her allowance advanced them in a single night. Marjorie Ferrar was, indeed, of those who can always get money at a pinch, but even to such come moments when they have seriously to consider what kind of pinch. In proportion to her age and sex, she was 'dipped' as badly as her father, and the withdrawal of her allowance was in the nature of a last straw. In a moment of discouragement she consented to an engagement, not yet to be made public. When the incident at Fleur's came to Sir Alexander's ears, he went to his bethrothed flaming. What could he do?

"Nothing, of course; don't be silly, Alec! Who cares?"

"The thing's monstrous. Let me go and exact an apology from this old blackguard."

"Father's been, and he wouldn't give it. He's got a chin you could hang a kettle on."

"Now, look here, Marjorie, you've got to make our engagement public, and let me get to work on him. I won't have this story going about."

Marjorie Ferrar shook her head.

"Oh! no, my dear. You're still on probation. I don't care a tuppenny ice about the story."

"Well, I do, and I'm going to that fellow tomorrow."

Marjorie Ferrar studied his face — its brown, burning eyes, its black, stiff hair, its jaw — shivered slightly, and had a brain-wave.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Alec, or you'll spill your ink. My father wants me to bring an action. He says I shall get swinging damages."

The Scotsman in MacGown applauded, the lover quailed.

"That may be very unpleasant for you," he muttered, "unless the brute settles out of Court."

"Of course he'll settle. I've got all his evidence in my vanity-bag."

MacGown gripped her by the shoulders and gave her a fierce kiss.

"If he doesn't, I'll break every bone in his body."

"My dear! He's nearly seventy, I should think."

"H'm! Isn't there a young man in the same boat with him?"

"Michael? Oh! Michael's a dear. I couldn't have his bones broken."

"Indeed!" said MacGown. "Wait till he launches this precious Foggartism they talk of — dreary rot! I'll eat him!"

"Poor little Michael!"

"I heard something about an American boy, too."

"Oh!" said Marjorie Ferrar, releasing herself from his grip. "A bird of passage — don't bother about him."

"Have you got a lawyer?"

"Not yet."

"I'll send you mine. He'll make them sit up!"

She remained pensive after he had left her, distrusting her own brain-wave. If only she weren't so hard up! She had learned during this month of secret engagement that "Nothing for nothing and only fair value for sixpence" ruled North of the Tweed as well as South. He had taken a good many kisses and given her one trinket which she dared not take to 'her Uncle's.' It began to look as if she would have to marry him. The prospect was in some ways not repulsive — he was emphatically a man; her father would take care that she only married him on terms as liberal as his politics; and perhaps her motto 'Live dangerously' could be even better carried out with him than without. Resting inert in a long chair, she thought of Francis Wilmot. Hopeless as husband, he might be charming as lover, naive, fresh, unknown in London, absurdly devoted, oddly attractive, with his lithe form, dark eyes, engaging smile. Too old-fashioned for words, he had made it clear already that he wanted to marry her. He was a baby. But until she was beyond his reach, she had begun to feel that he was beyond hers. After? Well, who knew? She lived in advance, dangerously, with Francis Wilmot. In the meantime this action for slander was a bore! And shaking the idea out of her head, she ordered her horse, changed her clothes, and repaired to the Row. After that she again changed her clothes, went to the Cosmopolis Hotel, and danced with her mask-faced partner, and Francis Wilmot. After that she changed her clothes once more, went to a first night, partook of supper afterwards with the principal actor and his party, and was in bed by two o'clock.

Like most reputations, that of Marjorie Ferrar received more than its deserts. If you avow a creed of indulgence, you will be indulged by the credulous. In truth she had only had two love-affairs passing the limits of decorum; had smoked opium once, and been sick over it; and had sniffed cocaine just to see what it was like. She gambled only with discretion, and chiefly on race-horses; drank with strict moderation and a good head; smoked of course, but the purest cigarettes she could get, and through a holder. If she had learned suggestive forms of dancing, she danced them but once in a blue moon. She rarely rode at a five-barred gate, and that only on horses whose powers she knew. To be in the know she read, of course, anything 'extreme,' but would not go out of her way to do so. She had flown, but just to Paris. She drove a car well, and of course fast, but, never to the danger of herself, and seldom to the real danger of the public. She had splendid health, and took care of it in private. She could always sleep at ten minutes' notice, and when she sat up half the night, slept half the day. She was 'in' with the advanced theatre, but took it as it came. Her book of poems, which had received praise because they emanated from one of a class supposed to be unpoetic, was remarkable not so much for irregularity of thought as for irregularity of metre. She was, in sum, credited with a too strict observance of her expressed creed: 'Take life in both hands, and eat it.'

This was why Sir Alexander MacGown's lawyer sat on the edge of his chair in her studio the following morning, and gazed at her intently. He knew her renown better than Sir Alexander. Messrs. Settlewhite and Stark liked to be on the right side of a matter before they took it up. How far would this young lady, with her very attractive appearance and her fast reputation, stand fire? For costs — they had Sir Alexander's guarantee and the word 'traitress' was a good enough beginning; but in cases of word against word, it was ill predicting.

Her physiognomy impressed Mr. Settlewhite favourably. She would not 'get rattled' in Court, if he were any judge; nor had she the Aubrey Beardsley cast of feature he had been afraid of, that might alienate a Jury. No! an upstanding young woman with a good blue eye and popular hair. She would do, if her story were all right.

Marjorie Ferrar, in turn, scrutinised one who looked as if he might take things out of her hands. Long-faced, with grey deep eyes under long dark lashes, with all his hair, and good clothes, he was as well preserved a man of sixty as she had ever seen.

"What do you want me to tell you, Mr. Settlewhite?"

"The truth."

"Oh! but naturally. Well, I was just saying to Mr. Quinsey that Mrs. Mont was very eager to form a 'salon,' and had none of the right qualities, and the old person who overheard me thought I was insulting her —"

"That all?"

"Well, I may have said she was fond of lions; and so she is."

"Yes; but why did he call you a traitress?"

"Because she was his daughter and my hostess, I suppose."

"Will this Mr. Quinsey confirm you?"

"Philip Quinsey? — oh! rather! He's in my pocket."

"Did anybody else overhear you running her down?"

She hesitated a second. "No."

'First lie!' thought Mr. Settlewhite, with his peculiar sweet-sarcastic smile. "What about an American?"

Marjorie Ferrar laughed. "He won't say so, anyway."

"An admirer?"

"No. He's going back to America."

'Second lie!' thought Mr. Settlewhite. 'But she tells them well.'

"You want an apology you can show to those who overheard the insult; and what we can get, I suppose?"

"Yes. The more the better."

'Speaking the truth there,' thought Mr. Settlewhite. "Are you hard up?"

"Couldn't well be harder."

Mr. Settlewhite put one hand on each knee, and reared his slim body.

"You don't want it to come into Court?"

"No; though I suppose it might be rather fun."

Mr. Settlewhite smiled again.

"That entirely depends on how many skeletons you have in your cupboard."

Marjorie Ferrar also smiled.

"I shall put everything in your hands," she said.

"Not THEM, my dear young lady. Well, we'll serve him and see how the cat jumps; but he's a man of means and a lawyer."

"I think he'll hate having anything about his daughter brought out in Court."

"Yes," said Mr. Settlewhite, drily. "So should I."

"And she IS a little snob, you know."

"Ah! Did you happen to use that word?"

"N-no; I'm pretty sure I didn't."

'Third lie!' thought Mr. Settlewhite: 'not so well told.'

"It makes a difference. Quite sure?"

"Not quite."

"He says you did?"

"Well, I told him he was a liar."

"Oh! did you? And they heard you?"

"Rather!"

"That may be important."

"I don't believe he'll say I called her a snob, in Court, anyway."

"That's very shrewd, Miss Ferrar," said Mr. Settlewhite. "I think we shall do."

And with a final look at her from under his long lashes, he stalked, thin and contained, to the door.

Three days later Soames received a legal letter. It demanded a formal apology, and concluded with the words "failing it, action will be taken." Twice in his life he had brought actions himself; once for breach of contract, once for divorce; and now to be sued for slander! In every case he had been the injured party, in his own opinion. He was certainly not going to apologise. Under the direct threat he felt much calmer. He had nothing to be ashamed of. He would call that 'baggage' a traitress to her face again tomorrow, and pay for the luxury, if need be. His mind roved back to when, in the early 'eighties, as a very young lawyer, he had handled his Uncle Swithin's defence against a fellow member of the Walpole Club. Swithin had called him in public "a little touting whipper-snapper of a parson." He remembered how he had whittled the charge down to the word 'whipper-snapper,' by proving the plaintiff's height to be five feet four, his profession the church, his habit the collection of money for the purpose of small-clothing the Fiji islanders. The Jury had assessed ‘whipper-snapper’ at ten pounds — Soames always believed the small clothes had done it. His Counsel had made great game of them — Bobstay, Q. C. There WERE Counsel in those days; the Q. C.‘s had been better than the K. C.‘s were. Bobstay would have gone clean through this ‘baggage’ and come out on the other side. Uncle Swithin had asked him to dinner afterwards and given him York ham with Madeira sauce, and his special Heidsieck. He had never given anybody anything else. Well! There must still be cross-examiners who could tear a reputation to tatters, especially if there wasn’t one to tear. And one could always settle at the last moment if one wished. There was no possibility anyway of Fleur being dragged in as witness or anything of that sort.

He was thunder-struck, a week later, when Michael rang him up at Mapledurham to say that Fleur had been served with a writ for libel in letters containing among others the expressions ‘a snake of the first water’ and ‘she hasn’t a moral about her.’

Soames went cold all over. “I told you not to let her go about abusing that woman.”

“I know; but she doesn’t consult me every time she writes a letter to a friend.”

“Pretty friend!” said Soames into the mouthpiece. “This is a nice pair of shoes!”

“Yes, sir; I’m very worried. She’s absolutely spoiling for a fight — won’t hear of an apology.”

Soames grunted so deeply that Michael’s ear tingled forty miles away.

“In the meantime, what shall we do?”

“Leave it to me,” said Soames. “I’ll come up to-night. Has she any evidence, to support those words?”

“Well, she says —”

“No,” said Soames, abruptly, “don’t tell me over the ‘phone.” And he rang off. He went out on to the lawn. Women! Petted and spoiled — thought they could say what they liked! And so they could till they came up against another woman. He stopped by the boat-house and gazed at the river. The water was nice and clean, and there it was — flowing down to London to get all dirty! That feverish, quarrelsome business up there! Now he would have to set to and rake up all he could against this Ferrar woman, and frighten her off. It was distasteful. But nothing else for it, if Fleur was to be kept out of Court! Terribly petty. Society lawsuits — who ever got anything out of them, save heart-burning and degradation? Like the war, you might win and regret it ever afterwards, or lose and regret it more. All temper! Jealousy and temper!

In the quiet autumn light, with the savour of smoke in his nostrils from his gardener’s first leaf bonfire, Soames felt moral. Here was his son-inlaw, wanting to do some useful work in Parliament, and make a name for the baby, and Fleur beginning to settle down and take a position; and now this had come along, and all the chatterers and busy mockers in Society would be gnashing on them with their teeth — if they had any! He looked at his shadow on the bank, grotesquely slanting towards the water as if wanting to drink. Everything was grotesque, if it came to that! In Society, England, Europe — shadows scrimmaging and sprawling; scuffling and posturing; the world just marking time before another Flood! H’m! He moved towards the river. There went his shadow, plunging in before him! They would all plunge into that mess of cold water if they didn’t stop their squabblings. And, turning abruptly, he entered his kitchen-garden. Nothing unreal there, and most things running to seed — stalks, and so on! How to set about raking up the past of this young woman? Where was it? These young sparks and fly-by-nights! They all had pasts, no doubt; but the definite, the concrete bit of immorality alone was of use, and when it came to the point, was unobtainable, he shouldn’t wonder. People didn’t like giving chapter and verse! It was risky, and not the thing! Tales out of school!

And, among his artichokes, approving of those who did not tell tales, disapproving of any one who wanted them told, Soames resolved grimly that told they must be. The leaf-fire smouldered, and the artichokes smelled rank, the sun went down behind the high brick wall mellowed by fifty years of weather; all was peaceful and chilly, except in his heart. Often now, morning or evening, he would walk among his vegetables — they were real and restful, and you could eat them. They had better flavour than the green-grocer’s and saved his bill — middlemen’s profiteering and all that. Perhaps they represented atavistic instincts in this great-grandson of ‘Superior Dosset’s’ father, that last of a long line of Forsyte ‘agriculturists.’ He set more and more store by vegetables the older he grew. When Fleur was a little bit of a thing, he would find her when he came back from the City, seated among the sunflowers or black currants, nursing her doll. He had once taken a bee out of her hair, and the little brute had stung him. Best years he ever had, before she grew up and took to this gadabout Society business, associating with women who went behind her back. Apology! So she wouldn’t hear of one? She was in the right. But to be in the right and have to go into Court because of it, was one of the most painful experiences that could be undergone. The Courts existed to penalise people who were in the right — in divorce, breach of promise, libel and the rest of it. Those who were in the wrong went to the South of France, or if they did appear, defaulted afterwards and left you to pay your costs. Had he not himself had to pay them in his action against Bosinney? And in his divorce suit had not Young Jolyon and Irene been in Italy when he brought it? And yet, he couldn't bear to think of Fleur eating humble-pie to that red-haired cat. Among the gathering shadows, his resolve hardened. Secure evidence that would frighten the baggage into dropping the whole thing like a hot potato — it was the only way!

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Chapter XIV

Further Consideration

The Government had ‘taken their toss’ over the Editor — no one could say precisely why — and Michael sat down to compose his Address. How say enough without saying anything? And, having impetuously written: “Electors of Mid-Bucks,” he remained for many moments still as a man who has had too good a dinner. “If”— he traced words slowly —“if you again return me as your representative, I shall do my best for the Country according to my lights. I consider the limitation of armaments, and, failing that, the security of Britain through the enlargement of our Air defences; the development of home agriculture; the elimination of unemployment through increased emigration to the Dominions; and the improvement of the national health particularly through the abatement of slums and smoke, to be the most pressing and immediate concerns of British policy. If I am returned, I shall endeavour to foster these ends with determination and coherence; and try not to abuse those whose opinions differ from my own. At my meetings I shall seek to give you some concrete idea of what is in my mind, and submit myself to your questioning.”

Dared he leave it at that? Could one issue an address containing no disparagement of the other side, no panegyric of his own? Would his Committee allow it? Would the electors swallow it? Well, if his Committee didn’t like it — they could turn it down, and himself with it; only — they wouldn’t have time to get another candidate!

The Committee, indeed, did not like it, but they lumped it; and the Address went out with an effigy on it of Michael, looking, as he said, like a hair-dresser. Thereon he plunged into a fray, which, like every other, began in the general and ended in the particular.

During the first Sunday lull at Lippinghall, he developed his poultry scheme — by marking out sites, and deciding how water could be laid on. The bailiff was sulky. In his view it was throwing away money. “Fellers like that!” Who was going to teach them the job? He had no time, himself. It would run into hundreds, and might just as well be poured down the gutter. “The townsman’s no mortial use on the land, Master Michael.”

“So everybody says. But, look here, Tutfield, here are three ‘down and outs,’ two of them ex-Service, and you’ve got to help me put this through. You say yourself this land’s all right for poultry — well, it’s doing no good now. Bowman knows every last thing about chickens; set him on to it until these chaps get the hang. Be a good fellow and put your heart into it; you wouldn’t like being ‘down and out’ yourself.”

The bailiff had a weakness for Michael, whom he had known from his bottle up. He knew the result, but if Master Michael liked to throw his father’s money away, it was no business of his. He even went so far as to mention that he knew “a feller” who had a hut for sale not ten miles away; and that there was “plenty of wood in the copse for the cuttin’.”

On the Tuesday after the Government had fallen Michael went up to town and summoned a meeting of his ‘down and outs.’ They came at three the following day, and he placed them in chairs round the dining-table. Standing under the Goya, like a general about to detail a plan of attack which others would have to execute, he developed his proposal. The three faces expressed little, and that without conviction. Only Bergfeld had known anything of it, before, and his face was the most doubting.

“I don’t know in the least,” went on Michael, “what you think of it; but you all want jobs — two of you in the open, and you, Boddick, don’t mind what it is, I think.”

“That’s right, sir,” said Boddick, “I’m on.”

Michael instantly put him down as the best man of the three.

The other two were silent till Bergfeld said:

“If I had my savings —”

Michael interrupted quickly:

“I’m putting in the capital; you three put in the brains and labour. It’s probably not more than a bare living, but I hope it’ll be a healthy one. What do YOU say, Mr. Swain?”

The hair-dresser, more shadow-stricken than ever, in the glow of Fleur’s Spanish room, smiled.

"I'm sure it's very kind of you. I don't mind havin' a try — only, who's goin' to boss the show?"

"Co-operation, Mr. Swain."

"Ah!" said the hair-dresser; "thought so. But I've seen a lot of tries at that, and it always ends in one bloke swallerin' the rest."

"Very well," said Michael, suddenly, "I'll boss it. But if any of you crane at the job, say so at once, and have done with it. Otherwise I'll get that hut delivered and set up, and we'll start this day month."

Boddick got up, and said: "Right, sir. What about my children?"

"How old, Boddick?"

"Two little girls, four and five."

"Oh! yes!" Michael had forgotten this item. "We must see about that."

Boddick touched his forelock, shook Michael's hand, and went out. The other two remained standing.

"Good-bye, Mr. Bergfeld; good-bye, Mr. Swain!"

"If I might —"

"Could I speak to you for a minute?"

"Anything you have to say," said Michael, astutely, "had better be said in each other's presence."

"I've always been used to hair."

'Pity,' thought Michael, 'that Life didn't drop that "h" for him — poor beggar!' "Well, we'll get you a breed of birds that can be shingled," he said. The hairdresser smiled down one side of his face. "Beggars can't be choosers," he remarked.

"*I* wished to ask you," said Bergfeld, "what system we shall adopt?"

"That's got to be worked out. Here are two books on poultry-keeping; you'd better read one each, and swop."

He noted that Bergfeld took both without remonstrance on the part of Swain.

Seeing them out into the Square, he thought: 'Rum team! It won't work, but they've got their chance.'

A young man who had been standing on the pavement came forward.

"Mr. Michael Mont, M. P.?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Michael Mont at home?"

"I think so. What do you want?"

"I must see her personally, please."

"Who are you from?"

"Messrs. Settlewhite and Stark — a suit."

"Dressmakers?"

The young man smiled.

"Come in," said Michael. "I'll see if she's at home."

Fleur was in the 'parlour.'

"A young man from some dressmaker's for you, dear."

"Mrs. Michael Mont? In the suit of Ferrar against Mont — libel. Good day, madam."

Between those hours of four and eight, when Soames arrived from Mapledurham, Michael suffered more than Fleur. To sit and see a legal operation performed on her with all the scientific skill of the British Bar, it was an appalling prospect; and there would be no satisfaction in Marjorie Ferrar's also being on the table, with her inside exposed to the gaze of all! He was only disconcerted, therefore, when Fleur said:

"All right; if she wants to be opened up, she shall be. I know she flew to Paris with Walter Nazing last November; and I've always been told she was Bertie Curfew's mistress for a year."

A Society case — cream for all the cats in Society, muck for all the blow-flies in the streets — and Fleur the hub of it! He waited for Soames with impatience. Though 'Old Forsyte's' indignation had started this, Michael turned to him now, as to an anchor let go off a lee shore. The 'old man' had experience, judgment, and a chin; he would know what, except bearing it with a grin, could be done. Gazing at a square foot of study wall which had escaped a framed caricature, he reflected on the underlying savagery of life. He would be eating a lobster to-night that had been slowly boiled alive! This study had been cleaned out by a charwoman whose mother was dying of cancer, whose son had lost a leg in the war, and who looked so jolly tired that he felt quite bad whenever he thought of her. The Bergfelds, Swains and Boddicks of the world — the Camden Towns, and Mile Ends — the devastated regions of France, the rock villages of Italy! Over it all what a thin crust of gentility! Members of Parliament, and ladies of fashion, like himself and Fleur, simpering and sucking silver spoons, and now and then dropping spoons and simper, and going for each other like Kilkenny cats!

"What evidence has she got to support those words?" Michael racked his memory. This was going to be a game of bluff. That Walter Nazing and Marjorie Ferrar had flown to Paris together appeared to him of next to no importance. People could still fly in couples with impunity; and as to what had happened afterwards in the great rabbit-warren Outre Manche — Pff! The Bertie Curfew affair was different. Smoke of a year's duration probably had fire behind it. He knew Bertie Curfew, the enterprising Director of the 'Ne Plus Ultra Play Society,' whose device was a stork swallowing a frog — a long young man, with long young hair that shone and was brushed back, and a long young record; a strange mixture of enthusiasm and contempt, from one to the other of which he passed with extreme suddenness. His sister, of whom he always spoke as 'Poor Norah,' in Michael's opinion was worth ten of him. She ran a Children's House in Bethnal Green, and had eyes from which meanness and evil shrank away.

Big Ben thumped out eight strokes; the Dandie barked, and Michael knew that Soames had come.

Very silent during dinner, Soames opened the discussion over a bottle of Lippinghall Madeira by asking to see the writ.

When Fleur had brought it, he seemed to go into a trance.

'The old boy,' thought Michael, 'is thinking of his past. Wish he'd come to!'

"Well, Father?" said Fleur at last.

As if from long scrutiny of a ghostly Court of Justice, Soames turned his eyes on his daughter's face.

"You won't eat your words, I suppose?"

Fleur tossed her now de-shingled head. "Do you want me to?"

"Can you substantiate them? You mustn't rely on what was told you — that isn't evidence."

"I know that Amabel Nazing came here and said that she didn't mind Walter flying to Paris with Majorie Ferrar, but that she did object to not having been told beforehand, so that she herself could have flown to Paris with somebody else."

"We could subpoena that young woman," said Soames.

Fleur shook her head. "She'd never give Walter away in Court."

"H'm! What else about this Miss Ferrar?"

"Everybody knows of her relationship with Bertie Curfew."

"Yes," Michael put in, "and between 'everybody knows' and 'somebody tells' is a great gap fixed."

Soames nodded.

"She just wants money out of us," cried Fleur; "she's always hard up. As if she cared whether people thought her moral or not! She despises morality — all her set do."

"Ah! Her view of morality!" said Soames, deeply; he was suddenly seeing a British Jury confronted by a barrister describing the modern view of morals: "No need, perhaps, to go into personal details."

Michael started up.

"By Jove, sir, you've hit it! If you can get her to admit that she's read certain books, seen or acted in certain plays, danced certain dances, worn certain clothes —" He fell back again into his chair; what if the other side started asking Fleur the same questions? Was it not the fashion to keep abreast of certain things, however moral one might really be? Who could stand up and profess to be shocked, today?

"Well?" said Soames.

"Only that one's own point of view isn't quite a British Jury's, sir. Even yours and ours, I expect, don't precisely tally."

Soames looked at his daughter. He understood. Loose talk — afraid of being out of the fashion — evil communications corrupting all profession of good manners! Still, no Jury could look at her face without — who could resist the sudden raising of those white lids? Besides, she was a mother, and the other woman wasn't; or if she was — she shouldn't be! No, he held to his idea. A clever fellow at the Bar could turn the whole thing into an indictment of the fast set and modern morality, and save all the invidiousness of exposing a woman's private life.

"You give me the names of her set and those books and plays and dancing clubs and things," he said. "I'll have the best man at the Bar."

Michael rose from the little conference somewhat eased in mind. If the matter could be shifted from the particular to the general; if, instead of attacking Marjorie Ferrar's practice, the defence could attack her theory, it would not be so dreadful. Soames took him apart in the hall.

"I shall want all the information I can get about that young man and her."

Michael's face fell.

"You can't get it from me, sir, I haven't got it."

"She must be frightened," said Soames. "If I can frighten her, I can probably settle it out of Court without an apology."

"I see; use the information out of Court, but not in."

Soames nodded. "I shall tell them that we shall justify. Give me the young man's address."

"Macbeth Chambers, Bloomsbury. It's close to the British Museum. But do remember, sir, that to air Miss Ferrar's linen in Court will be as bad for us as for her."

Again Soames nodded.

When Fleur and her father had gone up, Michael lit a cigarette, and passed back into the 'parlour.' He sat down at the clavichord. The instrument made very little noise — so he could strum on it without fear of waking the eleventh baronet. From a Spanish tune picked up three years ago on his honeymoon, whose savagery always soothed him, his fingers wandered on: "I got a crown, you got a crown — all God's childern got a crown! Eb'ryone dat talk 'bout 'Eaben ain't goin' dere. All God's childern got a crown."

Glass lustres on the walls gleamed out at him. As a child he had loved the colours of his aunt Pamela's glass chandeliers in the panelled rooms at Brook Street; but when he knew what was what, he and every one had laughed at them. And now lustres had come in again; and Aunt Pamela had gone out! "She had a crown — he had a crown —" Confound that tune! "Aupres de ma blonde — il fait bon — fait bon — fait bon; Aupres de ma blonde, il fait bon dormir."

His 'blonde'— not so very blonde, either — would be in bed by now. Time to go up! But still he strummed on, and his mind wandered in and out — of poultry and politics, Old Forsyte, Fleur, Foggartism, and the Ferrar girl — like a man in a maelstrom whirling round with his head just above water. Who was it said the landing-place for modernity was a change of heart; the re-birth of a belief that life was worth while, and better life attainable? 'Better life?' Prerogative of priests? Not now. Humanity had got to save itself! To save itself — what was that, after all, but expression of 'the will to live'? But did humanity will to live as much as it used? That was the point. Michael stopped strumming and listened to the silence. Not even a clock ticking — time was inhospitable in 'parlours'; and England asleep outside. Was the English 'will to live' as strong as ever; or had they all become so spoiled, so sensitive to life, that they had weakened on it? Had they sucked their silver spoon so long that, threatened with a spoon of bone, they preferred to get down from table? 'I don't believe it,' thought Michael, 'I won't believe it. Only where are we going? Where am I going? Where are all God's children going?' To bed, it seemed! And Big Ben struck: One.

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PART II

CHAPTER I

MICHAEL MAKES HIS SPEECH

When in the new Parliament Michael rose to deliver his maiden effort towards the close of the debate on the King's Speech, he had some notes in his hand and not an idea in his head. His heart was beating and his knees felt weak. The policy he was charged to express, if not precisely new in concept, was in reach and method so much beyond current opinion, that he awaited nothing but laughter. His would be a stray wind carrying the seed of a new herb into a garden, so serried and so full that no corner would welcome its growth. There was a plant called Chinese weed which having got hold never let go, and spread till it covered everything. Michael desired for Foggartism the career of Chinese weed; but all he expected was the like of what he had seen at Monterey on his tour round the world after the war. Chance had once brought to that Californian shore the seeds of the Japanese yew. In thick formation the little dark trees had fought their way inland to a distance of some miles. That battalion would never get farther now that native vegetation had been consciously roused against it; but its thicket stood — a curious and strong invader.

His first period had been so rehearsed that neither vacant mind nor dry mouth could quite prevent delivery. Straightening his waistcoat, and jerking his head back, he regretted that the Speech from the throne foreshadowed no coherent and substantial policy such as might hope to free the country from its present plague of under-employment, and over-population. Economically speaking, any foreseeing interpretation of the course of affairs must now place Britain definitely in the orbit of the overseas world. . . . ("Oh! oh!") Ironical laughter so soon and sudden cleared Michael's mind, and relaxed his lips; and, with the grin that gave his face a certain charm, he resumed:

Speakers on all sides of the House, dwelling on the grave nature of the Unemployment problem, had pinned their faith to the full recapture of European trade, some in one way, some in another. August as they were, he wished very humbly to remark that they could not eat cake and have it. (Laughter.) Did they contend that wages in Britain must come down and working hours be lengthened; or did they assert that European wages must go up, and European working hours be shortened? No, they had not had the temerity. Britain, which was to rid itself of unemployment in the ways suggested, was the only important country in the world which had to buy about seven-tenths of its food, and of whose population well-nigh six-sevenths lived in Towns. It employed those six-sevenths in producing articles in some cases too dearly for European countries to buy, and yet it had to sell a sufficient surplus above the normal exchanges of trade, to pay for seven-tenths of the wherewithal to keep its producers alive. (A laugh.) If this was a joke, it was a grim one. (A voice: "You have forgotten the carrying trade.") He accepted the honourable Member's correction, and hoped that he felt happy about the future of that trade. It was, he feared, a somewhat shrinking asset.

At this moment in his speech Michael himself became a somewhat shrinking asset, overwhelmed by a sudden desire to drop Foggartism, and sit down. The cool attention, the faint smiles, the expression on the face of a past Prime Minister, seemed conspiring towards his subsidence. 'How young — oh! how young you are!' they seemed to say. 'We sat here before you were breeched.' And he agreed with them completely. Still there was nothing for it but to go on — with Fleur in the Ladies' Gallery, old Blythe in the Distinguished Strangers'; yes, and something stubborn in his heart! Clenching the notes in his hand, therefore, he proceeded:

In spite of the war, and because of the war, the population of their Island had increased by 2,000,000. Emigration had fallen from 300,000 to 100,000. And this state of things was to be remedied by the mere process of recapturing to the full European trade which, quite obviously, had no intention of being so recaptured. What alternative, then, was there? Some honourable Members, he was afraid not many, would be familiar with the treatise of Sir James Foggart, entitled "The Parlous State of England." ("Hear, hear!" from a back Labour bench.) He remembered to have read in a certain organ, or perhaps he should say harmonium, of the Press, for it was not a very deep-voiced instrument —(laughter)— that no such crack-brained policy had ever been devised for British consumption. ("Hear, hear!") Certainly Foggartism was mad enough to look ahead, to be fundamental, and to ask the country to face its own position and the music into the bargain . . . .

About to go over 'the top'— with public confession of his faith trembling behind his lips — Michael was choked by the sudden thought: ‘Is it all right — is it what I think it, or am I an ignorant fool?’ He swallowed vigorously, and staring straight before him, went on:

“Foggartism deprecates surface measures for a people in our position; it asks the country to fix its mind on a date — say twenty years hence — a minute in a nation’s life — and to work steadily and coherently up to that date. It demands recognition of the need to make the British Empire, with its immense resources mostly latent, a self-sufficing unit. Imperialists will ask: What is there new in that? The novelty lies in degree and in method. Foggartism urges that the British people should be familiarised with the Empire by organised tours and propaganda on a great scale. It urges a vast increase — based on this familiarisation — of controlled and equipped emigration from these shores. But it has been found impossible, as honourable members well know, to send out suitable grown folk in any adequate quantity, because confirmed town-dwellers with their town tastes and habits, and their physique already impaired by town life, are of little use in the Dominions, while the few still on the English land cannot be spared. Foggartism, therefore, would send out boys and girls, between the ages of fourteen, or perhaps fifteen, and eighteen, in great numbers. The House is aware that experiments in this direction have already been made, with conspicuous success, but such experiments are but a drop in the bucket. This is a matter which can only be tackled in the way that things were tackled during the war. Development of child emigration is wanted, in fact, on the same scale and with the same energy as was manifested in Munitions after a certain most honourable Member had put his shoulder to that wheel — multiplication a hundredfold. Although the idea must naturally prove abortive without the utmost good-will and co-operating energy on the part of the Dominions, I submit that this co-operation is not beyond the bounds of hope. The present hostility of people in the Dominions towards British immigrants is due to their very reasonable distrust of the usefulness of adult immigrants from this country. Once they have malleable youth to deal with, that drawback vanishes. In fact, the opening up of these vast new countries is like the progress of a rolling snowball, each little bit of ‘all right’— I beg the House’s pardon — picks up another little bit; and there is no limit to the cumulative possibilities if a start is made at the right end and the scheme pushed and controlled by the right people.” Some one behind him said: “Talking through his hat.” Michael paused, disconcerted; then, snatching at his bitt, went on: “A job of this sort half done is better left alone, but in the war, when something was found necessary, it WAS done, and men were always available for the doing of it. I put it to the House that the condition of our country now demands efforts almost as great as then.”

He could see that some members were actually listening to him with attention, and, taking a deep breath, he went on:

“Leaving out Ireland —” (A voice: “Why?”) “I prefer not to touch on anything that does not like to be touched —” (laughter) “the present ratio of white population between Britain and the rest of the Empire is roughly in the nature of five to two. Child Emigration on a great scale will go far to equalise this ratio within twenty years; the British character of the British Empire will be established for ever, and supply and demand between the Mother Country and the Dominions will be levelled up.” (A voice: “The Dominions will then supply themselves.”) “The honourable Member will forgive me if I doubt that, for some time to come. We have the start in the machinery of manufacture. It may, of course, be five, seven, ten years before unemployment here comes down even to the pre-war rate, but can you point to any other plan which will really decrease it? I am all for good wages and moderate working hours. I believe the standard in Britain and the new countries, though so much higher than the European, is only a decent minimum, and in some cases does not reach it; I want better wages, even more moderate working hours; and the want is common among working men wherever the British flag flies.” (“Hear, hear!”) “They are not going back on that want; and it is no good supposing that they are!” (“Hear, hear!” “Oh! oh!”) “The equalisation of demand and supply WITHIN THE EMPIRE is the only way of preserving and improving the standards of life, which are now recognised as necessary on British soil. The world has so changed that the old maxim ‘buy in the cheapest, sell in the dearest market’ is standing on its head so far as England is concerned. Free Trade was never a principle —” (“Oh! oh!” “Hear, hear!” and laughter.) “Oh! well, it was born twins with expediency, and the twins have got mixed, and are both looking uncommonly peeky.” (Laughter.) “But I won’t go into that . . . .” (A voice: “Better not!”) Michael could see the mouth it came from below a clipped moustache in a red, black-haired face turned round at him from a Liberal bench. He could not put a name to it, but he did not like the unpolitical expression it wore. Where was he? Oh! yes. . . . “There is another point in the Foggart programme: England, as she now is, insufficiently protected in the air, and lamentably devoid of food-producing power, is an abiding temptation to the aggressive feelings of other nations. And here I must beg the House’s pardon for a brief reference to Cinderella — in other words, the Land. The Speech from the throne gave no lead in reference to that vexed question, beyond implying that a Conference of all interested will be called. Well, without a definite intention in the minds of all the political Parties to join in some fixed and long-lasting policy for rehabilitation, such a Conference is bound to fail. Here again Foggartism —" ("Ho! ho!") "Here again Foggartism steps in. Foggartism says: Lay down your Land policy AND DON'T CHANGE IT. Let it be as sacred as the Prohibition Law in America." (A voice: "And as damned!" Laughter.) "The sacred and damned — it sounds like a novel by Dostoievski." (Laughter.) "Well, we shall get nowhere without this damned sanctity. On our Land policy depends not only the prosperity of farmers, landlords, and labourers, desirable and important though that is, but the very existence of England, if unhappily there should come another war under the new conditions. Yes, and in a fixed land policy lies the only hope of preventing the permanent deterioration of the British type. Foggartism requires that we lay down our land policy, so that within ten years we may be growing up to seventy per cent. of our food. Estimates made during the war showed that as much as eighty-two per cent. could be grown at a pinch; and the measures then adopted went a long way to prove that this estimate was no more than truth. Why were those measures allowed to drop? Why was all that great improvement allowed to run to seed and grass? What is wanted is complete confidence in every branch of home agriculture; and nothing but a policy guaranteed over a long period can ever produce that confidence." Michael paused. Close by, a member yawned; he heard a shuffle of feet; another old Prime Minister came in; several members were going out. There was nothing new about 'the Land.' Dared he tackle the air — that third plank in the Foggart programme? There was nothing new about the air either! Besides, he would have to preface it by a plea for the abolition of air fighting, or at least for the reduction of armaments. It would take too long! Better leave well alone! He hurried on:

"Emigration! The Land! Foggartism demands for both the same sweeping attention as was given to vital measures during the war. I feel honoured in having been permitted to draw the attention of all Parties to this — I will brave an honourable Member's disposition to say 'Ho, ho!'— great treatise of Sir James Foggart. And I beg the House's pardon for having been so long in fulfilling my task."

He sat down, after speaking for thirteen minutes. Off his chest! An honourable Member rose.

"I must congratulate the Member for Mid-Bucks on what, despite its acquaintanceship with the clouds, and its Lewis Carrollian appeal for less bread, more taxes, we must all admit to be a lively and well-delivered first effort. The Member for Tyne and Tees, earlier in the Debate, made an allusion to the Party to which I have the honour to belong, which — er —"

'Exactly!' thought Michael, and after waiting for the next speech, which contained no allusion whatever to his own, he left the House.

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Chapter II

Results

He walked home, lighter in head and heart. That was the trouble — a light weight! No serious attention would be paid to him. He recollected the maiden speech of the Member for Cornmarket. At least he had stopped, today, as soon as the House began to fidget. He felt hot, and hungry. Opera-singers grew fat through their voices, Members of Parliament thin. He would have a bath.

He was half clothed again when Fleur came in.

“You did splendidly, Michael. That beast!”

“Which?”

“His name’s MacGown.”

“Sir Alexander MacGown? What about him?”

“You’ll see tomorrow. He insinuated that you were interested in the sale of the Foggart book, as one of its publishers.”

“That’s rather the limit.”

“And all the rest of his speech was a cut-up; horrid tone about the whole thing. Do you know him?”

“MacGown? No. He’s Member for some Scottish borough.”

“Well, he’s an enemy. Blythe is awfully pleased with you, and wild about MacGown; and so is Bart. I’ve never seen him so angry. You’ll have to write to The Times and explain that you’ve had no interest in Danby & Winter’s since before you were elected. Bart and your mother are coming to dinner. Did you know she was with me?”

“Mother? She abhors politics.”

“All she said was: ‘I wish dear Michael would brush his hair back before speaking. I like to see his forehead.’ And when MacGown sat down, she said: ‘My dear, the back of that man’s head is perfectly straight. D’you think he’s a Prussian? And he’s got thick lobes to his ears. I shouldn’t like to be married to him!’ She had her opera-glasses.”

Sir Lawrence and Lady Mont were already in the ‘parlour’ when they went down, standing opposite each other like two storks, if not precisely on one leg, still very distinguished. Pushing Michael’s hair up, Lady Mont pecked his forehead, and her dove-like eyes gazed at the top of his head from under their arched brows. She was altogether a little Norman in her curves; she even arched her words. She was considered “a deah; but not too frightfully all there.”

“How did you manage to stick it, Mother?”

“My dear boy, I was thrilled; except for that person in jute. I thought the shape of his head insufferable. Where did you get all that knowledge? It was so sensible.”

Michael grinned. “How did it strike you, sir?”

Sir Lawrence grimaced.

“You played the enfant terrible, my dear. Half the party won’t like it because they’ve never thought of it; and the other half won’t like it because they HAVE.”

“What! Foggartists at heart?”

“Of course; but in Office. You mustn’t support your real convictions in Office — it’s not done.”

“This nice room,” murmured Lady Mont. “When I was last here it was Chinese. And where’s the monkey?”

“In Michael’s study, Mother. We got tired of him. Would you like to see Kit before dinner?”

Left alone, Michael and his father stared at the same object, a Louis Quinze snuff-box picked up by Soames.

“Would you take any notice of MacGown’s insinuation, Dad?”

“Is that his name — the hairy haberdasher! I should.”

“How?”

“Give him the lie.”

“In private, in the Press, or in the House?”

"All three. In private I should merely call him a liar. In the Press you should use the words: 'Reckless disregard for truth.' And in Parliament — that you regret he 'should have been so misinformed.' To complete the crescendo you might add that men's noses have been pulled for less."

"But you don't suppose," said Michael, "that people would believe a thing like that?"

"They will believe anything, my dear, that suggests corruption in public life. It's one of the strongest traits in human nature. Anxiety about the integrity of public men would be admirable, if it wasn't so usually felt by those who have so little integrity themselves that they can't give others credit for it." Sir Lawrence grimaced, thinking of the P. P. R. S. "And talking of that — why wasn't Old Forsyte in the House today?"

"I offered him a seat, but he said: He hadn't been in the House since Gladstone moved the Home Rule Bill, and then only because he was afraid his father would have a fit."

Sir Lawrence screwed his eyeglass in.

"That's not clear to me," he said.

"His father had a pass, and didn't like to waste it."

"I see. That was noble of Old Forsyte."

"He said that Gladstone had been very windy."

"Ah! They were even longer in those days. You covered your ground very quickly, Michael. I should say with practice you would do. I've a bit of news for Old Forsyte. Shropshire doesn't speak to Charlie Ferrar because the third time the old man paid his debts to prevent his being posted, he made that a condition, for fear of being asked again. It's not so lurid as I'd hoped. How's the action?"

"The last I heard was something about administering what they call interrogatories."

"Ah! I know. They answer you in a way nobody can make head or tail of, and that without prejudice. Then they administer them to you, and you answer in the same way; it all helps the lawyers. What is there for dinner?"

"Fleur said we'd kill the fatted calf when I'd got my speech off."

Sir Lawrence sighed.

"I'm glad. Your mother has Vitamins again rather badly; we eat little but carrots, generally raw. French blood in a family is an excellent thing — prevents faddiness about food. Ah! here they come! . . ."

It has often been remarked that the breakfast-tables of people who avow themselves indifferent to what the Press may say of them are garnished by all the newspapers on the morning when there is anything to say. In Michael's case this was a waste of almost a shilling. The only allusions to his speech were contained in four out of thirteen dailies. The Times reported it (including the laughter) with condensed and considered accuracy. The Morning Post picked out three imperial bits, prefaced by the words: 'In a promising speech.' The Daily Telegraph remarked: "Among the other speakers were Mr. Michael Mont." And The Manchester Guardian observed: "The Member for Mid-Bucks in a maiden speech advocated the introduction of children into the Dominions."

Sir Alexander MacGown's speech received the added attention demanded by his extra years of Parliamentary service, but there was no allusion to the insinuation. Michael turned to Hansard. His own speech seemed more coherent than he had hoped. When Fleur came down he was still reading MacGown's.

"Give me some coffee, old thing."

Fleur gave him the coffee and leaned over his shoulder.

"This MacGown is after Marjorie Ferrar," she said; "I remember now."

Michael stirred his cup. "Dash it all! The House is free from that sort of pettiness."

"No. I remember Alison telling me — I didn't connect him up yesterday. Isn't it a disgusting speech?"

"Might be worse," said Michael, with a grin.

"'As a member of the firm who published this singular production, he is doubtless interested in pressing it on the public, so that we may safely discount the enthusiasm displayed.' Doesn't that make your blood boil?"

Michael shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't you ever feel angry, Michael?"

"My dear, I was through the war. Now for The Times. What shall I say?

"'SIR,

"'May I trespass upon your valuable space' (that's quite safe), 'in the interests of public life —' (that keeps it impersonal) 'to —' er — Well?"

"To say that Sir Alexander MacGown in his speech yesterday told a lie when he suggested that I was interested in the sale of Sir James Foggart's book."

"Straight," said Michael, "but they wouldn't put it in. How's this?

"'To draw attention to a misstatement in Sir Alexander MacGown's speech of yesterday afternoon. As a matter of fact' (always useful) 'I ceased to have any interest whatever in the firm which published Sir James Foggart's book, "The Parlous State of England," even before I became a member of the late Parliament; and am therefore in no way interested, as Sir Alexander MacGown suggested, in pressing it on the Public. I hesitate to assume that he meant to impugn my honour' (must get in 'honour') 'but his words might bear that construction. My interest in the book is simply my interest in what is truly the "parlous state of England."

'Faithfully, etc.'

That do?"

"Much too mild. Besides, I shouldn't say that you really believe the state of England is parlous. It's all nonsense, you know. I mean it's exaggerated."

"Very well," said Michael, "I'll put the state of the Country, instead. In the House I suppose I rise to a point of order. And in the Lobby to a point of disorder, probably. I wonder what The Evening Sun will say?"

The Evening Sun, which Michael bought on his way to the House, gave him a leader, headed: "Foggartism again," beginning as follows: "Young Hopeful, in the person of the Member for Mid-Bucks, roused the laughter of the House yesterday by his championship of the insane policy called Foggartism, to which we have already alluded in these columns"; and so on for twenty lines of vivid disparagement. Michael gave it to the door-keeper.

In the House, after noting that MacGown was present, he rose at the first possible moment.

"Mr. Speaker, I rise to correct a statement in yesterday's debate reflecting on my personal honour. The honourable Member for Greengow, in his speech said —" He then read the paragraph from Hansard. "It is true that I was a member of the firm which published Sir James Foggart's book in August, 1923, but I retired from all connection with that firm in October, 1923, before ever I entered this House. I have therefore no pecuniary or other interest whatever in pressing the claims of the book, beyond my great desire to see its principles adopted."

He sat down to some applause; and Sir Alexander MacGown rose. Michael recognised the face with the unpolitical expression he had noticed during his speech.

"I believe," he said, "that the honourable Member for Mid-Bucks was not sufficiently interested in his own speech to be present when I made my reply to it yesterday. I cannot admit that my words bear the construction which he has put on them. I said, and I still say, that one of the publishers of a book must necessarily be interested in having the judgment which induced him to publish it vindicated by the Public. The honourable Member has placed on his head a cap which I did not intend for it." His face came round towards Michael, grim, red, provocative.

Michael rose again.

"I am glad the honourable Member has removed a construction which others besides myself had put on his words."

A few minutes later, with a certain unanimity, both left the House.

The papers not infrequently contain accounts of how Mr. Swash, the honourable Member for Topcliffe, called Mr. Buckler, the honourable Member for Footing, something unparliamentary. ("Order!") And of how Mr. Buckler retorted that Mr. Swash was something worse. ("Hear, hear!" and "Order!") And of how Mr. Swash waved his fists (uproar), and Mr. Buckler threw himself upon the Chair, or threw some papers. ("Order! order! order!") And of how there was great confusion, and Mr. Swash, or Mr. Buckler, was suspended, and led vociferous out of the Mother of Parliaments by the Serjeant-at-Arms, with other edifying details. The little affair between Michael and Sir Alexander went off in other wise. With an instinct of common decency, they both made for the lavatory; nor till they reached those marble halls did either take the slightest notice of the other. In front of a roller towel Michael said:

"Now, sir, perhaps you'll tell me why you behaved like a dirty dog. You knew perfectly well the construction that would be placed on your words."

Sir Alexander turned from a hair-brush.

"Take that!" he said, and gave Michael a swinging box on the ear. Staggering, Michael came up wildly with his right, and caught Sir Alexander on the nose. Their movements then became intensive. Michael was limber, Sir Alexander stocky; neither was over proficient with his fists. The affair was cut short by the honourable Member for Washbason, who had been in retirement. Coming hastily out of a door, he received simultaneously a black eye, and a blow on the diaphragm, which caused him to collapse. The speaker, now, was the Member for Washbason, in language stronger than those who knew the honourable gentleman would have supposed possible.

"I'm frightfully sorry, sir," said Michael. "It's always the innocent party who comes off worst."

"I'll dam' well have you both suspended," gasped the Member for Washbason.

Michael grinned, and Sir Alexander said: "To hell!"

"You're a couple of brawling cads!" said the Member for Washbason. "How the devil am I to speak this afternoon?"

"If you went in bandaged," said Michael, dabbing the damaged eye with cold water, "and apologised for a motor accident, you would get special hearing, and a good Press. Shall I take the silver lining out of my tie for a bandage?"

"Leave my eye alone," bellowed the Member for Washbason, "and get out, before I lose my temper!"

Michael buttoned the top of his waistcoat, loosened by Sir Alexander's grip, observed in the glass that his ear was very red, his cuff bloodstained, and his opponent still bleeding from the nose, and went out.

'Some scrap!' he thought, entering the fresher air of Westminster. 'Jolly lucky we were tucked away in there! I don't think I'll mention it!' His ear was singing, and he felt rather sick, physically and mentally. The salvational splendour of Foggartism already reduced to a brawl in a lavatory! It made one doubt one's vocation. Not even the Member for Washbason, however, had come off with dignity, so that the affair was not likely to get into the papers.

Crossing the road towards home, he sighted Francis Wilmot walking West.

"Hallo!"

Francis Wilmot looked up, and seemed to hesitate. His face was thinner, his eyes deeper set; he had lost his smile.

"How is Mrs. Mont?"

"Very well, thanks. And you?"

"Fine," said Francis Wilmot. "Will you tell her I've had a letter from her cousin Jon. They're in great shape. He was mighty glad to hear I'd seen her, and sent his love."

"Thanks," said Michael, drily. "Come and have tea with us."

The young man shook his head.

"Have you cut your hand?"

Michael laughed. "No, somebody's nose."

Francis Wilmot smiled wanly. "I'm wanting to do that all the time. Whose was it?"

"A man called MacGown's."

Francis Wilmot seized Michael's hand. "It's the very nose!" Then, apparently disconcerted by his frankness, he turned on his heel and made off, leaving Michael putting one and one together.

Next morning's papers contained no allusion to the blood-letting of the day before, except a paragraph to the effect that the Member for Washbason was confined to his house by a bad cold. The Tory journals preserved a discreet silence about Foggartism; but in two organs — one Liberal and one Labour — were little leaders, which Michael read with some attention.

The Liberal screed ran thus: "The debate on the King's speech produced one effort which at least merits passing notice. The policy alluded to by the Member for Mid-Bucks under the label of Foggartism, because it emanates from that veteran Sir James Foggart, has a certain speciousness in these unsettled times, when every one is looking for quack specifics. Nothing which departs so fundamentally from all that Liberalism stands for will command for a moment the support of any truly Liberal vote. The risk lies in its appeal to backwoodism in the Tory ranks. Loose thought and talk of a pessimistic nature always attracts a certain type of mind. The state of England is not really parlous. It in no way justifies any unsound or hysterical departure from our traditional policy. But there is no disguising the fact that certain so-called thinkers have been playing for some time past with the idea of reviving a ‘splendid isolation,’ based (whether they admit it or not) on the destruction of Free Trade. The young Member for Mid-Bucks in his speech handled for a moment that corner-stone of Liberalism, and then let it drop; perhaps he thought it too weighty for him. But reduced to its elements, Foggartism is a plea for the abandonment of Free Trade, and a blow in the face of the League of Nations.”

Michael sighed and turned to the Labour article, which was signed, and struck a more human note:

“And so we are to have our children carted off to the Antipodes as soon as they can read and write, in order that the capitalist class may be relieved of the menace lurking in Unemployment. I know nothing of Sir James Foggart, but if he was correctly quoted in Parliament yesterday by a member for an agricultural constituency, I smell Prussianism about that old gentleman. I wonder what the working man is saying over his breakfast-table? I fear the words: ‘To hell!’ are not altogether absent from his discourse. No, Sir James Foggart, English Labour intends to call its own hand; and with all the old country’s drawbacks, still prefers it for itself and its children. We are not taking any, Sir James Foggart.”

‘There it is, naked,’ thought Michael. ‘The policy ought never to have been entrusted to me. Blythe ought to have found a Labour townsman.’

Foggartism, whittled to a ghost by jealousy and class-hatred, by shibboleth, section and Party — he had a vision of it slinking through the purlieus of the House and the corridors of the Press, never admitted to the Presence, nor accepted as flesh and blood!

“Never mind,” he muttered; “I’ll stick it. If one’s a fool, one may as well be a blazing fool. Eh, Dan?”

The Dandie, raising his head from his paws, gave him a lustrous glance.

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CHAPTER III

MARJORIE FERRAR AT HOME

Francis Wilmot went on his way to Chelsea. He had a rendezvous with Life. Over head and ears in love, and old-fashioned to the point of marriage, he spent his days at the tail of a petticoat as often absent as not. His simple fervour had wrung from Marjorie Ferrar confession of her engagement. She had put it bluntly: She was in debt, she wanted shekels and she could not live in the backwoods. He had promptly offered her all his shekels. She had refused them with the words:

"My poor dear, I'm not so far gone as that." Often on the point of saying 'Wait until I'm married,' the look on his face had always deterred her. He was primitive; would never understand her ideal: Perfection, as wife, mistress, and mother, all at once. She kept him only by dangling the hope that she would throw MacGown over; taking care to have him present when MacGown was absent, and absent when MacGown was present. She had failed to keep them apart on two occasions, painful and productive of more lying than she was at all accustomed to. For she was really taken with this young man; he was a new flavour. She 'loved' his dark 'slinky' eyes, his grace, the way his 'back-chat' grew, dark and fine, on his slim comely neck. She 'loved' his voice and his old-fashioned way of talking. And, rather oddly, she 'loved' his loyalty. Twice she had urged him to find out whether Fleur wasn't going to 'climb down' and 'pay up.' Twice he had refused, saying: "They were mighty nice to me; and I'd never tell you what they said, even if I did go and find out."

She was painting his portrait, so that a prepared canvas with a little paint on it chaperoned their almost daily interviews, which took place between three and four when the light had already failed. It was an hour devoted by MacGown to duty in the House. A low and open collar suited Francis Wilmot's looks. She liked him to sit lissom on a divan with his eyes following her; she liked to come close to him, and see the tremor of his fingers touching her skirt or sleeve, the glow in his eyes, the change in his face when she moved away. His faith in her was inconvenient. P's and Q's were letters she despised. And yet, to have to mind them before him gave her a sort of pleasure, made her feel good. One did not shock children!

That day, since she expected MacGown at five, she had become uneasy before the young man came in, saying:

"I met Michael Mont; his cuff was bloody. Guess whose blood!"

"Not Alec's?"

Francis Wilmot dropped her hands.

"Don't call that man 'Alec' to me."

"My dear child, you're too sensitive. I thought they'd have a row — I read their speeches. Hadn't Michael a black eye? No? Tt — tt! Al — er —'that man' will be awfully upset. Was the blood fresh?"

"Yes," said Francis Wilmot, grimly.

"Then he won't come. Sit down, and let's do some serious work for once."

But throwing himself on his knees, he clasped his hands behind her waist.

"Marjorie, Marjorie!"

Disciple of Joy, in the forefront of modern mockery, she was yet conscious of pity, for him and for herself. It was hard not to be able to tell him to run out, get licence and ring, or whatever he set store by, and have done with it! Not even that she was ready to have done with it without ring or licence! For one must keep one's head. She had watched one lover growing tired, kept her head, and dismissed him before he knew it; grown tired of another, kept her head, and gone on till he was tired too. She had watched favourites she had backed go down, kept her head and backed one that didn't; had seen cards turn against her, and left off playing before her pile was gone. Time and again she had earned the good mark of Modernity.

So she kissed the top of his head, unclasped his hands, and told him to be good; and, in murmuring it, felt that she had passed her prime.

"Amuse me while I paint," she said. "I feel rotten."

And Francis Wilmot, like a dark ghost, amused her.

Some believe that a nose from which blood has been drawn by a blow swells less in the first hour that it does later. This was why Sir Alexander MacGown arrived at half-past four to say that he could not come at five. He had driven straight from the House with a little bag of ice held to it. Having been led to understand that the young American was 'now in Paris,' he stood stock still, staring at one whose tie was off and whose collar was unbuttoned. Francis Wilmot rose from the divan, no less silent. Marjorie Ferrar put a touch on the canvas.

"Come and look, Alec; it's only just begun."

"No, thanks," said MacGown.

Crumpling his tie into his pocket, Francis Wilmot bowed and moved towards the door.

"Won't you stay for tea, Mr. Wilmot?"

"I believe not, thank you."

When he was gone Marjorie Ferrar fixed her eyes on the nose of her bethrothed. Strong and hard, it was as yet, little differentiated from the normal.

"Now," said MacGown, "why did you lie about that young blighter? You said he was in Paris. Are you playing fast and loose with me, Marjorie?"

"Of course! Why not?"

MacGown advanced to within reach of her.

"Put down that brush."

Marjorie Ferrar raised it; and suddenly it hit the wall opposite.

"You'll stop that picture, and you'll not see that fellow again; he's in love with you."

He had taken her wrists.

Her face, quite as angry as his own, reined back.

"Let go! I don't know if you call yourself a gentleman?"

"No, a plain man."

"Strong and silent — out of a dull novel. Sit down, and don't be unpleasant."

The duel of their eyes, brown and burning, blue and icy, endured for quite a minute. Then he did let go.

"Pick up that brush and give it to me."

"I'm damned if I will!"

"Then our engagement is off. If you're old-fashioned, I'm not. You want a young woman who'll give you a whip for a wedding-present."

MacGown put his hands up to his head.

"I want you too badly to be sane."

"Then pick up the brush."

MacGown picked it up.

"What have you done to your nose?"

MacGown put his hand to it.

"Ran it against a door."

Marjorie Ferrar laughed. "Poor door!"

MacGown gazed at her in genuine astonishment.

"You're the hardest woman I ever came across; and why I love you, I don't know."

"It hasn't improved your looks or your temper, my dear. You were rash to come here today."

MacGown uttered a sort of groan. "I can't keep away, and you know it."

Marjorie Ferrar turned the canvas face to the wall, and leaned there beside it.

"I don't know what you think of the prospects of our happiness, Alec; but I think they're pretty poor. Will you have a whisky and soda? It's in that cupboard. Tea, then? Nothing? We'd better understand each other. If I marry you, which is very doubtful, I’m not going into purdah. I shall see what friends I choose. And until I marry you, I shall also see them. If you don’t like it, you can leave it.”

She watched his clenching hands, and her wrists tingled. To be perfect wife to him would ‘take a bit of doing!’ If only she knew of a real ‘good thing’ instead, and had a ‘shirt to put on it!’ If only Francis Wilmot had money and did not live where the cotton came from, and darkies crooned in the fields; where rivers ran red, Florida moss festooned the swamps and the sun shone; where grapefruit grew — or didn’t? — and mocking-birds sang sweeter than the nightingale. South Carolina, described to her with such enthusiasm by Francis Wilmot! A world that was not her world stared straight into the eyes of Marjorie Ferrar. South Carolina! Impossible! It was like being asked to be ancient!

MacGown came up to her. “I’m sorry,” he said. “Forgive me, Marjorie.”

On her shrugging shoulders he put his hands, kissed her lips, and went away.

And she sat down in her favourite chair, listless, swinging her foot. The sand had run out of her dolly — life was a bore! It was like driving tandem, when the leader would keep turning round; or the croquet party in “Alice in Wonderland,” read in the buttercup-fields at High Marshes not twenty years ago that felt like twenty centuries.

What did she want? Just a rest from men and bills? or that fluffy something called ‘real love’? Whatever it was, she hadn’t got it! And so! Dress, and go out, and dance; and later dress again, and go out and dine; and the dresses not paid for.

Well, nothing like an egg-nog for ‘the hump’!

Ringing for the ingredients, she made one with plenty of brandy, capped it with nutmeg, and drank it down.

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CHAPTER IV

FONS ET ORIGO

Two mornings later Michael received two letters. The first, which bore an Australian post-mark, ran thus:

“DEAR SIR, “I hope you are well and the lady. I thought perhaps you’d like to know how we are. Well, Sir, we’re not much to speak of out here after a year and a half. I consider there’s too much gilt on the ginger-bread as regards Australia. The climate’s all right when it isn’t too dry or too wet — it suits my wife fine, but Sir when they talk about making your fortune all I can say is tell it to the marines. The people here are a funny lot they don’t seem to have any use for us and I don’t seem to have any use for them. They call us Pommies and treat us as if we’d took a liberty in coming to their blooming country. You’d say they wanted a few more out here, but they don’t seem to think so. I often wish I was back in the old Country. My wife says we’re better off here, but I don’t know. Anyway they tell a lot of lies as regards emigration.

“Well, Sir, I’ve not forgotten your kindness. My wife says please to remember her to you and the lady.

“Yours faithfully,

“ANTHONY BICKET.”

With that letter in his hand, Michael, like some psychometric medium, could see again the writer, his thin face, prominent eyes, large ears, a shadowy figure of the London streets behind his coloured balloons. Poor little snipe — square peg in round hole wherever he might be; and all those other pegs — thousands upon thousands, that would never fit in. Pommies! Well! He wasn’t recommending emigration for them; he was recommending it for those who could be shaped before their wood had set. Surely they wouldn’t put that stigma on to children! He opened the other letter.

“Roll Manor, “Nr. Huntingdon.

“MY DEAR SIR,

“The disappointment I have felt since the appearance of my book was somewhat mitigated by your kind allusions to it in Parliament, and your championship of its thesis. I am an old man, and do not come to London now, but it would give me pleasure to meet you. If you are ever in this neighbourhood, I should be happy if you would lunch with me, or stay the night, as suits you best.

“With kind regards,

“Faithfully yours,

“JAS: FOGGART.”

He showed it to Fleur.

“If you go, my dear, you’ll be bored to tears.”

“I must go,” said Michael; “Fons et Origo!”

He wrote that he would come to lunch the following day.

He was met at the station by a horse drawing a vehicle of a shape he had never before beheld. The green-liveried man to whose side he climbed introduced it with the words: “Sir James thought, sir, you’d like to see about you; so ‘e sent the T cart.”

It was one of those grey late autumn days, very still, when the few leaves that are left hang listless, waiting to be windswept. The puddled road smelled of rain; rooks rose from the stubbles as if in surprise at the sound of horses’ hoofs; and the turned earth of ploughed fields had the sheen that betokened clay. To the flat landscape poplars gave a certain spirituality; and the russet-tiled farmhouse roofs a certain homeliness.

“That’s the manor, sir,” said the driver, pointing with his whip. Between an orchard and a group of elms, where was obviously a rookery, Michael saw a long low house of deeply weathered brick covered by Virginia creeper whose leaves had fallen. At a little distance were barns, outhouses, and the wall of a kitchen-garden. The T cart turned into an avenue of limes and came suddenly on the house unprotected by a gate. Michael pulled an old iron bell. Its lingering clang produced a lingering man, who, puckering his face, said: “Mr. Mont? Sir James is expecting you. This way, sir.”

Through an old low hall smelling pleasantly of wood-smoke, Michael reached a door which the puckered man closed in his face.

Sir James Foggart! Some gaitered old countryman with little grey whiskers, neat, weathered and firm-featured; or one of those short-necked John Bulls, still extant, square and weighty, with a flat top to his head, and a flat white topper on it!

The puckered man reopened the door, and said:

“Sir James will see you, sir.”

Before the fire in a large room with a large hearth and many books was a huge old man, grey-bearded and grey-locked, like a superannuated British lion, in an old velvet coat with whitened seams.

He appeared to be trying to rise.

“Please don’t, sir,” said Michael.

“If you’ll excuse me, I won’t. Pleasant journey?”

“Very.”

“Sit down. Much touched by your speech. First speech, I think?”

Michael bowed.

“Not the last, I hope.”

The voice was deep and booming; the eyes looked up keenly, as if out of thickets, so bushy were the eyebrows, and the beard grew so high on the cheeks. The thick grey hair waved across the forehead and fell on to the coat collar. A primeval old man in a high state of cultivation. Michael was deeply impressed.

“I’ve looked forward to this honour, sir,” he said, “ever since we published your book.”

“I’m a recluse — never get out now. Tell you the truth, don’t want to — see too many things I dislike. I write, and smoke my pipe. Ring the bell, and we’ll have lunch. Who’s this Sir Alexander MacGown? — his head wants punching!”

“No longer, sir,” said Michael.

Sir James Foggart leaned back and laughed.

His laugh was long, deep, slightly hollow, like a laugh in a trombone.

“Capital! And how did those fellows take your speech? Used to know a lot of ’em at one time — fathers of these fellows, grandfathers, perhaps.”

“How do you know so well what England wants, sir,” said Michael, suavely, “now that you never leave home?”

Sir James Foggart pointed with a large thin hand covered with hair to a table piled with books and magazines.

“Read,” he said; “read everything — eyes as good as ever — seen a good deal in my day.” And he was silent, as if seeing it again.

“Are you following your book up?”

“M’m! Something for ’em to read when I’m gone. Eighty-four, you know.”

“I wonder,” said Michael, “that you haven’t had the Press down.”

“Have — had ’em yesterday; three by different trains; very polite young men; but I could see they couldn’t make head or tail of the old creature — too far gone, eh?”

At this moment the door was opened, and the puckered man came in, followed by a maid and three cats. They put a tray on Sir James’ knees and another on a small table before Michael. On each tray was a partridge with chipped potatoes, spinach and bread sauce. The puckered man filled Sir James’ glass with barley-water, Michael’s with claret, and retired. The three cats, all tortoise-shells, began rubbing themselves against Sir James’ trousers, purring loudly.

“Don’t mind cats, I hope? No fish today, pussies!”

Michael was hungry and finished his bird. Sir James gave most of his to the cats. They were then served with fruit salad, cheese, coffee and cigars, and everything removed, except the cats, who lay replete before the fire, curled up in a triangle.

Michael gazed through the smoke of two cigars at the fount and origin, eager, but in doubt whether it would stand pumping — it seemed so very old! Well! anyway, he must have a shot!

“You know Blythe, sir, of The Outpost? He’s your great supporter; I’m only a mouthpiece.”

“Know his paper — best of the weeklies; but too clever by half.”

“Now that I’ve got the chance,” said Michael, “would you mind if I asked you one or two questions?”

Sir James Foggart looked at the lighted end of his cigar. “Fire ahead.”

“Well, sir, can England really stand apart from Europe?”

“Can she stand with Europe? Alliances based on promise of assistance that won’t be forthcoming — worse than useless.”

“But suppose Belgium were invaded again, or Holland?”

“The one case, perhaps. Let that be understood. Knowledge in Europe, young man, of what England will or will not do in given cases is most important. And they’ve never had it. Perfide Albion! Heh! We always wait till the last moment to declare our policy. Great mistake. Gives the impression that we serve Time — which, with our democratic system, by the way, we generally do.”

“I like that, sir,” said Michael, who did not. “About wheat? How would you stabilise the price so as to encourage our growth of it?”

“Ha! My pet lamb. We want a wheat loan, Mr. Mont, and Government control. Every year the Government should buy in advance all the surplus we need and store it; then fix a price for the home farmers that gives them a good profit; and sell to the public at the average between the two prices. You’d soon see plenty of wheat grown here, and a general revival of agriculture.”

“But wouldn’t it raise the price of bread, sir?”

“Not it.”

“And need an army of officials?”

“No. Use the present machinery properly organised.”

“State trading, sir?” said Michael, with diffidence.

Sir James Foggart’s voice boomed out. “Exceptional case — basic case — why not?”

“I quite agree,” said Michael, hastily. “I never thought of it, but why not? . . . Now as to the opposition to child emigration in this country. Do you think it comes from the affection of parents for their children?”

“More from dislike of losing the children’s wages.”

“Still, you know,” murmured Michael, “one might well kick against losing one’s children for good at fifteen!”

“One might; human nature’s selfish, young man. Hang on to ’em and see ’em rot before one’s eyes, or grow up to worse chances than one’s own — as you say, that’s human nature.”

Michael, who had not said it, felt somewhat stunned.

“The child emigration scheme will want an awful lot of money and organisation.”

Sir James stirred the cats with his slippered foot.

“Money! There’s still a mint of money — misapplied. Another hundred million loan — four and a half millions a year in the Budget; and a hundred thousand children at least sent out every year. In five years we should save the lot in unemployment dole.” He waved his cigar, and its ash spattered on his velvet coat.

‘Thought it would,’ said Michael to himself, knocking his own off into a coffee-cup. “But can children sent out wholesale like that be properly looked after, and given a real chance, sir?”

“Start gradually; where there’s a will there’s a way.”

“And won’t they just swell the big towns out there?”

“Teach ’em to want land, and give it ’em.”

“I don’t know if it’s enough,” said Michael, boldly; “the lure of the towns is terrific.”

Sir James nodded. “A town’s no bad thing till it’s overdone, as they are here. Those that go to the towns will increase the demand for our supplies.”

‘Well,’ thought Michael, ‘I’m getting on. What shall I ask him next?’ And he contemplated the cats, who were stirring uneasily. A peculiar rumbling noise had taken possession of the silence. Michael looked up. Sir James Foggart was asleep! In repose he was more tremendous than ever — perhaps rather too tremendous; for his snoring seemed to shake the room.

The cats tucked their heads farther in. There was a slight smell of burning. Michael picked a fallen cigar from the carpet. What should he do now? Wait for a revival, or clear out? Poor old boy! Foggartism had never seemed to Michael a more forlorn hope than in this sanctum of its fount and origin. Covering his ears, he sat quite still. One by one the cats got up. Michael looked at his watch. 'I shall lose my train,' he thought, and tiptoed to the door, behind a procession of deserting cats. It was as though Foggartism were snoring the little of its life away! "Goodbye, sir!" he said softly, and went out. He walked to the station very thoughtful. Foggartism! That vast if simple programme seemed based on the supposition that human beings could see two inches before their noses. But was that supposition justified; if so, would England be so town-ridden and over-populated? For one man capable of taking a far and comprehensive view and going to sleep on it, there were nine — if not nine-and-ninety — who could take near and partial views and remain wide awake. Practical politics! The answer to all wisdom, however you might boom it out. "Oh! Ah! Young Mont — not a practical politician!" It was public death to be so labelled. And Michael, in his railway-carriage, with his eyes on the English grass, felt like a man on whom every one was heaping earth. Had pelicans crying in the wilderness a sense of humour? If not, their time was poor. Grass, grass, grass! Grass and the towns! And, nestling his chin into his heavy coat, he was soon faster asleep than Sir James Foggart.

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Chapter V

Progress of the Case

When Soames said "Leave it to me," he meant it, of course; but it was really very trying that whenever anything went wrong, he, and not somebody else, had to set it right!

To look more closely into the matter he was staying with his sister Winifred Dartie in Green Street. Finding his nephew Val at dinner there the first night, he took the opportunity of asking him whether he knew anything of Lord Charles Ferrar.

"What do you want to know, Uncle Soames?"

"Anything unsatisfactory. I'm told his father doesn't speak to him."

"Well," said Val, "it's generally thought he'll win the Lincolnshire with a horse that didn't win the Cambridgeshire."

"I don't see the connection."

Val Dartie looked at him through his lashes. He was not going to enter for the slander stakes. "Well, he's got to bring off a coup soon, or go under."

"Is that all?"

"Except that he's one of those chaps who are pleasant to you when you can be of use, and unpleasant when you can't."

"So I gathered from his looks," said Soames. "Have you had any business dealings with him?"

"Yes; I sold him a yearling by Torpedo out of Banshee."

"Did he pay you?"

"Yes," said Val, with a grin; "and she turned out no good."

"H'm! I suppose he was unpleasant afterwards? That all you know?"

Val nodded. He knew more, if gossip can be called 'more'; but what was puffed so freely with the smoke of racing-men's cigars was hardly suited to the ears of lawyers.

For so old a man of the world Soames was singularly unaware how in that desirable sphere, called Society, every one is slandered daily, and no bones broken; slanderers and slandered dining and playing cards together with the utmost good feeling and the intention of reslandering each other the moment they are round the corner. Such genial and hair-raising reports reach no outside ears, and Soames really did not know where to begin investigation.

"Can you ask this Mr. Curfew to tea?" he said to Fleur.

"What for, Father?"

"So that I can pump him."

"I thought there were detectives for all that sort of thing."

Soames went a special colour. Since his employment of Mr. Polteed, who had caught him visiting his own wife's bedroom in Paris, at the beginning of the century, the word detective produced a pain in his diaphragm. He dropped the subject. And yet, without detectives, what was he to do?

One night, Winifred having gone to the theatre, he sat down with a cigar, to think. He had been provided by Michael with a list of 'advanced' books and plays which 'modern' people were reading, attending and discussing. He had even been supplied with one of the books: "Canthar," by Perceval Calvin. He fetched it from his bedroom, and, turning up a lamp, opened the volume. After reading the first few pages, in which he could see nothing, he turned to the end and read backwards. In this way he could skip better, and each erotic passage, to which he very soon came, led him insensibly on to the one before it. He had reached the middle of the novel, before he had resort in wonder to the title-pages. How was it that the publisher and author were at large? Ah! The imprint was of a foreign nature. Soames breathed more freely. Though sixty-nine, and neither Judge, juryman, nor otherwise professionally compelled to be shocked, he was shaken. If women were reading this sort of thing, then there really was no distinction between men and women nowadays. He took up the book again, and read steadily on to the beginning. The erotic passages alone interested him. The rest seemed rambling, disconnected stuff. He rested again. What was this novel written for? To make money, of course. But was there another purpose? Was the author one of these ‘artist’ fellows who thought that to give you ‘life’— wasn’t that the phrase? — they must put down every visit to a bedroom, and some besides? ‘Art for Art’s sake,’ ‘realism’— what did they call it? In Soames’ comparatively bleak experience ‘life’ did not consist wholly of visiting bedrooms, so that he was unable to admit that this book was life, the whole of life, and nothing but life. “Calvin’s a crank, sir,” Michael had said, when he handed him the novel. “He thinks people can’t become continent except through being excessively incontinent; so he shows his hero and heroine arriving gradually at continence.” ‘At Bedlam,’ thought Soames. They would see what a British Jury had to say to that, anyway. But how elicit a confession that this woman and her set had read it with gusto? And then an idea occurred to him, so brilliant that he had to ponder deeply before he could feel any confidence in it. These ‘advanced’ young people had any amount of conceit; every one who didn’t share their views was a ‘dud,’ or a ‘grundy.’ Suppose the book were attacked in the Press, wouldn’t it draw their fire? And if their fire could be drawn in print, could it not be used afterwards as evidence of their views on morality? H’m! This would want very nice handling. And first of all, how was he to prove that Marjorie Ferrar had read this book? Thus casting about him, Soames was rewarded by another brilliant thought: Young Butterfield — who had helped him to prove the guilt of Elderson in that matter of the P. P. R. S. and owed his place at Danby & Winter’s, the publishers, to Soames’ recommendation! Why not make use of him? Michael always said the young man was grateful. And obscuring the title of the book against his flank, in case he should meet a servant, Soames sought his own bedroom.

His last thought that night was almost diagnostic.

‘In my young days we read that sort of book if we could get hold of it, and didn’t say so; now, it seems, they make a splash of reading it, and pretend it does them good!’

Next morning from ‘The Connoisseurs’ he telephoned to Danby & Winter’s, and asked to speak to Mr. Butterfield.

“Yes?”

“Mr. Forsyte speaking. Do you remember me?”

“Yes, indeed, sir.”

“Can you step round to the Connoisseurs’ Club this morning some time?”

“Certainly, sir. Will twelve-thirty suit you?”

Secretive and fastidious in matters connected with sex, Soames very much disliked having to speak to a young man about an ‘immoral’ book. He saw no other way of it, however, and, on his visitor’s arrival, shook hands and began at once.

“This is confidential, Mr. Butterfield.”

Butterfield, whose dog-like eyes had glowed over the handshake, answered:

“Yes, sir. I’ve not forgotten what you did for me, sir.”

Soames held out the book.

“Do you know that novel?”

Butterfield smiled slightly.

“Yes, sir. It’s printed in Brussels. They’re paying five pounds a copy for it.”

“Have you read it?”

The young man shook his head. “It’s not come my way, sir.”

Soames was relieved. “Well, don’t! But just attend a moment. Can you buy ten copies of it, at my expense, and post them to ten people whose names I’ll give you? They’re all more or less connected with literature. You can put in slips to say the copies are complimentary, or whatever you call it. But mention no names.”

The young man Butterfield said deprecatingly:

“The price is rising all the time, sir. It’ll cost you well on sixty pounds.”

“Never mind that.”

“You wish the book boomed, sir?”

“Good Gad — no! I have my reasons, but we needn’t go into them.”

“I see, sir. And you want the copies to come — as if — as if from heaven?”

“That’s it,” said Soames. “I take it that publishers often send doubtful books to people they think will support them.

There's just one other thing. Can you call a week later on one of the people to whom you've sent the books, and offer to sell another copy as if you were an agent for it? I want to make quite sure it's already reached that person, and been read. You won't give your name, of course. Will you do this for me?"

The eyes of the young man Butterfield again glowed:

"Yes, sir. I owe you a great deal, sir."

Soames averted his eyes; he disliked all expression of gratitude.

"Here's the list of names, then, with their addresses. I've underlined the one you call on. I'll write you a cheque to go on with; and you can let me know later if there's anything more to pay."

He sat down, while the young man Butterfield scrutinised the list.

"I see it's a lady, sir, that I'm to call on."

"Yes; does that make any difference to you?"

"Not at all, sir. Advanced literature is written for ladies nowadays."

"H'm!" said Soames. "I hope you're doing well?"

"Splendidly, sir. I was very sorry that Mr. Mont left us; we've been doing better ever since."

Soames lifted an eyebrow. The statement confirmed many an old suspicion. When the young man had gone, he took up "Canthar." Was he capable of writing an attack on it in the Press, over the signature 'Paterfamilias'? He was not. The job required some one used to that sort of thing. Besides, a real signature would be needed to draw fire. It would not do to ask Michael to suggest one; but Old Mont might know some fogey at the Parthenaeum who carried metal. Sending for a bit of brown paper, he disguised the cover with it, put the volume in his overcoat pocket, and set out for 'Snooks'.'

He found Sir Lawrence about to lunch, and they sat down together. Making sure that the waiter was not looking over his shoulder, Soames, who had brought the book in with him, pushed it over, and said:

"Have you read that?"

Sir Lawrence whinnied.

"My dear Forsyte, why this morbid curiosity? Everybody's reading it. They say the thing's unspeakable."

"Then you haven't?" said Soames, keeping him to the point.

"Not yet, but if you'll lend it me, I will. I'm tired of people who've enjoyed it asking me if I've read 'that most disgusting book.' It's not fair, Forsyte. Did YOU enjoy it?"

"I skimmed it," said Soames, looking round his nose. "I had a reason. When you've read it, I'll tell you."

Sir Lawrence brought it back to him at 'the Connoisseurs' two days later.

"Here you are, my dear Forsyte," he said. "I never was more glad to get rid of a book! I've been in a continual stew for fear of being overseen with it! Perceval Calvin — quel sale Monsieur!"

"Exactly!" said Soames. "Now, I want to get that book attacked."

"You! Is Saul also among the prophets? Why this sudden zest?"

"It's rather roundabout," said Soames, sitting on the book. He detailed the reason, and ended with:

"Don't say anything to Michael, or Fleur."

Sir Lawrence listened with his twisting smile.

"I see," he said, "I see. Very cunning, Forsyte. You want me to get some one whose name will act like a red rag. It mustn't be a novelist, or they'll say he's jealous — which he probably is: the book's selling like hot cakes — I believe that's the expression. Ah! I think — rather think, Forsyte, that I have the woman."

"Woman!" said Soames. "They won't pay any attention to that."

Sir Lawrence cocked his loose eyebrow. "I believe you're right — the only women they pay attention to nowadays are those who go one better than themselves. Shall I do it myself, and sign 'Outraged Parent'?"

"I believe it wants a real name."

"Again right, Forsyte; it does. I'll drop into the Parthenaeum, and see if any one's alive."

Two days later Soames received a note.

“The Parthenaeum,

“Friday.

“MY DEAR FORSYTE,

“I’ve got the man — the Editor of The Protagonist; and he’ll do it under his own name. What’s more, I’ve put him on to the right line. We had a spirited argument. He wanted to treat it de haut en bas as the work of a dirty child. I said: ‘No. This thing is symptomatic. Treat it seriously; show that it represents a school of thought, a deliberate literary attitude; and make it a plea for censorship.’ Without the word censorship, Forsyte, they will never rise. So he’s leaving his wife and taking it into the country for the week-end. I admire your conduct of the defence, my dear Forsyte; it’s very subtle. But if you’ll forgive me for saying so, it’s more important to prevent the case coming into Court than to get a verdict if it does.

“Sincerely yours,

“LAWRENCE MONT.”

With which sentiment Soames so entirely agreed, that he went down to Mapledurham, and spent the next two afternoons going round and round with a man he didn’t like, hitting a ball, to quiet his mind.

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CHAPTER VI

MICHAEL VISITS BETHNAL GREEN

The feeling of depression with which Michael had come back from the fount and origin was somewhat mitigated by letters he was receiving from people of varying classes, nearly all young. They were so nice and earnest. They made him wonder whether after all practical politicians were not too light-hearted, like the managers of music-halls who protected the Public carefully from their more tasteful selves. They made him feel that there might be a spirit in the country that was not really represented in the House, or even in the Press. Among these letters was one which ran:

"Sunshine House, "Bethnal Green.

"DEAR MR. MONT,

"I was so awfully glad to read your speech in The Times. I instantly got Sir James Foggart's book. I think the whole policy is simply splendid. You've no idea how heart-breaking it is for us who try to do things for children, to know that whatever we do is bound to be snowed under by the life they go to when school age ends. We have a good opportunity here of seeing the realities of child life in London. It's wonderful to see the fondness of the mothers for the little ones, in spite of their own hard lives — though not all, of course, by any means; but we often notice, and I think it's common experience, that when the children get beyond ten or twelve, the fondness for them begins to assume another form. I suppose it's really the commercial possibilities of the child making themselves felt. When money comes in at the door, disinterested love seems to move towards the window. I suppose it's natural, but it's awfully sad, because the commercial possibilities are generally so miserable; and the children's after-life is often half ruined for the sake of the few shillings they earn. I do fervently hope something will come of your appeal; only — things move so slowly, don't they? I wish you would come down and see our House here. The children are adorable, and we try to give them sunshine.

"Sincerely yours,

"NORAH CURFEW."

Bertie Curfew's sister! But surely that case would not really come to anything! Grateful for encouragement, and seeking light on Foggartism, he decided to go. Perhaps Norah Curfew would take the little Boddicks! He suggested to Fleur that she should accompany him, but she was afraid of picking up something unsuitable to the eleventh baronet, so he went alone.

The house, facing the wintry space called Bethnal Green, consisted of three small houses converted into one, with their three small back yards, trellised round and gravelled, for a playground. Over the door were the words: SUNSHINE HOUSE, in gold capitals. The walls were cream-coloured, the woodwork dark, and the curtains of gay chintz. Michael was received in the entrance-lobby by Norah Curfew herself. Tall, slim and straight, with dark hair brushed back from a pale face, she had brown eyes, clear, straight and glowing.

'Gosh!' thought Michael, as she wrung his hand. 'She IS swept and garnished. No basement in her soul!'

"It WAS good of you to come, Mr. Mont. Let me take you over the house. This is the playroom."

Michael entered a room of spotless character, which had evidently been formed from several knocked into one. Six small children dressed in blue linen were seated on the floor, playing games. They embraced the knees of Norah Curfew when she came within reach. With the exception of one little girl Michael thought them rather ugly.

"These are our residents. The others only come out of school hours. We have to limit them to fifty, and that's a pretty good squeeze. We want funds to take the next two houses."

"How many of you are working here?"

"Six. Two of us do the cooking; one the accounts; and the rest washing, mending, games, singing, dancing, and general chores. Two of us live in."

"I don't see your harps and crowns."

Norah Curfew smiled.

"Pawned," she said.

“What do you do about religion?” asked Michael, thinking of the eleventh baronet’s future.

“Well, on the whole we don’t. You see, they’re none of them more than twelve; and the religious age, when it begins at all, begins with sex about fourteen. We just try to teach kindness and cheerfulness. I had my brother down the other day. He’s always laughed at me; but he’s going to do a matinee for us, and give us the proceeds.”

“What play?”

“I think it’s called ‘The Plain Dealer.’ He says he’s always wanted to do it for a good object.”

Michael stared. “Do you know ‘The Plain Dealer’?”

“No; it’s by one of the Restoration people, isn’t it?”

“Wycherley.”

“Oh! yes!” Her eyes remaining clearer than the dawn, Michael thought: ‘Poor dear! It’s not my business to queer the pitch of her money-getting; but Master Bertie likes his little joke!’

“I must bring my wife down here,” he said; “she’d love your walls and curtains. And I wanted to ask you — You haven’t room, have you, for two more little girls, if we pay for them? Their father’s down and out, and I’m starting him in the country — no mother.”

Norah Curfew wrinkled her straight brows, and on her face came the look Michael always connected with haloes, an anxious longing to stretch good-will beyond power and pocket.

“Oh! we must!” she said. “I’ll manage somehow. What are their names?”

“Boddick — Christian, I don’t know. I call them by their ages — Four and Five.”

“Give me the address. I’ll go and see them myself; if they haven’t got anything catching, they shall come.”

“You really are an angel,” said Michael, simply.

Norah Curfew coloured, and opened a door. “That’s silly,” she said, still more simply. “This is our mess-room.”

It was not large, and contained a girl working a typewriter, who stopped with her hands on the keys and looked round; another girl beating up eggs in a bowl, who stopped reading a book of poetry; and a third, who seemed practising a physical exercise, and stopped with her arms extended.

“This is Mr. Mont,” said Norah Curfew, “who made that splendid speech in the House. Miss Betts, Miss La Fontaine, Miss Beeston.”

The girls bowed, and the one who continued to beat the eggs, said: “It was bully.”

Michael also bowed. “Beating the air, I’m afraid.”

“Oh! but, Mr. Mont, it must have an effect. It said what so many people are really thinking.”

“Ah!” said Michael, “but their thoughts are so deep, you know.”

“Do sit down.”

Michael sat on the end of a peacock-blue divan.

“I was born in South Africa,” said the egg-beater, “and I know what’s waiting.”

“My father was in the House,” said the girl, whose arms had come down to her splendid sides. “He was very much struck. Anyway, we’re jolly grateful.”

Michael looked from one to the other.

“I suppose if you don’t all believe in things, you wouldn’t be doing this? YOU don’t think the shutters are up in England, anyway?”

“Good Lord, no!” said the girl at the typewriter; “you’ve only to live among the poor to know that.”

“The poor haven’t got every virtue, and the rich haven’t got every vice — that’s nonsense!” broke in the physical exerciser.

Michael murmured soothingly.

“I wasn’t thinking of that. I was wondering whether something doesn’t hang over our heads too much?”

“D’you mean poison-gas?”

“Partly; and town blight, and a feeling that Progress has been found out.”

“Well, I don’t know,” replied the egg-beater, who was dark and pretty and had a slight engaging stammer, “I used to think so in the war. But Europe isn’t the world. Europe isn’t even very important, really. The sun hardly shines there, anyway.”

Michael nodded. “After all, if the Millennium comes and we do blot each other out, in Europe, it’ll only mean another desert about the size of the Sahara, and the loss of a lot of people obviously too ill-conditioned to be fit to live. It’d be a jolly good lesson to the rest of the world, wouldn’t it? Luckily the other continents are far off each other.”

“Cheerful!” exclaimed Norah Curfew.

Michael grinned.

“Well, one can’t help catching the atmosphere of this place. I admire you all frightfully, you know, giving up everything, to come and do this.”

“That’s tosh,” said the girl at the typewriter. “What is there to give up — bunny-hugging? One got used to doing things, in the war.”

“If it comes to that,” said the egg-beater, “we admire you much more, for not giving up — Parliament.”

Again Michael grinned.

“Miss La Fontaine — wanted in the kitchen!”

The egg-beater went towards the door.

“Can you — beat eggs? D’you mind — shan’t be a minute.” Handing Michael the bowl and fork, she vanished.

“What a shame!” said Norah Curfew. “Let me!”

“No,” said Michael; “I can beat eggs with anybody. What do you all feel about cutting children adrift at fourteen?”

“Well, of course, it’ll be bitterly opposed,” said the girl at the typewriter. “They’ll call it inhuman, and all that. It’s much more inhuman really to keep them here.”

“The real trouble,” said Norah Curfew, “apart from the shillings earned, is the class-interference idea. Besides, Imperialism isn’t popular.”

“I should jolly well think it isn’t,” muttered the physical exerciser.

“Ah!” said the typist, “but this isn’t Imperialism, is it, Mr. Mont? It’s all on the lines of making the Dominions the equal of the Mother Country.”

Michael nodded. “Commonwealth.”

“That won’t prevent their camouflaging their objection to losing the children’s wages,” said the physical exerciser.

A close discussion ensued between the three young women as to the exact effect of children’s wages on the working-class budget. Michael beat his eggs and listened. It was, he knew, a point of the utmost importance. The general conclusion seemed to be that children earned on the whole rather more than their keep, but that it was ‘very short-sighted in the long run,’ because it fostered surplus population and unemployment, and a “great shame” to spoil the children’s chances for the sake of the parents.

The re-entrance of the egg-beater put a stop to it.

“They’re beginning to come in, Norah.”

The physical exerciser slipped out, and Norah Curfew said:

“Now, Mr. Mont, would you like to see them?”

Michael followed her. He was thinking: ‘I wish Fleur had come!’ These girls seemed really to believe in things.

Down-stairs the children were trickling in from school. He stood and watched them. They seemed a queer blend of anaemia and vitality, of effervescence and obedience. Unselfconscious as puppies, but old beyond their years; and yet, looking as if they never thought ahead. Each movement, each action was as if it were their last. They were very quick. Most of them carried something to eat in a paper bag, or a bit of grease-paper. They chattered, and didn’t laugh. Their accent struck Michael as deplorable. Six or seven at most were nice to look at; but nearly all looked good-tempered, and none seemed to be selfish. Their movements were jerky. They mobbed Norah Curfew and the physical exerciser; obeyed without question, ate without appetite, and grabbed at the house-cat. Michael was fascinated.

With them came four or five mothers, who had questions to ask, or bottles to fill. They too were on perfect terms with the young women. Class did not exist in this house; only personality was present. He noticed that the children responded to his grin, that the women didn't, though they smiled at Norah Curfew and the physical exerciser; he wondered if they would give him a bit of their minds if they knew of his speech.

Norah Curfew accompanied him to the door.

"Aren't they ducks?"

"I'm afraid if I saw much of them, I should give up Foggartism."

"Oh! but why?"

"Well, you see it designs to make them men and women of property."

"You mean that would spoil them?"

Michael grinned. "There's something dangerous about silver spoons. Here's my initiation fee." He handed her all his money.

"Oh! Mr. Mont, we didn't —!"

"Well, give me back sixpence, otherwise I shall have to walk home."

"It's frightfully kind of you. Do come again; and please don't give up Foggartism."

He walked to the train thinking of her eyes; and, on reaching home, said to Fleur:

"You absolutely must come and see that place. It's quite clean, and the spirit's topping. It's bucked me up like anything. Norah Curfew's perfectly splendid."

Fleur looked at him between her lashes.

"Oh!" she said. "I will."

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CHAPTER VII

CONTRASTS

The land beyond the coppice at Lippinghall was a ten-acre bit of poor grass, chalk and gravel, fenced round, to show that it was property. Except for one experiment with goats, abandoned because nobody would drink their milk in a country that did not demean itself by growing food, nothing had been done with it. By December this poor relation of Sir Lawrence Mont's estate was being actively exploited. Close to the coppice the hut had been erected, and at least an acre converted into a sea of mud. The coppice itself presented an incised and draggled appearance, owing to the ravages of Henry Boddick and another man, who had cut and stacked a quantity of timber, which a contractor was gradually rejecting for the fowl-house and granary. The incubator-house was at present in the nature of a prophecy. Progress, in fact, was somewhat slow, but it was hoped that fowls might be asked to begin their operations soon after the New Year. In the meantime Michael had decided that the colony had better get the worst over and go into residence. Scraping the Manor House for furniture, and sending in a store of groceries, oil-lamps, and soap, he installed Boddick on the left, earmarked the centre for the Bergfelds, and the right hand for Swain. He was present when the Manor car brought them from the station. The murky day was turning cold, the trees dripped, the car-wheels splashed up the surface water. From the doorway of the hut Michael watched them get out, and thought he had never seen three more untimely creatures. Bergfeld came first; having only one suit, he had put it on, and looked what he was — an actor out of a job. Mrs. Bergfeld came second, and having no outdoor coat, looked what she was — nearly frozen. Swain came last. On his shadowy face was nothing quite so spirited as a sneer; but he gazed about him, and seemed to say: 'My hat!'

Boddick, with a sort of prescience, was absent in the coppice. 'He,' thought Michael, 'is my only joy!'

Taking them into the kitchen messroom of the hut, he deployed a thermos of hot coffee, a cake, and a bottle of rum.

"Awfully sorry things look so dishevelled; but I think the hut's dry, and there are plenty of blankets. These oil-lamps smell rather. You were in the war, Mr. Swain; you'll feel at home in no time. Mrs. Bergfeld, you look so cold, do put some rum into your coffee; we always do when we go over the top."

They all put rum into their coffee, which had a marked effect. Mrs. Bergfeld's cheeks grew pink, and her eyes darkened. Swain remarked that the hut was a 'bit of all right'; Bergfeld began making a speech. Michael checked him. "Boddick knows all the ropes. I'm afraid I've got to catch a train; I've only just time to show you round."

While whirling back to town afterwards he felt that he had, indeed, abandoned his platoon just as it was going over the top. That night he would be dining in Society; there would be light and warmth, jewels and pictures, wine and talk; the dinner would cost the board of his 'down and outs' for a quarter at least; and nobody would give them and their like a thought. If he ventured to draw Fleur's attention to the contrast, she would say:

"My dear boy, that's like a book by Gurdon Minho; you're getting sentimental." And he would feel a fool. Or would he? Would he not, perhaps, look at her small distinguished head, and think: 'Too easy a way out, my dear; those who take it have little heads!' And, then, his eyes, straying farther down to that white throat and all the dainty loveliness below, would convey a warmth to his blood and a warning to his brain not to give way to blasphemy, lest it end by disturbing bliss. For what with Foggartism, poultry, and the rest of it, Michael had serious thoughts sometimes that Fleur had none; and with wisdom born of love, he knew that if she hadn't, she never would have, and he must get used to it. She was what she was, and could be converted only in popular fiction. Excellent business for the self-centred heroine to turn from interest in her own belongings to interest in people who had none; but in life it wasn't done. Fleur at least camouflaged her self-concentration gracefully; and with Kit —! Ah! but Kit was herself!

So he did not mention his 'down and outs' on their way to dinner in Eaton Square. He took instead a lesson in the royal Personage named on their invitation card, and marvelled at Fleur's knowledge. "She's interested in social matters. And do remember, Michael, not to sit down till she asks you to, and not to get up before her, and to say 'ma'am.'"

Michael grinned. "I suppose they'all all be nobs, or sn — er — why the deuce did they ask us?"

But Fleur was silent, thinking of her curtsey.

Royalty was affable, the dinner short but superb, served and eaten off gold plate, at a rate which suited the impression that there really wasn't a moment to spare. Fleur took a mental note of this new necessity. She knew personally five of the twenty-four diners, and the rest as in an illustrated paper, darkly. She had seen them all there at one time or another, stepping hideously in paddocks, photographed with their offsprings or their dogs, about to reply for the Colonies, or 'taking a lunar' at a flying grouse. Her quick instinct apprehended almost at once the reason why she and Michael had been invited. His speech! Like some new specimen at the Zoo, he was an object of curiosity, a stunt. She saw people nodding in the direction of him, seated opposite her between two ladies covered with flesh and pearls. Excited and very pretty, she flirted with the Admiral on her right, and defended Michael with spirit from the Under-Secretary on her left. The Admiral grew warm, the Under-Secretary, too young for emotion, cold.

"A little knowledge, Mrs. Mont," he said at the end of his short second innings, "is a dangerous thing."

"Now where have I heard that?" said Fleur. "Is it in the Bible?"

The Under-Secretary tilted his chin.

"We who have to work Departments know too much, perhaps; but your husband certainly doesn't know enough. Foggartism is an amusing idea, but there it stops."

"We shall see!" said Fleur. "What do you say, Admiral?"

"Foggartism! What's that — new kind of death ray? I saw a fellow yesterday, Mrs. Mont — give you my word! — who's got a ray that goes through three bullocks, a nine-inch brick wall, and gives a shock to a donkey on the other side; and only at quarter strength."

Fleur flashed a look round towards the Under-Secretary, who had turned his shoulder, and, leaning towards the Admiral, murmured:

"I wish you'd give a shock to the donkey on my other side; he wants it, and I'm not nine inches thick."

But before the Admiral could shoot his death ray, Royalty had risen.

In the apartment to which Fleur was withdrawn, she had been saying little for some minutes, and noticing much, when her hostess came up and said:

"My dear, Her Royal Highness —"

Fleur followed, retaining every wit.

A frank and simple hand patted the sofa beside her. Fleur sat down. A frank and simple voice said:

"What an interesting speech your husband made! It was so refreshing, I thought."

"Yes, ma'am," said Fleur; "but there it will stop, I am told."

A faint smile curled lips guiltless of colouring matter.

"Well, perhaps. Has he been long in Parliament?"

"Only a year."

"Ah! I liked his taking up the cudgels for the children."

"Some people think he's proposing a new kind of child slavery."

"Oh, really! Have you any children?"

"One," said Fleur, and added honestly: "And I must say I wouldn't part with him at fourteen."

"Ah! and have you been long married?"

"Four years."

At this moment the royal lady saw some one else she wished to speak to, and was compelled to break off the conversation, which she did very graciously, leaving Fleur with the feeling that she had been disappointed with the rate of production.

In the cab trailing its way home through the foggy night, she felt warm and excited, and as if Michael wasn't.

"What's the matter, Michael?"

His hand came down on her knee at once.

"Sorry, old thing! Only, really — when you think of it — eh?"

"Of what? You were quite a li — object of interest."

"The whole thing's a game. Anything for novelty!"

"The Princess was very nice about you."

"Ah! Poor thing! But I suppose you get used to anything!"

Fleur laughed. Michael went on:

"Any new idea gets seized and talked out of existence. It never gets farther than the brain, and the brain gets bored; and there it is, already a back number!"

"That can't be true, Michael. What about Free Trade, or Woman Suffrage?"

Michael squeezed her knee. "All the women say to me: 'But how interesting, Mr. Mont; I think it's most thrilling!' And the men say: 'Good stunt, Mont! But not practical politics, of course.' And I've only one answer: 'Things as big got done in the war.' By George, it's foggy!"

They were going, indeed, at a snail's pace, and through the windows could see nothing but the faint glow of the street-lamps emerging slowly, high up, one by one. Michael let down a window, and leaned out.

"Where are we?"

"Gawd knows, sir."

Michael coughed, put up the window again, and resumed his clutch of Fleur.

"By the way, Wastwater asked me if I'd read 'Canthar.' He says there's a snorting cut-up of it in The Protagonist. It'll have the usual effect — send sales up."

"They say it's very clever."

"Horribly out of drawing — not fit for children, and tells adults nothing they don't know. I don't see how it can be justified."

"Genius, my dear. If it's attacked, it'll be defended."

"Sib Swan won't have it — he says it's muck."

"Oh! yes; but Sib's getting a back number."

"That's very true," said Michael, thoughtfully. "By Jove! how fast things move, except in politics, and fog."

Their cab had come to a standstill. Michael let down the window again.

"I'm fair lost, sir," said the driver's hoarse voice. "Ought to be near the Embankment, but for the life of me I can't find the turning." Michael buttoned his coat, put up the window again, and got out on the near side.

The night was smothered, alive only with the continual hootings of creeping cars. The black vapour, acrid and cold, surged into Michael's lungs.

"I'll walk beside you; we're against the curb; creep on till we strike the river, or a bobby."

The cab crept on, and Michael walked beside it, feeling with his foot for the curb.

The refined voice of an invisible man said: "This is sanguinary!"

"It is," said Michael. "Where are we?"

"In the twentieth century, and the heart of civilisation."

Michael laughed, and regretted it; the fog tasted of filth.

"Think of the police!" said the voice, "having to be out in this all night!"

"Splendid force, the police!" replied Michael. "Where are you, sir?"

"Here, sir. Where are you?"

It was the exact position. The blurred moon of a lamp glowed suddenly above Michael's head. The cab ceased to move.

"If I could only smell the 'Ouses of Parliament," said the cabman. "They'll be 'avin' supper there be now."

"Listen!" said Michael — Big Ben was striking. "That was to our left."

"At our back," said the cabman.

"Can't be, or we should be in the river; unless you've turned right round!"

"Gawd knows where I've turned," said the cabman, sneezing. "Never saw such a night!"

"There's only one thing for it — drive on until we hit something. Gently does it."

The cabman started the cab, and Michael, with his hand on it, continued to feel for the curb with his foot.

"Steady!" he said, suddenly. "Car in front." There was a slight bump.

"Nah then!" said a voice. "Where yer comin'? Cawn't yer see?"

Michael moved up alongside of what seemed to be another taxi.

"Comin' along at that pice!" said its driver; "and full moon, too!"

"Awfully sorry," said Michael. "No harm done. You got any sense of direction left?"

"The pubs are all closed — worse luck! There's a bloomin' car in front o' me that I've hit three times. Can't make any impression on it. The driver's dead, I think. Would yer go and look, Guv'nor?"

Michael moved towards the loom in front. But at that moment it gave way to the more universal blackness. He ran four steps to hail the driver, stumbled off the curb, fell, picked himself up and spun round. He moved along the curb to his right, felt he was going wrong, stopped, and called: "Hallo!" A faint "Hallo!" replied from — where? He moved what he thought was back, and called again. No answer! Fleur would be frightened! He shouted. Half a dozen faint hallos replied to him; and someone at his elbow said: "Don't cher know where y'are?"

"No; do you?"

"What do you think? Lost anything?"

"Yes; my cab."

"Left anything in it?"

"My wife."

"Lawd! You won't get 'er back to-night." A hoarse laugh, ghostly and obscene, floated by. A bit of darkness loomed for a moment, and faded out. Michael stood still. 'Keep your head!' he thought. 'Here's the curb — either they're in front, or they're behind; or else I've turned a corner.' He stepped forward along the curb. Nothing! He stepped back. Nothing! "What the blazes have I done?" he muttered: "or have they moved on?" Sweat poured down him in spite of the cold. Fleur would be really scared! And the words of his election address sprang from his lips. "Chiefly by the elimination of smoke!"

"Ah!" said a voice, "got a cigarette, Guv'nor?"

"I'll give you all I've got and half a crown, if you'll find a cab close by with a lady in it. What street's this?"

"Don't arst me! The streets 'ave gone mad, I think."

"Listen!" said Michael sharply.

"That's right, 'Some one callin' so sweet.'"

"Hallo!" cried Michael. "Fleur!"

"Here! Here!"

It sounded to his right, to his left, behind him, in front. Then came the steady blowing of a cab's horn.

"Now we've got 'em," said the bit of darkness. "This way, Guv'nor, step slow, and mind my corns!"

Michael yielded to a tugging at his coat.

"It's like No-Man's Land in a smoke barrage!" said his guide.

"You're right. Hallo! Coming!"

The horn sounded a yard off. A voice said: "Oh! Michael!"

His face touched Fleur's in the window of the cab.

"Just a second, darling. There you are, my friend, and thanks awfully! Hope you'll get home!"

"I've 'ad worse nights out than this. Thank you, Captain! Wish you and the lady luck." There was a sound of feet shuffling on, and the fog sighed out: "So long!"

"All right, sir," said the hoarse voice of Michael's cabman. "I know where I am now. First on the left, second on the right. I'll bump the curb till I get there. Thought you was swallered up, sir!"

Michael got into the cab, and clasped Fleur close. She uttered a long sigh, and sat quite still.

"Nothing more scaring than a fog!" he said.

"I thought you'd been run over!"

Michael was profoundly touched.

“Awfully sorry, darling. And you’ve got all that beastly fog down your throat. We’ll drown it out when we get in. The poor chap was an ex-Service man. Wonderful the way the English keep their humour and don’t lose their heads.”

“I lost mine!”

“Well, you’ve got it back,” said Michael, pressing it against his own to hide the emotion he was feeling. “Fog’s our sheet-anchor, after all. So long as we have fog, England will survive.” He felt Fleur’s lips against his.

He belonged to her, and she couldn’t afford to have him straying about in fogs or Foggartism! Was that the —? And then he yielded to the thrill.

The cabman was standing by the opened door. “Now, sir, I’m in your Square. P’r’aps you know your own ’ouse.”

Wrenched from the kiss, Michael stammered “Righto!” The fog was thinner here; he could consult the shape of trees. “On and to your right, third house.”

There it was — desirable — with its bay-trees in its tubs and its fanlight shining. He put his latch-key in the door.

“A drink?” he said.

The cabman coughed: “I won’t say no, sir.”

Michael brought the drink.

“Far to go?”

“Near Putney Bridge. Your ‘ealth, sir!”

Michael watched his pinched face drinking.

“Sorry you’ve got to plough into that again!”

The cabman handed back the glass.

“Thank’ee, sir; I shall be all right now; keep along the river, and down the Fulham Road. Thought they couldn’t lose me in London. Where I went wrong was trying for a short cut instead of takin’ the straight road round. ‘Ope the young lady’s none the worse, sir. She was properly scared while you was out there in the dark. These fogs ain’t fit for ‘uman bein’s. They ought to do somethin’ about ’em in Parliament.”

“They ought!” said Michael, handing him a pound note. “Good night, and good luck!”

“It’s an ill wind!” said the cabman, starting his cab. “Good night, sir, and thank you kindly.”

“Thank YOU!” said Michael.

The cab ground slowly away, and was lost to sight.

Michael went in to the Spanish room. Fleur, beneath the Goya, was boiling a silver kettle, and burning pastilles. What a contrast to the world outside — its black malodorous cold reek, its risk and fear! In this pretty glowing room, with this pretty glowing woman, why think of its tangle, lost shapes, and straying cries?

Lighting his cigarette, he took his drink from her by its silver handle, and put it to his lips.

“I really think we ought to have a car, Michael!”

❦

Chapter VIII

Collecting Evidence

The editor of The Protagonist had so evidently enjoyed himself that he caused a number of other people to do the same.

"There's no more popular sight in the East, Forsyte," said Sir Lawrence, "than a boy being spanked; and the only difference between East and West is that in the East the boy at once offers himself again at so much a spank. I don't see Mr. Perceval Calvin doing that."

"If he defends himself," said Soames, gloomily, "other people won't."

They waited, reading daily denunciations signed: 'A Mother of Three'; 'Roger: Northampton'; 'Victorian'; 'Alys St. Maurice'; 'Plus Fours'; 'Arthur Whiffkin'; 'Sportsman if not Gentleman'; and 'Pro Patria'; which practically all contained the words: 'I cannot say that I have read the book through, but I have read enough to —'

It was five days before the defence fired a shot. But first came a letter above the signature: 'Swishing Block,' which, after commenting on the fact that a whole school of so-called literature had been indicted by the Editor of The Protagonist in his able letter of the 14th inst., noted with satisfaction that the said school had grace enough to take its swishing without a murmur. Not even an anonymous squeak had been heard from the whole apostolic body.

"Forsyte," said Sir Lawrence, handing it to Soames, "that's my very own mite, and if it doesn't draw them — nothing will!"

But it did. The next issue of the interested journal in which the correspondence was appearing contained a letter from the greater novelist L. S. D. which restored every one to his place. This book might or might not be Art, he hadn't read it; but the Editor of The Protagonist wrote like a pedagogue, and there was an end of him. As to the claim that literature must always wear a flannel petticoat, it was 'piffle,' and that was that. From under the skirts of this letter the defence, to what of exultation Soames ever permitted himself, moved out in force. Among the defenders were as many as four of the selected ten associates to whom young Butterfield had purveyed copies. They wrote over their own names that "Canthar" was distinctly LITERATURE; they were sorry for people who thought in these days that LITERATURE had any business with morals. The work must be approached aesthetically or not at all. ART was ART, and morality was morality, and never the twain could, would, or should meet. It was monstrous that a work of this sort should have to appear with a foreign imprint. When would England recognise genius when she saw it?

Soames cut the letters out one after the other, and pasted them in a book. He had got what he wanted, and the rest of the discussion interested him no more. He had received, too, a communication from young Butterfield.

"Sir,

"I called on the lady last Monday, and was fortunately able to see her in person. She seemed rather annoyed when I offered her the book. 'That book,' she said: 'I read it weeks ago.' 'It's exciting a great deal of interest, Madam,' I said. 'I know,' she said. 'Then you won't take a copy; the price is rising steadily, it'll be very valuable in time?' 'I've got one,' she said. That's what you told me to find out, sir; so I didn't pursue the matter. I hope I have done what you wanted. But if there is anything more, I shall be most happy. I consider that I owe my present position entirely to you."

Soames didn't know about that, but as to his future position — he might have to put the young man into the box. The question of a play remained. He consulted Michael.

"Does that young woman still act in the advanced theatre place you gave me the name of?"

Michael winced. "I don't know, sir; but I could find out."

Inquiry revealed that she was cast for the part of Olivia in Bertie Curfew's matinee of "The Plain Dealer."

"'The Plain Dealer'?" said Soames. "Is that an advanced play?"

"Yes, sir, two hundred and fifty years old."

"Ah!" said Soames; "they were a coarse lot in those days. How is it she goes on there if she and the young man have split?"

"Oh! well, they're very cool hands. I do hope you're going to keep things out of Court, sir?"

"I can't tell. When's this performance?"

"January the seventh."

Soames went to his Club library and took down "Wycherley." He was disappointed with the early portions of "The Plain Dealer," but it improved as it went on, and he spent some time making a list of what George Forsyte would have called the 'nubbly bits.' He understood that at that theatre they did not bowdlerise. Excellent! There were passages that should raise hair on any British Jury. Between "Canthar" and this play, he felt as if he had a complete answer to any claim by the young woman and her set to having 'morals about them.' Old professional instincts were rising within him. He had retained Sir James Foskisson, K. C., not because he admired him personally, but because if he didn't, the other side might. As junior he was employing very young Nicholas Forsyte; he had no great opinion of him, but it was as well to keep the matter in the family, especially if it wasn't to come into Court.

A conversation with Fleur that evening contributed to his intention that it should not.

"What's happened to that young American?" he said.

Fleur smiled acidly. "Francis Wilmot? Oh! he's 'fallen for' Marjorie Ferrar."

"'Fallen for her'?" said Soames. "What an expression!"

"Yes, dear; it's American."

"'For' her? It means nothing, so far as I can see."

"Let's hope not, for his sake! She's going to marry Sir Alexander MacGown, I'm told."

"Oh!"

"Did Michael tell you that he hit him on the nose?"

"Which — who?" said Soames testily. "Whose nose?"

"MacGown's, dear; and it bled like anything."

"Why on earth did he do that?"

"Didn't you read his speech about Michael?"

"Oh!" said Soames. "Parliamentary fuss — that's nothing. They're always behaving like children, there. And so she's going to marry him. Has he been putting her up to all this?"

"No; SHE'S been putting him."

Soames discounted the information with a sniff; he scented the hostility of woman for woman. Still, chicken and egg — political feeling and social feeling, who could say which first prompted which? In any case, this made a difference. Going to be married — was she? He debated the matter for some time, and then decided that he would go and see Settlewhite and Stark. If they had been a firm of poor repute or the kind always employed in 'causes celebres,' he wouldn't have dreamed of it; but, as a fact, they stood high, were solid family people, with an aristocratic connection and all that.

He did not write, but took his hat and went over from 'The Connoisseurs' to their offices in King Street, St. James's. The journey recalled old days — to how many such negotiatory meetings had he not gone or caused his adversaries to come! He had never cared to take things into Court if they could be settled out of it. And always he had approached negotiation with the impersonality of one passionless about to meet another of the same kidney — two calculating machines, making their livings out of human nature. He did not feel like that today; and, aware of this handicap, stopped to stare into the print and picture shop next door. Ah! There were those first proofs of the Roussel engravings of the Prince Consort Exhibition of '51, that Old Mont had spoken of — he had an eye for an engraving, Old Mont. Ah! and there was a Fred Walker, quite a good one! Mason, and Walker — they weren't done for yet by any means. And the sensation that a man feels hearing a blackbird sing on a tree just coming into blossom, stirred beneath Soames' ribs. Long — long since he had bought a picture! Let him but get this confounded case out of the way, and he could enjoy himself again. Riving his glance from the window, he took a deep breath, and walked into Settlewhite and Stark's.

The chief partner's room was on the first floor, and the chief partner standing where chief partners stand.

"How do you do, Mr. Forsyte? I've not met you since 'Bobbin against the L. & S. W.' That must have been 1900!"

"1899," said Soames. "You were for the Company."

Mr. Settlewhite pointed to a chair.

Soames sat down and glanced up at the figure before the fire. H'm! A long-lipped, long-eyelashed, long-chinned face; a man of his own calibre, education, and probity! He would not beat about the bush.

"This action," he said, "is a very petty business. What can we do about it?"

Mr. Settlewhite frowned.

"That depends, Mr. Forsyte, on what you have to propose? My client has been very grossly libelled."

Soames smiled sourly.

"She began it. And what is she relying on — private letters to personal friends of my daughter's, written in very natural anger! I'm surprised that a firm of your standing —"

Mr. Settlewhite smiled.

"Don't trouble to compliment my firm! I'm surprised myself that you're acting for your daughter. You can hardly see all round the matter. Have you come to offer an apology?"

"That!" said Soames. "I should have thought it was for your client to apologise."

"If such is your view, I'm afraid it's no use continuing this discussion."

Soames regarded him fixedly.

"How do you think you're going to prove damage? She belongs to the fast set."

Mr. Settlewhite continued to smile.

"I understand she's going to marry Sir Alexander MacGown," said Soames.

Mr. Settlewhite's lips tightened.

"Really, Mr. Forsyte, if you have come to offer an apology and a substantial sum in settlement, we can talk. Otherwise —"

"As a sensible man," said Soames, "you know that these Society scandals are always dead sea fruit — nothing but costs and vexation, and a feast for all the gossips about town. I'm prepared to offer you a thousand pounds to settle the whole thing, but an apology I can't look at. A mutual expression of regret — perhaps; but an apology's out of the question."

"Fifteen hundred I might accept — the insults have had wide currency. But an apology is essential."

Soames sat silent, chewing the injustice of it all. Fifteen hundred! Monstrous! Still he would pay even that to keep Fleur out of Court. But humble-pie! She wouldn't eat it, and he couldn't make her, and he didn't know that he wanted to. He got up.

"Look here, Mr. Settlewhite, if you take this into Court, you will find yourself up against more than you think. But the whole thing is so offensive to me, that I'm prepared to meet you over the money, though I tell you frankly I don't believe a Jury would award a penny piece. As to an apology, a 'formula' could be found, perhaps"— why the deuce was the fellow smiling? —"something like this: 'We regret that we have said hasty things about each other,' to be signed by both parties."

Mr. Settlewhite caressed his chin.

"Well, I'll put your proposition before my client. I join with you in wishing to see the matter settled, not because I'm afraid of the result"—'Oh, no!' thought Soames —"but because these cases, as you say, are not edifying." He held out his hand.

Soames gave it a cold touch.

"You understand that this is entirely 'without prejudice,'" he said, and went on. 'She'll take it!' he thought. Fifteen hundred pounds of his money thrown away on that baggage, just because for once she had been labelled what she was; and all his trouble to get evidence wasted! For a moment he resented his devotion to Fleur. Really it was fatuous to be so fond as that! Then his heart rebounded. Thank God! He had settled it.

Christmas was at hand. It did not alarm him, therefore, that he received no answering communication. Fleur and Michael were at Lippinghall with the ninth and eleventh baronets. He and Annette had Winifred and the Cardigans down at 'The Shelter.' Not till the 6th of January did he receive a letter from Messrs. Settlewhite and Stark.

"DEAR SIR,

"In reference to your call of the 17th ultimo, your proposition was duly placed before our client, and we are instructed to say that she will accept the sum of L1,500 — fifteen hundred pounds — and an apology, duly signed by your client, copy of which we enclose.

“We are, dear Sir,

“Faithfully yours,

“SETTLEWHITE AND STARK.”

Soames turned to the enclosure. It ran thus:

I, Mrs. Michael Mont, withdraw the words concerning Miss Marjorie Ferrar contained in my letters to Mrs. Ralph Ppynrryn and Mrs. Edward Maltese of October 4th last, and hereby tender a full and free apology for having written them.

“(Signed)”

Pushing back the breakfast-table, so violently that it groaned, Soames got up.

“What is it, Soames?” said Annette. “Have you broken your plate again? You should not bite so hard.”

“Read that!”

Annette read.

“You would give that woman fifteen hundred pounds? I think you are mad, Soames. I would not give her fifteen hundred pence! Pay this woman, and she tells her friends. That is fifteen hundred apologies in all their minds. Really, Soames — I am surprised. A man of business, a clever man! Do you not know the world better than that? With every pound you pay, Fleur eats her words!”

Soames flushed. It was so French, and yet somehow it was so true. He walked to the window. The French — they had no sense of compromise, and every sense of money!

“Well,” he said, “that ends it anyway. She won’t sign. And I shall withdraw my offer.”

“I should hope so. Fleur has a good head. She will look very pretty in Court. I think that woman will be sorry she ever lived! Why don’t you have her what you call shadowed? It is no good to be delicate with women like that.”

In a weak moment he had told Annette about the book and the play; for, unable to speak of them to Fleur and Michael, he had really had to tell some one; indeed, he had shown her “Canthar,” with the words: “I don’t advise you to read it; it’s very French.”

Annette had returned it to him two days later, saying: “It is not French at all; it is disgusting. You English are so coarse. It has no wit. It is only nasty. A serious nasty book — that is the limit. You are so old-fashioned, Soames. Why do you say this book is French?”

Soames, who really didn’t know why, had muttered:

“Well, they can’t get it printed in England.” And with the words: “Bruxelles, Bruxelles, you call Bruxelles —” buzzing about his ears, had left the room. He had never known any people so touchy as the French!

Her remark about ‘shadowing,’ however, was not easily forgotten. Why be squeamish, when all depended on frightening this woman? And on arriving in London he visited an office that was not Mr. Polteed’s, and gave instructions for the shadowing of Marjorie Ferrar’s past, present, and future.

His answer to Settlewhite and Stark, too, was brief, determined, and written on the paper of his own firm.

“Jan. 6th, 1925.

“DEAR SIRS,

“I have your letter of yesterday’s date, and note that your client has rejected my proposition, which, as you know, was made entirely without prejudice, and is now withdrawn in toto.

“Yours faithfully,

“SOAMES FORSYTE.”

If he did not mistake, they would be sorry. And he gazed at the words ‘in toto’; somehow they looked funny. In toto! And now for “The Plain Dealer”!

The theatre of the ‘Ne Plus Ultra’ Play-producing Society had a dingy exterior, a death-mask of Congreve in the hall, a peculiar smell, and an apron stage. There was no music. They hit something three times before the curtain went up. There were no footlights. The scenery was peculiar — Soames could not take his eyes off it till, in the first Entr’acte, its principle was revealed to him by the conversation of two people sitting just behind.

“The point of the scenery here is that no one need look at it, you see. They go farther than anything yet done.”

“They’ve gone farther in Moscow.”

“I believe not. Curfew went over there. He came back raving about the way they speak their lines.”

“Does he know Russian?”

“No. You don’t need to. It’s the timbre. I think he’s doing pretty well here with that. You couldn’t give a play like this if you took the words in.”

Soames, who had been trying to take the words in-it was, indeed, what he had come for — squinted round at the speakers. They were pale and young and went on with a strange unconcern.

“Curfew’s doing great work. He’s shaking them up.”

“I see they’ve got Marjorie Ferrar as Olivia.”

“Don’t know why he keeps on an amateur like that.”

“Box office, dear boy; she brings the smart people. She’s painful, I think.”

“She did one good thing — the dumb girl in that Russian play. But she can’t speak for nuts; you’re following the sense of her words all the time. She doesn’t rhythmatise you a little bit.”

“She’s got looks.”

“M’yes.”

At this moment the curtain went up again. Since Marjorie Ferrar had not yet appeared, Soames was obliged to keep awake; indeed, whether because she couldn’t ‘speak for nuts,’ or merely from duty, he was always awake while she was on the stage, and whenever she had anything outrageous to say he noted it carefully, otherwise he passed an excellent afternoon, and went away much rested. In his cab he mentally rehearsed Sir James Foskisson in the part of cross-examiner:

“I think, madam, you played Olivia in a production of “The Plain Dealer” by the “Ne Plus Ultra” Play-Producing Society? . . . Would it be correct to say that the part was that of a modest woman? . . . Precisely. And did it contain the following lines? (Quotation of nubbly bits.) . . . Did that convey anything to your mind, madam? . . . I suppose that you would not say it was an immoral passage? . . . No? Nor calculated to offend the ears and debase the morals of a decent-minded audience? . . . No. In fact, you don’t take the same view of morality that I, or, I venture to think, the Jury do? . . . No. The dark scene — you did not remonstrate with the producer for not omitting that scene? . . . Quite. Mr. Curfew, I think, was the producer? Yes. Are you on such terms with that gentleman as would have made a remonstrance easy? . . . Ah! Now, madam, I put it to you that throughout 1923 you were seeing this gentleman nearly every day. . . . Well, say three or four times a week. And yet you say that you were not on such terms as would have made it possible for you to represent to him that no modest young woman should be asked to play a scene like that. . . . Indeed! The Jury will form their own opinion of your answer. You are not a professional actress, dependent for your living on doing what you are told to do? . . . No. And yet you have the face to come here and ask for substantial damages because of the allegation in a private letter that you haven’t a moral about you? . . . Have you? . . .” And so on, and so on. Oh! no. Damages! She wouldn’t get a farthing.

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CHAPTER IX

VOLTE FACE

Keeping Sir Alexander MacGown and Francis Wilmot in the air, fulfilling her week-end and other engagements, playing much bridge in the hope of making her daily expenses, getting a day's hunting when she could, and rehearsing the part of Olivia, Marjorie Ferrar had almost forgotten the action, when the offer of fifteen hundred pounds and the formula were put before her by Messrs. Settlewhite and Stark. She almost jumped at it. The money would wipe out her more pressing debts; she would be able to breathe, and reconsider her future.

She received their letter on the Friday before Christmas, just as she was about to go down to her father's, near Newmarket, and wrote hastily to say she would call at their office on her way home on Monday. The following evening she consulted her father. Lord Charles was of opinion that if this attorney fellow would go as far as fifteen hundred, he must be dead keen on settling, and she had only to press for the apology to get it. Anyway she should let them stew in their juice for a bit. On Monday he wanted to show her his yearlings. She did not, therefore, return to Town till the 23rd, and found the office closed for Christmas. It had never occurred to her that solicitors had holidays. On Christmas Eve she herself went away for ten days; so that it was January the 4th before she was again able to call. Mr. Settlewhite was still in the South of France, but Mr. Stark would see her. Mr. Stark knew little about the matter, but thought Lord Charles' advice probably sound; he proposed to write accepting the fifteen hundred pounds if a formal apology were tendered; they could fall back on the formula if necessary, but it was always wise to get as much as you could. With some misgiving Marjorie Ferrar agreed.

Returning from the matinee on January 7th, tired and elated by applause, by Bertie Curfew's words: "You did quite well, darling," and almost the old look on his face, she got into a hot bath, and was just out of it when her maid announced Mr. Wilmot.

"Keep him, Fanny; say I'll be with him in twenty minutes."

Feverish and soft, as if approaching a crisis, she dressed hastily, put essence of orange-blossom on her neck and hands, and went to the studio. She entered without noise. The young man, back to the door, in the centre of the room, evidently did not hear her. Approaching within a few feet, she waited for the effect on him of orange-blossom. He was standing like some Eastern donkey, that with drooped ears patiently awaits the fresh burdening of a sore back. And suddenly he spoke: "I'm all in."

"Francis!"

The young man turned.

"Oh! Marjorie!" he said, "I never heard." And taking her hands, he buried his face in them.

She was hampered at that moment. To convert his mouth from despairing kissing of her hands to triumphal flame upon her lips would have been so easy if he had been modern, if his old-fashioned love had not complimented her so subtly; if, too, she were not feeling for him something more — or was it less? — than passion. Was she to know at last the sensations of the simple — a young girl's idyll — something she had missed? She led him to the divan, sat down by his side, and looked into his eyes. Fabled sweetness, as of a Spring morning — Francis and she, children in the wood, with the world well lost! She surrendered to the innocence of it; deliberately grasped something delicious, new. Poor boy! How delightful to feel him happy at last — to promise marriage and mean to perform it! When? Oh! when he liked — Soon, quite soon; the sooner the better! Almost unconscious that she was 'playing' a young girl, she was carried away by his amazement and his joy. He was on fire, on air; yet he remained delicate — he was wonderful! For an hour they sat — a fragrant hour for memory to sniff — before she remembered that she was dining out at half-past eight. She put her lips to his, and closed her eyes. And thought ran riot. Should she spoil it, and make sure of him in modern fashion? What was his image of her but a phlizz, but a fraud? She saw his eyes grow troubled, felt his hands grow fevered. Something seemed drowning before her eyes. She stood up.

"Now, my darling, you must fly!"

When he had flown, she threw off her dress and brushed out her hair that in the mirror seemed to have more gold than red. . . . Some letters on her dressing-table caught her eye. The first was a bill, the second a bill; the third ran thus:

"DEAR MADAM,

"We regret to say that Cuthcott Kingston & Forsyte have refused to give the apology we asked for, and withdrawn their verbal offer in toto. We presume, therefore, that the action must go forward. We have every hope, however, that they may reconsider the matter before it comes into Court.

"Your obedient servants,

"SETTLEWHITE & STARK."

She dropped it and sat very still, staring at a little hard line on the right side of her mouth and a little hard line on the left . . . .

Francis Wilmot, flying, thought of steamship-lines and staterooms, of registrars and rings. An hour ago he had despaired; now it seemed he had always known she was "too fine not to give up this fellow whom she didn't love." He would make her the queen of South Carolina — he surely would! But if she didn't like it out there, he would sell the 'old home,' and they would go and live where she wished — in Venice; he had heard her say Venice was wonderful; or New York, or Sicily; with her he wouldn't care! And London in the cold dry wind seemed beautiful, no longer a grey maze of unreality and shadows, but a city where you could buy rings and steamship passages. The wind cut him like a knife and he did not feel it. That poor devil MacGown! He hated the sight, the thought of him, and yet felt sorry, thinking of him with the cup dashed from his lips. And all the days, weeks, months himself had spent circling round the flame, his wings scorched and drooping, seemed now but the natural progress of the soul towards Paradise. Twenty-four — his age and hers; an eternity of bliss before them! He pictured her on the porch at home. Horses! A better car than the old Ford! The darkies would adore her — kind of grand, and so white! To walk with her among the azaleas in the Spring, that he could smell already; no — it was his hands where he had touched her! He shivered, and resumed his flight under the bare trees, well-nigh alone in the East wind; the stars of a bitter night shining.

A card was handed to him as he entered his hotel.

"Mr. Wilmot, a gentleman to see you."

Sir Alexander was seated in a corner of the Lounge, with a crush hat in his hand. He rose and came towards Francis Wilmot, grim and square.

"I've been meaning to call on you for some time, Mr. Wilmot."

"Yes, sir. May I offer you a cocktail, or a glass of sherry?"

"No, thank you. You are aware of my engagement to Miss Ferrar?"

"I was, sir."

This red aggressive face, with its stiff moustache and burning eyes, revived his hatred; so that he no longer felt sorry.

"You know that I very much object to your constant visits to that young lady. In this country it is not the part of a gentleman to pursue an engaged young woman."

"That," said Francis Wilmot, coolly, "is for Miss Ferrar herself to say."

MacGown's face grew even redder.

"If you hadn't been an American, I should have warned you to keep clear a long time ago."

Francis Wilmot bowed.

"Well! Are you going to?"

"Permit me to decline an answer."

MacGown thrust forward his face.

"I've told you," he said. "If you trespass any more, look out for yourself."

"Thank you; I will," said Francis Wilmot, softly.

MacGown stood for a moment swaying slightly. Was he going to hit out? Francis Wilmot put his hands into his trouser pockets.

"You've had your warning," said MacGown, and turned on his heel.

"Good night!" said Francis Wilmot to that square receding back. He had been gentle, he had been polite, but he hated the fellow, yes, indeed! Save for the triumphal glow within him, there might have been a fuss!

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CHAPTER X

PHOTOGRAPHY

Summoned to the annual Christmas covert-shooting at Lippinghall, Michael found there two practical politicians, and one member of the Government.

In the mullion-windowed smoking-room, where men retired, and women too sometimes, into chairs old, soft, leathery, the ball of talk was lightly tossed, and naught so devastating as Foggartism mentioned. But in odd minutes and half-hours Michael gained insight into political realities, and respect for practical politicians. Even on this holiday they sat up late, got up early, wrote letters, examined petitions, dipped into Blue Books. They were robust, ate heartily, took their liquor like men, never seemed fatigued. They shaved clean, looked healthy, and shot badly with enjoyment. The member of the Government played golf instead, and Fleur went round with him. Michael learned the lesson: Have so much on your mind that you have practically nothing in it; no time to pet your schemes, fancies, feelings. Carry on, and be careful that you don't know to what end.

As for Foggartism, they didn't — a la Evening Sun — pooh-pooh it; they merely asked, as Michael had often asked himself: "Yes, but how are you going to work it? Your scheme might be very good, if it didn't hit people's pockets. Any addition to the price of living is out of the question — the country's taxed up to the hilt. Your Foggartism's going to need money in every direction. You may swear till you're blue in the face that ten or twenty years hence it'll bring fivefold return; nobody will listen. You may say: 'Without it we're all going to the devil'; but we're accustomed to that — some people think we're there already, and they resent its being said. Others, especially manufacturers, believe what they want to. They can't bear any one who cries 'stinking fish,' whatever his object. Talk about reviving trade, and less taxation, or offer more wages and talk of a capital levy, and, according to Party, we shall believe you've done the trick — until we find you haven't. But you're talking of less trade and more taxation in the present with a view to a better future. Great Scott! In politics you can shuffle the cards, but you mustn't add or subtract. People only react to immediate benefit, or, as in the war, to imminent danger. You must cut out sensationalism."

In short, they were intelligent, and completely fatalistic.

After these quiet talks, Michael understood, much better than before, the profession of politics. He was greatly attracted by the member of the Government; his personality was modest, his manner pleasant, he had Departmental ideas, and was doing his best with his own job according to those ideas; if he had others he kept them to himself. He seemed to admire Fleur, and he listened better than the other two. He said, too, some things they hadn't. "Of course, what we're able to do may be found so inadequate that there'll be a great journalistic outcry, and under cover of it we may bring in some sweeping measures that people will swallow before they know what they're in for."

"The Press," said Michael; "I don't see them helping."

"Well! It's the only voice there is. If you could get fast hold of the vociferous papers, you might even put your Foggartism over. What you're really up against is the slow town growth of the last hundred and fifty years, an ingrained state of mind which can only see England in terms of industrialism and the carrying trade. And in the town-mind, of course, hope springs eternal. They don't like calamity talk. Some genuinely think we can go on indefinitely on the old lines, and get more and more prosperous into the bargain. Personally, I don't. It's possible that much of what old Foggart advocates may be adopted bit by bit, even child emigration, from sheer practical necessity; but it won't be called Foggartism. Inventor's luck! HE'LL get no credit for being the first to see it. And," added the Minister, gloomily, "by the time it's adopted, it'll probably be too late."

Receiving the same day a request for an interview from a Press Syndicate whose representative would come down to suit his convenience, Michael made the appointment, and prepared an elaborate exposition of his faith. The representative, however, turned out to be a camera, and a photograph entitled: 'The Member for Mid-Bucks expounding Foggartism to our Representative,' became the only record of it. The camera was active. It took a family group in front of the porch: 'Right to Left, Mr. Michael Mont, M. P., Lady Mont, Mrs. Michael Mont, Sir Lawrence Mont, Bt.' It took Fleur: 'Mrs. Michael Mont, with Kit and Dandie.' It took the Jacobean wing. It took the Minister, with his pipe, 'enjoying a Christmas rest.' It took a corner of the walled garden: ‘In the grounds.’ It then had lunch. After lunch it took the whole house-party: ‘At Sir Lawrence Mont’s, Lippinghall Manor, Bucks’; with the Minister on Lady Mont’s right and the Minister’s wife on Sir Lawrence’s left. This photograph would have turned out better, if the Dandie, inadvertently left out, had not made a sudden onslaught on the camera’s legs. It took a photograph of Fleur alone: ‘Mrs. Michael Mont — a charming young Society hostess.’ It understood that Michael was making an interesting practical experiment — could it take Foggartism in action? Michael grinned and said: Yes, if it would take a walk, too.

They departed for the coppice. The colony was in its normal state — Boddick, with two of the contractor’s men cheering him on, was working at the construction of the incubator-house; Swain, smoking a cigarette, was reading The Daily Mall; Bergfeld was sitting with his head in his hands, and Mrs. Bergfeld was washing up.

The camera took three photographs. Michael, who had noted that Bergfeld had begun shaking, suggested to the camera that it would miss its train. It at once took a final photograph of Michael in front of the hut, two cups of tea at the Manor, and its departure.

As Michael was going up-stairs that night, the butler came to him.

“The man Boddick’s in the pantry, Mr. Michael; I’m afraid something’s happened, sir.”

“Oh!” said Michael, blankly.

Where Michael had spent many happy hours, when he was young, was Boddick, his pale face running with sweat, and his dark eyes very alive.

“The German’s gone, sir.”

“Gone?”

“Hanged hisself. The woman’s in an awful state. I cut him down, and sent Swain to the village.”

“Good God! Hanged! But why?”

“He’s been very funny these last three days; and that camera upset him properly. Will you come, sir?”

They set out with a lantern, Boddick telling his tale.

“As soon as ever you was gone this afternoon he started to shake and carry on about having been made game of. I told ’im not to be a fool, and went out to get on with it. But when I came in to tea, he was still shakin’, and talkin’ about his honour and his savin’s; Swain had got fed-up and was jeerin’ at him, and Mrs. Bergfeld was as white as a ghost in the corner. I told Swain to shut his head; and Fritz simmered down after a bit, and sat humped up as he does for hours together. Mrs. Bergfeld got our tea. I had some chores to finish, so I went out after. When I come in at seven, they was at it again hammer and tongs, and Mrs. Bergfeld cryin’ fit to bust her heart. ‘Can’t you see,’ I said, ‘how you’re upsettin’ your wife?’ ‘Henry Boddick,’ he said, ‘I’ve nothing against YOU, you’ve always been decent to me. But this Swain,’ he said, “is name is Swine!’ and he took up the bread-knife. I got it away from him, and spoke him calm. ‘Ah!’ he said, ‘but YOU’VE no pride.’ Swain was lookin’ at him with that sort o’ droop in his mouth he’s got. ‘Pride,’ he says, ‘you silly blighter, what call ‘ave YOU to ‘ave any pride?’ Well, I see that while we was there he wasn’t goin’ to get any better, so I took Swain off for a glass at the pub. When we came back at ten o’clock, Swain went straight to bed, and I went into the mess-room, where I found his wife alone. ‘Has he gone to bed?’ I said. ‘No,’ she said, ‘he’s gone out to cool his head. Oh! Henry Boddick,’ she said, ‘I don’t know what to do with him!’ We sat there a bit, she tellin’ me about ’im brooding, and all that — nice woman she is, too; till suddenly she said: ‘Henry Boddick,’ she said, ‘I’m frightened. Why don’t he come?’ We went out to look for him, and where d’you think he was, sir? You know that big tree we’re just goin’ to have down? There’s a ladder against it, and the guidin’ rope all fixed. He’d climbed up that ladder in the moonlight, put the rope round his neck, and jumped off; and there he was, six feet from the ground, dead as a duck. I roused up Swain, and we got him in, and — Well, we ‘ad a proper time! Poor woman, I’m sorry for her, sir — though really I think it’s just as well he’s gone — he couldn’t get upsides with it anyhow. That camera chap would have given something for a shot at what we saw there in the moonlight.”

‘Foggartism in action!’ thought Michael, bitterly. ‘So endeth the First Lesson!’

The hut looked lonely in the threading moonlight and the bitter wind. Inside, Mrs. Bergfeld was kneeling beside the body placed on the deal table, with a handkerchief over its face. Michael put a hand on her shoulder. She gave him a wild look, bowed her head again, and her lips began moving. ‘Prayer!’ thought Michael. ‘Catholic — of course!’ He took Boddick aside. “Don’t let her see Swain. I’ll talk to him.”

When the police and the doctor came in, he buttonholed the hair-dresser, whose shadowy face looked ghastly in the moonlight. He seemed much upset.

"You'd better come down to the house for the night, Swain."

"All right, sir. I never meant to hurt the poor beggar. But he did carry on so, and I've got my own trouble. I couldn't stand 'im monopolisin' misfortune the way he does. When the inquest's over, I'm off. If I can't get some sun soon, I'll be as dead as 'im."

Michael was relieved. Boddick would be left alone.

When at last he got back to the house with Swain, Fleur was asleep. He did not wake her to tell her the news, but lay a long time trying to get warm, and thinking of that great obstacle to all salvation — the human element. And, mingled with his visions of the woman beside that still, cold body were longings for the warmth of the young body close to him.

The photographs were providential. For three days no paper could be taken up which did not contain some allusion, illustrated, to "The Tragedy on a Buckinghamshire Estate"; "German actor hangs himself"; "The drama at Lippinghall"; "Tragic end of an experiment"; "Right to Left: Mr. Michael Mont, Member for Mid-Bucks; Bergfeld, the German actor who hanged himself; Mrs. Bergfeld."

The Evening Sun wrote more in sorrow than in anger:

"The suicide of a German actor on Sir Lawrence Mont's estate at Lippinghall has in it a touch of the grotesquely moral. The unfortunate man seems to have been one of three 'out-of-works' selected by the young Member for Mid-Bucks, recently conspicuous for his speech on 'Foggartism,' for a practical experiment in that peculiar movement. Why he should have chosen a German to assist the English people to return to the Land is not perhaps very clear; but, largely speaking, the incident illustrates the utter unsuitability of all amateur attempts to solve this problem, and the futility of pretending to deal with the unemployment crisis while we still tolerate among us numbers of aliens who take the bread out of the mouths of our own people." The same issue contained a short leader entitled: "The Alien in our Midst." The inquest was well attended. It was common knowledge that three men and one woman lived in the hut, and sensational developments were expected. A good deal of disappointment was felt that the evidence disclosed nothing at all of a sexual character.

Fleur, with the eleventh baronet, returned to town after it was over. Michael remained for the funeral — in a Catholic cemetery some miles away. He walked with Henry Boddick behind Mrs. Bergfeld. A little sleet was drifting out of a sky the colour of the gravestones, and against that whitish sky the yew-trees looked very stark. He had ordered a big wreath laid on the grave, and when he saw it thus offered up, he thought: 'First human beings, then rams, now flowers! Progress! I wonder!'

Having arranged that Norah Curfew should take Mrs. Bergfeld as cook in Bethnal Green, he drove her up to London in the Manor car. During that long drive he experienced again feelings that he had not had since the war. Human hearts, dressed-up to the nines in circumstance, interests, manners, accents, race, and class, when stripped by grief, by love, by hate, by laughter were one and the same heart. But how seldom were they stripped! Life was a clothed affair! A good thing too, perhaps — the strain of nakedness was too considerable! He was, in fact, infinitely relieved to see the face of Norah Curfew, and hear her cheerful words to Mrs. Bergfeld:

"Come in, my dear, and have some tea!" She was the sort who stripped to the heart without strain or shame.

Fleur was in the drawing-room when he got home, furred up to her cheeks, which were bright as if she had just come in from the cold.

"Been out, my child?"

"Yes. I—" She stopped, looked at him rather queerly, and said: "Well, have you finished with that business?"

"Yes; thank God. I've dropped the poor creature on Norah Curfew."

Fleur smiled. "Ah! Yes, Norah Curfew! SHE lives for everybody but herself, doesn't she?"

"She does," said Michael, rather sharply.

"The new woman. One's getting clean out of fashion."

Michael took her cheeks between his hands.

"What's the matter, Fleur?"

"Nothing."

"There is."

"Well, one gets a bit fed up with being left out, as if one were fit for nothing but Kit, and looking appetising."

Michael dropped his hands, hurt and puzzled. Certainly he had not consulted her about his 'down and outs'; had felt sure it would only bore or make her laugh — No future in it! And had there been?

"Any time you like to go shares in any mortal thing, Fleur, you've only to say so."

"Oh! I don't want to poke into your affairs. I've got my own. Have you had tea?"

"Do tell me what's the matter?"

"My dear boy, you've already asked me that, and I've already told you — nothing."

"Won't you kiss me?"

"Of course. And there's Kit's bath — would you like to go up?"

Each short stab went in a little farther. This was a spiritual crisis, and he did not know in the least how to handle it. Didn't she want him to admire her, to desire her? What did she want? Recognition that she was as interested as he in-in the state of the Country? Of course! Only — was she?

"Well," she said, "*I* want tea, anyway. Is the new woman dramatic?"

Jealousy? The notion was absurd. He said quietly:

"I don't quite follow you."

Fleur looked up at him with very clear eyes.

"Good God!" said Michael, and left the room.

He went up-stairs and sat down before 'The White Monkey.' In that strategic position he better perceived the core of his domestic moment. Fleur had to be first — had to take precedence. No object in her collection must live a life of its own! He was appalled by the bitterness of that thought. No, no! It was only that she had a complex — a silver spoon, and it had become natural in her mouth. She resented his having interests in which she was not first; or rather, perhaps, resented the fact that they were not her interests too. And that was to her credit, when you came to think of it. She was vexed with herself for being egocentric. Poor child! 'I've got to mind my eye,' thought Michael, 'or I shall make some modern-novel mess of this in three parts.' And his mind strayed naturally to the science of dishing up symptoms as if they were roots — ha! He remembered his nursery governess locking him in; he had dreaded being penned up ever since. The psychoanalysts would say that was due to the action of his governess. It wasn't — many small boys wouldn't have cared a hang; it was due to a nature that existed before that action. He took up the photograph of Fleur that stood on his desk. He loved the face, he would always love it. If she had limitations — well! So had he — lots! This was comedy, one mustn't make it into tragedy! Surely she had a sense of humour, too! Had she? Had she not? And Michael searched the face he held in his hands . . . .

But, as is usual with husbands, he had diagnosed without knowledge of all the facts.

Fleur had been bored at Lippinghall, even collection of the Minister had tried her. She had concealed her boredom from Michael. But self-sacrifice takes its revenge. She reached home in a mood of definite antagonism to public affairs. Hoping to feel better if she bought a hat or two, she set out for Bond Street. At the corner of Burlington Street, a young man bared his head.

"Fleur!"

Wilfrid Desert! Very lean and very brown!

"You!"

"Yes. I'm just back. How's Michael?"

"Very well. Only he's in Parliament."

"Great Scott! And how are you?"

"As you see. Did you have a good time?"

"Yes. I'm only perching. The East has got me!"

"Are you coming to see us?"

"I think not. The burnt child, you know."

"Yes; you ARE brown!"

"Well, good-bye, Fleur! You look just the same, only more so. I'll see Michael somewhere."

"Good-bye!" She walked on without looking back, and then regretted not having found out whether Wilfrid had done the same.

She had given Wilfrid up for — well, for Michael, who — who had forgotten it! Really she was too self-sacrificing!

And then at three o'clock a note was brought her:

"By hand, ma'am; answer waiting."

She opened an envelope, stamped 'Cosmopolis Hotel.'

"MADAM,

"We apologise for troubling you, but are in some perplexity. Mr. Francis Wilmot, a young American gentleman, who has been staying in this hotel since early October, has, we are sorry to say, contracted pneumonia. The doctor reports unfavourably on his condition. In these circumstances we thought it right to examine his effects, in order that we might communicate with his friends; but the only indication we can find is a card of yours. I venture to ask you if you can help us in the matter.

"Believe me to be, Madam,

"Your faithful servant,

"(for the Management)."

Fleur stared at an illegible signature, and her thoughts were bitter. Jon had dumped Francis on her as a herald of his happiness; her enemy had lifted him! Well, then, why didn't that Cat look after him herself? Oh! well, poor boy! Ill in a great hotel — without a soul!

"Call me a taxi, Coaker."

On her way to the Hotel she felt slight excitement of the 'ministering angel' order.

Giving her name at the bureau, she was taken up to Room 209. A chambermaid was there. The doctor, she said, had ordered a nurse, who had not yet come.

Francis Wilmot, very flushed, was lying back, propped up; his eyes were closed.

"How long has he been ill like this?"

"I've noticed him looking queer, ma'am; but we didn't know how bad he was until today. I think he's just neglected it. The doctor says he's got to be packed. Poor gentleman, it's very sad. You see, he's hardly there!"

Francis Wilmot's lips were moving; he was evidently on the verge of delirium.

"Go and make some lemon tea in a jug as weak and hot as you can; quick!"

When the maid had gone, she went up and put her cool hand to his forehead.

"It's all right, Francis. Much pain?"

Francis Wilmot's lips ceased to move; he looked up at her and his eyes seemed to burn.

"If you cure me," he said, "I'll hate you. I just want to get out, quick!"

She changed her hand on his forehead, whose heat seemed to scorch the skin of her palm. His lips resumed their almost soundless movement. The meaningless, meaningful whispering frightened her, but she stood her ground, constantly changing her hand, till the maid came back with the tea.

"The nurse has come, miss; she'll be up in a minute."

"Pour out the tea. Now, Francis, drink!"

His lips sucked, chattered, sucked. Fleur handed back the cup, and stood away. His eyes had closed again.

"Oh! ma'am," whispered the maid, "he IS bad! Such a nice young gentleman, too."

"What was his temperature; do you know?"

"I did hear the doctor say nearly 105. Here is the nurse, ma'am."

Fleur went to her in the doorway.

"It's not just ordinary, nurse — he WANTS to go. I think a love-affair's gone wrong. Shall I stop and help you pack him?"

When the pneumonia jacket had been put on, she lingered, looking down at him. His eyelashes lay close and dark against his cheeks, long and innocent, like a little boy's.

Outside the door, the maid touched her arm. "I found this letter, ma'am; ought I to show it to the doctor?"

Fleur read:

"MY POOR DEAR BOY,

"We were crazy yesterday. It isn't any good, you know. Well, I haven't got a breakable heart; nor have you really, though you may think so when you get this. Just go back to your sunshine and your darkies, and put me out of your thoughts. I couldn't stay the course. I couldn't possibly stand being poor. I must just go through it with my Scotsman and travel the appointed road. What is the good of thinking we can play at children in the wood, when one of them is "Your miserable (at the moment)

"MARJORIE.

"I mean this — I mean it. Don't come and see me any more, and make it worse for yourself. M."

"Exactly!" said Fleur. "I've told the nurse. Keep it and give it him back if he gets well. If he doesn't, burn it. I shall come tomorrow." And, looking at the maid with a faint smile, she added: "*I* am not that lady!"

"Oh! no, ma'am — miss — no, I'm sure! Poor young gentleman! Isn't there nothing to be done?"

"I don't know. I should think not . . . ."

She had kept all these facts from Michael with a sudden retaliatory feeling. He couldn't have private — or was it public — life all to himself!

After he had gone out with his 'Good God!' she went to the window. Queer to have seen Wilfrid again! Her heart had not fluttered, but it tantalised her not to know whether she could attract him back. Out in the square it was as dark as when last she had seen him before he fled to the East — a face pressed to this window that she was touching with her fingers. 'The burnt child!' No! She did not want to reduce him to that state again; nor to copy Marjorie Ferrar, who had copied her. If, instead of going East, Wilfrid had chosen to have pneumonia like poor Francis! What would she have done? Let him die for want of her? And what ought she to do about Francis, having seen that letter? Tell Michael? No, he thought her frivolous and irresponsible. Well! She would show him! And that sister — who had married Jon? Ought she to be cabled to? But this would have a rapid crisis, the nurse had said, and to get over from America in time would be impossible! Fleur went back to the fire. What kind of girl was this wife of Jon's? Another in the new fashion — like Norah Curfew; or just one of those Americans out for her own way and the best of everything? But they would have the new kind of woman in America, too — even though it didn't come from Paris. Anne Forsyte! — Fleur gave a little shiver in front of the hot fire.

She went up-stairs, took off her hat, and scrutinised her image. Her face was coloured and rounded, her eyes were clear, her brow unlined, her hair rather flattened. She fluffed it out, and went across into the nursery.

The eleventh baronet, asleep, was living his private life with a very determined expression on his face; at the foot of his cot lay the Dandie, with his chin pressed to the floor, and at the table the nurse was sewing. In front of her lay an illustrated paper with the photograph inscribed: "Mrs. Michael Mont, with Kit and Dandie."

"What do you think of it, nurse?"

"I think it's horrible, ma'am; it makes Kit look as if he hadn't any sense — giving him a stare like that!"

Fleur took up the paper; her quick eyes had seen that it concealed another. There on the table was a second effigy of herself: "Mrs. Michael Mont, the pretty young London hostess, who, rumour says, will shortly be defendant in a Society lawsuit." And, above, yet another effigy, inscribed: "Miss Marjorie Ferrar, the brilliant granddaughter of the Marquis of Shropshire, whose engagement to Sir Alexander MacGown, M. P., is announced."

Fleur dropped paper back on paper.

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Chapter XI

Shadows

The dinner, which Marjorie Ferrar had so suddenly recollected, was MacGown's, and when she reached the appointed restaurant, he was waiting in the hall.

"Where are the others, Alec?"

"There are no others," said MacGown.

Marjorie Ferrar reined back. "I can't dine with you alone in a place like this!"

"I had the Ppynrryns, but they fell through."

"Then I shall go to my Club."

"For God's sake, no, Marjorie. We'll have a private room. Go and wait in there, while I arrange it."

With a shrug she passed into a little 'lounge.' A young woman whose face seemed familiar idled in, looked at her, and idled out again, the ormolu clock ticked, the walls of striped pale grey stared blankly in the brilliant light, and Marjorie Ferrar stared blankly back — she was still seeing Francis Wilmot's ecstatic face.

"Now!" said MacGown. "Up those stairs, and third on the right. I'll follow in a minute."

She had acted in a play, she had passed an emotional hour, and she was hungry. At least she could dine before making the necessary scene. And while she drank the best champagne MacGown could buy, she talked and watched the burning eyes of her adorer. That red-brown visage, square, stiff-haired head, and powerful frame — what a contrast to the pale, slim face and form of Francis! This was a man, and when he liked, agreeable. With him she would have everything she wanted except — what Francis could give her. And it was one or the other — not both, as she had thought it might be. She had once crossed the 'striding edge' on Helvellyn, with a precipice on one side and a precipice on the other, and herself, doubting down which to fall, in the middle. She hadn't fallen, and — she supposed — she wouldn't now! One didn't, if one kept one's head!

Coffee was brought; and she sat, smoking, on the sofa. Her knowledge of private rooms taught her that she was now as alone with her betrothed as money could make them. How would he behave?

He threw his cigar away, and sat down by her side. This was the moment to rise and tell him that he was no longer her betrothed. His arm went round her, his lips sought her face. "Mind my dress; it's the only decent one I've got."

And, suddenly, not because she heard a noise, but because her senses were not absorbed like his, she perceived a figure in the open doorway. A woman's voice said: "Oh! I beg your pardon; I thought —" Gone!

Marjorie Ferrar started up.

"Did you see that young woman?"

"Yes. Damn her!"

"She's shadowing me."

"What?"

"I don't know her, and yet I know her perfectly. She had a good look at me down-stairs, when I was waiting."

MacGown dashed to the door and flung it open. Nobody was there! He shut it, and came back.

"By heaven! Those people, I'll —! Well, that ends it! Marjorie, I shall send our engagement to the papers tomorrow."

Marjorie Ferrar, leaning her elbows on the mantelpiece, stared at her own face in the glass above it. 'Not a moral about her!' What did it matter? If only she could decide to marry Francis out of hand, slide away from them all — debts, lawyers, Alec! And then the 'You be damned' spirit in her blood revolted. The impudence of it! Shadowing her! No! She was not going to leave Miss Fleur triumphant — the little snob; and that old party with the chin!

MacGown raised her hand to his lips; and, somehow, the caress touched her.

"Oh! well," she said, "I suppose you'd better."

"Thank God!"

“Do you really think that to get me is a cause for gratitude?”

“I would go through Hell to get you.”

“And after? Well, as we’re public property, let’s go down and dance.”

For an hour she danced. She would not let him take her home, and in her cab she cried. She wrote to Francis when she got in. She went out again to post it. The bitter stars, the bitter wind, the bitter night! At the little slurred thump of her letter dropping, she laughed. To have played at children! It was too funny! So that was done with! ‘On with the dance!’

Extraordinary, the effect of a little paragraph in the papers! Credit, like new-struck oil, spurted sky-high. Her post contained, not bills for dresses, but solicitations to feed, frizz, fur, flower, feather, furbelow, and photograph her. London offered itself. To escape that cynical avalanche she borrowed a hundred pounds and flew to Paris. There, every night, she went to the theatre. She had her hair done in a new style, she ordered dresses, ate at places known to the few — living up to Michael’s nickname for her; and her heart was heavy.

She returned after a week, and burned the avalanche — fortunately all letters of congratulation contained the phrase ‘of course you won’t think of answering this.’ She didn’t. The weather was mild; she rode in the Row; she prepared to hunt. On the eve of departure, she received an anonymous communication.

“Francis Wilmot is very ill with pneumonia at the Cosmopolis Hotel. He is not expected to live.”

Her heart flurried round within her breast and flumped; her knees felt weak; her hand holding the note shook; only her head stayed steady. The handwriting was ‘that little snob’s.’ Had Francis caused this message to be sent? Was it his appeal? Poor boy! And must she go and see him if he were going to die? She so hated death. Did this mean that it was up to her to save him? What did it mean? But indecision was not her strong point. In ten minutes she was in a cab, in twenty at the Hotel. Handing her card, she said:

“You have a Mr. Wilmot here — a relative of mine. I’ve just heard of his serious illness. Can I go up and see the nurse?”

The Management looked at the card, inquisitively at her face, touched a bell, and said:

“Certainly, madam. . . . Here, you — take this lady up to Room — er — 209.”

Led by what poor Francis called a ‘bell-boy’ into the lift, she walked behind his buttons along a pale-gray river of corridor carpet, between pale-grey walls, past cream-coloured after cream-coloured door in the bright electric light, with her head a little down.

The ‘bell-boy’ knocked ruthlessly on a door.

It was opened, and in the lobby of the suite stood Fleur . . . .

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CHAPTER XII

DEEPENING

However untypically American according to Soames, Francis Wilmot seemed to have the national passion for short cuts.

In two days from Fleur's first visit he had reached the crisis, hurrying towards it like a man to his bride. Yet, compared with the instinct to live, the human will is limited, so that he failed to die. Fleur, summoned by telephone, went home cheered by the doctor's words: "He'll do now, if we can coax a little strength into him." That, however, was the trouble. For three afternoons she watched his exhausted indifference seeming to increase. And she was haunted by cruel anxiety. On the fourth day she had been sitting for more than an hour when his eyes opened.

"Yes, Francis?"

"I'm going to quit all right, after all."

"Don't talk like that — it's not American. Of course you're not going to quit."

He smiled, and shut his eyes. She made up her mind then.

Next day he was about the same, more dead than alive. But her mind was at rest; her messenger had brought back word that Miss Ferrar would be in at four o'clock. She would have had the note by now; but would she come? How little one knew of other people, even when they were enemies!

He was drowsing, white and strengthless, when she heard the 'bell-boy's' knock. Passing into the lobby, she closed the door softly behind her, and opened the outer door. So she HAD come!

If this meeting of two declared enemies had in it something dramatic, neither perceived it at the moment. It was just intensely unpleasant to them both. They stood for a moment looking at each other's chins. Then Fleur said:

"He's extremely weak. Will you sit down while I tell him you're here?"

Having seen her settled where Francis Wilmot put his clothes out to be valeted in days when he had worn them, Fleur passed back into the bedroom, and again closed the door.

"Francis," she said, "some one is waiting to see you."

Francis Wilmot did not stir, but his eyes opened and cleared strangely. To Fleur they seemed suddenly the eyes she had known; as if all these days they had been 'out,' and some one had again put a match to them.

"You understand what I mean?"

The words came clear and feeble: "Yes; but if I wasn't good enough for her before, I surely am not now. Tell her I'm through with that fool business."

A lump rose in Fleur's throat.

"Thank her for coming!" said Francis Wilmot, and closed his eyes again.

Fleur went back into the lobby. Marjorie Ferrar was standing against the wall with an unlighted cigarette between her lips.

"He thanks you for coming; but he doesn't want to see you. I'm sorry I brought you down."

Marjorie Ferrar took out the cigarette. Fleur could see her lips quivering. "Will he get well?"

"I don't know. I think so — now. He says he's 'through with that fool business.'"

Marjorie Ferrar's lips tightened. She opened the outer door, turned suddenly, and said:

"Will you make it up?"

"No," said Fleur.

There was a moment of complete stillness; then Marjorie Ferrar gave a little laugh, and slipped out.

Fleur went back. He was asleep. Next day he was stronger. Three days later Fleur ceased her visits; he was on the road to recovery. She had become conscious, moreover, that she had a little lamb which, wherever Mary went, was sure to go. She was being shadowed! How amusing! And what a bore that she couldn't tell Michael; because she had not yet begun again to tell him anything.

On the day that she ceased her visits he came in while she was dressing for dinner, with 'a weekly' in his hand.

"Listen to this," he said:

'When to God's fondouk the donkeys are taken —
Donkeys of Africa, Sicily, Spain —
If peradventure the Deity waken,
He shall not easily slumber again.

Where in the sweet of God's straw they have laid them,
Broken and dead of their burdens and sores,
He, for a change, shall remember He made them —
One of the best of His numerous chores —

Order from some one a sigh of repentance —
Donkeys of Araby, Syria, Greece —
Over the fondouk distemper the sentence:
"God's own forsaken — the stable of Peace."'

"Who's that by?"

"It sounds like Wilfrid."

"It is by Wilfrid," said Michael, and did not look at her. "I met him at the 'Hotch-Potch.'"

"And how is he?"

"Very fit."

"Have you asked him here?"

"No. He's going East again soon."

Was he fishing? Did he know that she had seen him? And she said:

"I'm going down to father's, Michael. He's written twice."

Michael put her hand to his lips.

"All right, darling."

Fleur reddened; her strangled confidences seemed knotted in her throat. She went next day with Kit and Dandie. The 'little lamb' would hardly follow to 'The Shelter.'

Annette had gone with her mother to Cannes for a month; and Soames was alone with the English winter. He was paying little attention to it, for the 'case' was in the list, and might be reached in a few weeks' time. Deprived of French influence, he was again wavering towards compromise. The announcement of Marjorie Ferrar's engagement to McGown had materially changed the complexion of affairs. In the eyes of a British Jury, the character of a fast young lady, and the character of the same young lady publicly engaged to a Member of Parliament, with wealth and a handle to his name, would not be at all the same thing. They were now virtually dealing with Lady MacGown, and nothing, Soames knew, was so fierce as a man about to be married. To libel his betrothed was like approaching a mad dog.

He looked very grave when Fleur told him of her 'little lamb.' It was precisely the retaliation he had feared; nor could he tell her that he had 'told her so,' because he hadn't. He had certainly urged her to come down to him, but delicacy had forbidden him to give her the reason. So far as he could tell through catechism, there had been nothing 'suspect' in her movements since Lippinghall, except those visits to the Cosmopolis Hotel. But they were bad enough. Who was going to believe that she went to this sick man out of pure kindness? Such a motive was not current in a Court of Law. He was staggered when she told him that Michael didn't know of them. Why not?

"I didn't feel like telling him."

"Feel? Don't you see what a position you've put yourself in? Here you are, running to a young man's bedside, without your husband's knowledge."

"Yes, darling; but he was terribly ill."

"I dare say," said Soames; "so are lots of people."

"Besides, he was over head and ears in love with HER."

"D'you think he's going to admit that, even if we could call him?"

Fleur was silent, thinking of Francis Wilmot's face.

"Oh! I don't know," she said at last. "How horrid it all is!"

"Of course it's horrid," said Soames. "Have you had a quarrel with Michael?"

"No; not a quarrel. Only he doesn't tell ME things."

"What things?"

"How should I know, dear?"

Soames grunted. "Would he have minded your going?"

"Of course not. He'd have minded if I hadn't. He likes that boy."

"Well, then," said Soames, "either you or he, or both, will have to tell a lie, and say that he did know. I shall go up and talk to him. Thank goodness we can prove the illness. If I catch anybody coming down here after you —!"

He went up the following afternoon. Parliament being in recess, he sought the 'Hotch-Potch' Club. He did not like a place always connected in his mind with his dead cousin, that fellow young Jolyon, and said to Michael at once: "Can we go somewhere else?"

"Yes, sir; where would you like?"

"To your place, if you can put me up for the night. I want to have a talk with you."

Michael looked at him askance.

"Now," said Soames, after dinner, "what's this about Fleur — she says you don't tell her things?"

Michael gazed into his glass of port.

"Well, sir," he said slowly, "I'd be only too glad to, of course, but I don't think they really interest her. She doesn't feel that public things matter."

"Public! I meant private."

"There aren't any private things. Do you mean that she thinks there are?"

Soames dropped his scrutiny.

"I don't know — she said 'things.'"

"Well, you can put that out of your head, and hers."

"H'm! Anyway, the result's been that she's been visiting that young American with pneumonia at the Cosmopolis Hotel, without letting you know. It's a mercy she hasn't picked it up."

"Francis Wilmot?"

"Yes. He's out of the wood, now. That's not the point. She's been shadowed."

"Good God!" said Michael.

"Exactly! This is what comes of not talking to your wife. Wives are funny — they don't like it."

Michael grinned.

"Put yourself in my place, sir. It's my profession, now, to fuss about the state of the Country, and all that; and you know how it is — one gets keen. But to Fleur, it's all a stunt. I quite understand that; but, you see, the keener I get, the more I'm afraid of boring her, and the less I feel I can talk to her about it. In a sort of way she's jealous."

Soames rubbed his chin. The state of the Country was a curious kind of co-respondent. He himself was often worried by the state of the Country, but as a source of division between husband and wife it seemed to him cold-blooded; he had known other sources in his time!

"Well, you mustn't let it go on," he said. "It's trivial."

Michael got up.

"Trivial! Well, sir, I don't know, but it seems to me very much the sort of thing that happened when the war came. Men had to leave their wives then."

"Wives put up with that," said Soames, "the Country was in danger."

"Isn't it in danger now?"

With his inveterate distrust of words, it seemed to Soames almost indecent for a young man to talk like that. Michael was a politician, of course; but politicians were there to keep the Country quiet, not to go raising scares and talking through their hats.

“When you’ve lived a little longer,” he said, “you’ll know that there’s always something to fuss about if you like to fuss. There’s nothing in it really; the pound’s going up. Besides, it doesn’t matter what you tell Fleur, so long as you tell her something.”

“She’s intelligent, sir,” said Michael.

Soames was taken aback. He could not deny the fact, and answered:

“Well, national affairs are too remote; you can’t expect a woman to be interested in them.”

“Quite a lot of women are.”

“Blue-stockings.”

“No, sir; they nearly all wear ‘nude.’”

“H’m! Those! As to interest in national affairs — put a tax on stockings, and see what happens!”

Michael grinned.

“I’ll suggest it, sir.”

“If you expect,” said Soames, “that people — women or not — are going to put themselves out of the way for any scheme like this — this Foggartism of yours, you’ll be very much disappointed.”

“So everybody tells me. It’s just because I don’t like cold water at home as well as abroad, that I’ve given up worrying Fleur.”

“Well, if you take my advice, you’ll take up something practical — the state of the traffic, or penny postage. Drop pessimism; people who talk at large like that, never get trusted in this country. In any case you’ll have to say you knew about her visits to that young man.”

“Certainly, sir, wife and husband are one. But you don’t really mean to let them make a circus of it in Court?”

Soames was silent. He did not MEAN them to; but what if they did?

“I can’t tell,” he said, at last. “The fellow’s a Scotchman. What did you go hitting him on the nose for?”

“He gave me a thick ear first. I know it was an excellent opportunity for turning the other cheek, but I didn’t think of it in time.”

“You must have called him something.”

“Only a dirty dog. As you know, he suggested a low motive for my speech.”

Soames stared. In his opinion this young man was taking himself much too seriously.

“Your speech! You’ve got to get it out of your mind,” he said, “that anything you can say or do will make any difference.”

“Then what’s the good of my being in Parliament?”

“Well, you’re in the same boat with everybody else. The Country’s like a tree; you can keep it in order, but you can’t go taking it up by the roots to look at them.”

Michael looked at him, impressed.

“In public matters,” said Soames, “the thing is to keep a level head, and do no more than you’re obliged.”

“And what’s to govern one’s view of necessity?”

“Common-sense. One can’t have everything.”

And rising, he began scrutinising the Goya.

“Are you going to buy another Goya, sir?”

“No; if I buy any more pictures, I shall go back to the English School.”

“Patriotism?”

Soames gave him a sharp look.

“There’s no patriotism,” he said, “in fussing. And another thing you’ve got to remember is that foreigners like to hear that we’ve got troubles. It doesn’t do to discuss our affairs out loud.”

Michael took these sayings to bed with him. He remembered, when he came out of the war, thinking: ‘If there’s another war, nothing will induce me to go.’ But now, if one were to come, he knew he WOULD be going again. So Old Forsyte thought he was just ‘fussing’! Was he? Was Foggartism a phlizz? Ought he to come to heel, and take up the state of the traffic? Was everything unreal? Surely not his love for Fleur? Anyway he felt hungry for her lying there. And Wilfrid back, too! To risk his happiness with her for the sake of — what? Punch had taken a snap at him this week, grinning and groping at a surrounding fog. Old England, like Old Forsyte, had no use for theories. Self-conscious national efforts were just pomposity. Pompous! He? The thought was terribly disturbing. He got out of bed and went to the window. Foggy! In fog all were shadows; and he the merest shadow of them all, an unpractical politician, taking things to heart! One! Two! Big Ben! How many hearts had he turned to water! How many dreams spoiled, with his measured resonance! Line up with the top-dressers, and leave the Country to suck its silver spoon!

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Part III

Chapter I

'Circuses'

In his early boyhood Soames had been given to the circus. He had outgrown it; 'Circuses' were now to him little short of an abomination. Jubilees and Pageants, that recurrent decimal, the Lord Mayor, Earl's Court, Olympia, Wembley — he disliked them all. He could not stand a lot of people with their mouths open. Dressing up was to him a symptom of weak-mindedness, and the collective excitement of a crowd an extravagance which offended his reticent individualism. Though not deeply versed in history, he had an idea, too, that nations who went in for 'circuses' were decadent. Queen Victoria's funeral, indeed, had impressed him — there had been a feeling in the air that day; but ever since, things had gone from bad to worse. They made everything into a 'circus' now! A man couldn't commit a murder without the whole paper-reading population — himself included — looking over each other's shoulders; and as to these football-matches, and rodeos — they interfered with the traffic and the normal course of conversation; people were so crazy about them!

Of course, 'circuses' had their use. They kept the people quiet. Violence by proxy, for instance, was obviously a political principle of some value. It was difficult to gape and shed blood at the same time; the more people stood in rows by day to see others being hurt, the less trouble would they take to hurt others themselves, and the sounder Soames could sleep by night. Still, sensation-hunting had become a disease, in his opinion, and no one was being inoculated for it, so far as he could see!

As the weeks went on and the cases before it in the List went off, the 'circus' they were proposing to make of his daughter appeared to him more and more monstrous. He had an instinctive distrust of Scotchmen — they called themselves Scotsmen nowadays, as if it helped their character! — they never let go, and he could not approve in other people a quality native to himself. Besides, 'Scotchmen' were so — so exuberant — always either dour or else hearty — extravagant chaps! Towards the middle of March, with the case in the list for the following week, he took an extreme step and entered the Lobby of the House of Commons. He had spoken to no one of his determination to make this last effort, for it seemed to him that all — Annette, Michael, Fleur herself — had done their best to spoil the chance of settlement.

Having sent in his card, he waited a long while in that lofty purlieu. 'Lobbying,' he knew the phrase, but had never realised the waste of time involved in it. The statues consoled him somewhat. Sir Stafford Northcote — a steady chap; at old Forsyte dinner-parties in the eighties his character had been as much a standby as the saddle of mutton. He found even 'that fellow Gladstone' bearable in stucco, or whatever it was up there. You might dislike, but you couldn't sneeze at him, as at some of these modern chaps. He was sunk in coma before Lord Granville when at last he heard the words:

"Sir Alexander MacGown," and saw a square man with a ruddy face, stiff black hair, and clipped moustache, coming between the railings, with a card in his hand.

"Mr. Forsyte?"

"Yes. Can we go anywhere that's not quite so public?"

The 'Scotchman' nodded, and led him down a corridor to a small room.

"Well?"

Soames smoothed his hat. "This affair," he said, "can't be any more agreable to you than it is to me."

"Are you the individual who was good enough to apply the word 'traitress' to the lady I'm engaged to?"

"That is so."

"Then I don't see how you have the impudence to come and speak to me."

Soames bit his lips.

"I spoke under the provocation of hearing your fiancee call my daughter a snob, in her own house. Do you want this petty affair made public?"

"If you think that you and your daughter can get away with calling the lady I'm going to marry 'a snake,' 'a traitress,' 'an immoral person,' you're more mistaken that you ever were in your life. An unqualified apology that her Counsel can announce in Court is your only way out.”

“That you won’t get; mutual regret is another thing. As to the question of damages —”

“Damn the damages!” said MacGown violently. And there was that in Soames which applauded.

“Well,” he said, “I’m sorry for you and her.”

“What the devil do you mean, sir?”

“You will know by the end of next week, unless you revise your views in between. If it comes into Court, we shall justify.”

The ‘Scotchman’ went so red that for a moment Soames was really afraid he would have an apoplectic fit.

“You’d better look out what you say in Court.”

“We pay no attention to bullies in Court.”

MacGown clenched his fists.

“Yes,” said Soames, “it’s a pity I’m not your age. Good evening!”

He passed the fellow and went out. He had noted his way in this ‘rabbit warren,’ and was soon back among the passionless statues. Well! He had turned the last stone and could do no more, except make that overbearing fellow and his young woman sorry they’d ever been born. He came out into the chilly mist of Westminster. Pride and temper! Sooner than admit themselves in the wrong, people would turn themselves into an expensive ‘circus’ for the gaping and the sneers, the japing and the jeers of half the town! To vindicate her ‘honour,’ that ‘Scotchman’ would have his young woman’s past dragged out! And fairly faced by the question whether to drag it out or not, Soames stood still. If he didn’t, she might get a verdict; if he did, and didn’t convince the jury, the damages would be shockingly increased. They might run into thousands. He felt the need of definite decision. One had been drifting in the belief that the thing wouldn’t come into Court! Four o’clock! Not too late, perhaps, to see Sir James Foskisson. He would telephone to very young Nicholas to arrange a conference at once, and if Michael was at South Square, he would take him down to it . . . .

In his study, Michael had been staring with lugubrious relish at Aubrey Greene’s cartoon of himself in a Society paper. On one leg, like Guy — or was it Slingsby? — in the Edward Lear ‘Nonsense’ book, he was depicted crying in a wilderness where a sardonic smile was rising on the horizon. Out of his mouth the word ‘Foggartism’ wreathed like the smoke of a cigar. Above a hole in the middle distance, a meercat’s body supported the upturned face and applauding forepaws of Mr. Blythe. The thing was devastating in treatment and design — not unkind, merely killing. Michael’s face had been endowed with a sort of after-dinner rapture, as if he were enjoying the sound of his own voice. Ridicule! Not even a personal friend, an artist, could see that the wilderness was at least as deserving of ridicule as the pelican! The cartoon seemed to write the word futility large across his page. It recalled to him Fleur’s words at the outset: “And by the time the Tories go out you’ll have your licence.” She was a born realist! From the first she had foreseen for him the position of an eccentric, picturesquely beating a little private drum! A dashed good cartoon! And no one could appreciate it so deeply as its victim. But why did every one smile at Foggartism? Why? Because among a people who naturally walked, it leaped like a grasshopper; to a nation that felt its way in fog, it seemed a will-o’-the-wisp. Yes, he was a fool for his pains! And — just then, Soames arrived.

“I’ve been to see that Scotchman,” he said. “He means to take it into Court.”

“Oh! Not really, sir! I always thought you’d keep it out.”

“Only an unqualified apology will do that. Fleur can’t give it; she’s in the right. Can you come down with me now and see Sir James Foskisson?”

They set out in a taxi for the Temple.

The chambers of very young Nicholas Forsyte were in Paper Buildings. Chinny, mild and nearly forty, he succeeded within ten minutes in presenting to them every possible doubt.

“He seems to enjoy the prospect of getting tonked,” murmured Michael while they were going over to Sir James.

“A poor thing,” Soames responded; “but careful. Foskisson must attend to the case himself.”

After those necessary minutes during which the celebrated K. C. was regathering from very young Nicholas what it was all about, they were ushered into the presence of one with a large head garnished by small grey whiskers, and really obvious brains. Since selecting him, Soames had been keeping his eye on the great advocate; had watched him veiling his appeals to a jury with an air of scrupulous equity; very few — he was convinced — and those not on juries, could see Sir James Foskisson coming round a corner. Soames had specially remarked his success in cases concerned with morals or nationality — no one so apt at getting a co-respondent, a German, a Russian, or anybody at all bad, non-suited! At close quarters his whiskers seemed to give him an intensive respectability — difficult to imagine him dancing, gambling, or in bed. In spite of his practice, too, he enjoyed the reputation of being thorough; he might be relied on to know more than half the facts of any case by the time he went into Court, and to pick up the rest as he went along — or at least not to show that he hadn't. Very young Nicholas, knowing all the facts, had seemed quite unable to see what line could possibly be taken. Sir James, on the other hand, appeared to know only just enough. Sliding his light eyes from Soames to Michael, he retailed them, and said: "Eminently a case for an amicable settlement."

"Indeed!" said Soames.

Something in his voice seemed to bring Sir James to attention.

"Have you attempted that?"

"I have gone to the limit."

"Excuse me, Mr. Forsyte, but what do you regard as the limit?"

"Fifteen hundred pounds, and a mutual expression of regret. They'd accept the money, but they ask for an unqualified apology."

The great lawyer rested his chin. "Have you tried the unqualified apology without the money?"

"No."

"I would almost be inclined. MacGown is a very rich man. The shadow and the substance, eh? The expressions in the letters are strong. What do you say, Mr. Mont?"

"Not so strong as those she used of my wife."

Sir James Foskisson looked at very young Nicholas.

"Let me see," he said, "those were —?"

"Lion-huntress, and snob," said Michael, curtly.

Sir James wagged his head precisely as if it were a pair of scales.

"Immoral, snake, traitress, without charm — you think those weaker?"

"They don't make you snigger, sir, the others do. In Society it's the snigger that counts."

Sir James smiled.

"The jury won't be in Society, Mr. Mont."

"My wife doesn't feel like making an apology, anyway, unless there's an expression of regret on the other side; and I don't see why she should."

Sir James Foskisson seemed to breathe more freely.

"In that case," he said, "we have to consider whether to use the detective's evidence or not. If we do, we shall need to subpoena the hall porter and the servants at Mr — er — Curfew's flat."

"Exactly," said Soames; "that's what we're here to decide." It was as if he had said: 'The conference is now opened.'

Sir James perused the detective's evidence for five silent minutes.

"If this is confirmed, even partially," he said, at last, "we win."

Michael had gone to the window. The trees in the garden had tiny buds; some pigeons were strutting on the grass below. He heard Soames say:

"I ought to tell you that they've been shadowing my daughter. There's nothing, of course, except some visits to a young American dangerously ill of pneumonia at his hotel."

"Of which I knew and approved," said Michael, without turning round.

"Could we call him?"

"I believe he's still at Bournemouth. But he was in love with Miss Ferrar."

Sir James turned to Soames.

“If there’s no question of a settlement, we’d better go for the gloves. Merely to cross-examine as to books and play and clubs, is very inconclusive.”

“Have you read the dark scene in ‘The Plain Dealer’?” asked Soames; “and that novel, ‘Canthar’?”

“All very well, Mr. Forsyte, but impossible to say what a jury would make of impersonal evidence like that.”

Michael had come back to his seat.

“I’ve a horror,” he said, “of dragging in Miss Ferrar’s private life.”

“No doubt. But do you want me to win the case?”

“Not that way. Can’t we go into Court, say nothing, and pay up?”

Sir James Foskisson smiled and looked at Soames. ‘Really,’ he seemed to say, ‘why did you bring me this young man?’

Soames, however, had been pursuing his own thoughts.

“There’s too much risk about that flat; if we failed there, it might be a matter of twenty thousand pounds. Besides, they would certainly call my daughter. I want to prevent that at all costs. I thought you could turn the whole thing into an indictment of modern morality.”

Sir James Foskisson moved in his chair, and the pupils of his light-blue eyes became as pinpoints. He nodded almost imperceptibly three times, precisely as if he had seen the Holy Ghost.

“When shall we be reached?” he said to very young Nicholas.

“Probably next Thursday — Mr. Justice Brane.”

“Very well. I’ll see you again on Monday. Good evening.” And he sank back into an immobility, which neither Soames nor Michael felt equal to disturbing.

They went away silent — very young Nicholas tarrying in conversation with Sir James’ devil.

Turning at the Temple station, Michael murmured:

“It was just as if he’d said: ‘Some stunt!’ wasn’t it? I’m looking in at The Outpost, sir. If you’re going back to Fleur, will you tell her?”

Soames nodded. There it was! He had to do everything that was painful.

❦

Chapter II

“Not Going to have it”

In the office of The Outpost Mr. Blythe had just been in conversation with one of those great business men who make such deep impression on all to whom they voice their views in strict confidence. If Sir Thomas Lockit did not precisely monopolise the control of manufacture in Great Britain, he, like others, caused almost any one to think so — his knowledge was so positive and his emphasis so cold. In his view the Country must resume the position held before the Great War. It all hinged on coal — a question of this seven hours a day; and they were “not going to have it.” A shilling, perhaps two shillings, off the cost of coal. They were “not going to have” Europe doing without British produce. Very few people knew Sir Thomas Lockit’s mind; but nearly all who did were extraordinarily gratified.

Mr. Blythe, however, was biting his finger, and spitting out the result.

“Who was that fellow with the grey moustache?” asked Michael.

“Lockit. He’s ‘not going to have it.’”

“Oh!” said Michael, in some surprise.

“One sees more and more, Mont, that the really dangerous people are not the politicians, who want things with public passion — that is, mildly, slowly; but the big business men, who want things with private passion, strenuously, quickly. They know their own minds; and if we don’t look out they’ll wreck the country.”

“What are they up to now?” said Michael.

“Nothing for the moment; but it’s brewing. One sees in Lockit the futility of will-power. He’s not going to have what it’s entirely out of his power to prevent. He’d like to break Labour and make it work like a nigger from sheer necessity. Before that we shall be having civil war. Some of the Labour people, of course, are just as bad — they want to break everybody. It’s a bee nuisance. If we’re all to be plunged into industrial struggles again, how are we to get on with Foggartism?”

“I’ve been thinking about the Country,” said Michael. “Aren’t we beating the air, Blythe? Is it any good telling a man who’s lost a lung, that what he wants is a new one?”

Mr. Blythe puffed out one cheek.

“Yes,” he said, “the Country had a hundred very settled years — Waterloo to the War — to get into its present state; it’s got its line of life so fixed and its habits so settled that nobody — neither editors, politicians, nor business men — can think except in terms of its bloated town industrialism. The Country’s got beyond the point of balance in that hundred settled years, and it’ll want fifty settled years to get back to that point again. The real trouble is that we’re not going to get fifty settled years. Some bee thing or other — war with Turkey or Russia, trouble in India, civil ructions, to say nothing of another general flare-up — may knock the bottom out of any settled plans any time. We’ve struck a disturbed patch of history, and we know it in our bones, and live from hand to mouth, according.”

“Well, then!” said Michael, glumly, thinking of what the Minister had said to him at Lippinghall.

Mr. Blythe puffed out the other cheek.

“No backsliding, young man! In Foggartism we have the best goods we can see before us, and we must bee well deliver them, as best we can. We’ve outgrown all the old hats.”

“Have you seen Aubrey Greene’s cartoon?”

“I have.”

“Good — isn’t it? But what I realty came in to tell you, is that this beastly libel case of ours will be on next week.”

Mr. Blythe’s ears moved.

“I’m sorry for that. Win or lose — nothing’s worse for public life than private ructions. You’re not going to have it, are you?”

“We can’t help it. But our defence is to be confined to an attack on the new morality.”

“One can’t attack what isn’t,” said Mr. Blythe.

“D’you mean to say,” said Michael, grinning, “that you haven’t noticed the new morality?”

"Certainly not. Formulate it if you can."

"'Don't be stupid, don't be dull.'"

Mr. Blythe grunted. "The old morality used to be: 'Behave like a gentleman.'"

"Yes! But in modern thought there ain't no sich an animal."

"There are fragments lying about; they reconstructed Neanderthal man from half a skull."

"A word that's laughed at can't be used, Blythe."

"Ah!" said Mr. Blythe. "The chief failings of your generation, young Mont, are sensitiveness to ridicule, and terror of being behind the times. It's bee weakminded."

Michael grinned.

"I know it. Come down to the House. Parsham's Electrification Bill is due. We may get some lights on Unemployment."

Having parted from Mr. Blythe in the Lobby, Michael came on his father walking down a corridor with a short bright old man in a trim grey beard.

"Ah! Michael, we've been seeking you. Marquess, my hopeful son! The marquess wants to interest you in electricity."

Michael removed his hat.

"Will you come to the reading-room, sir?"

This, as he knew, was Marjorie Ferrar's grandfather, and might be useful. In a remote corner of a room lighted so that nobody could see anyone else reading, they sat down in triangular formation.

"You know about electricity, Mr. Mont?" said the marquess.

"No, sir, except that more of it would be desirable in this room."

"Everywhere, Mr. Mont. I've read about your Foggartism; if you'll allow me to say so, it's quite possibly the policy of the future; but nothing will be done with it till you've electrified the country. I should like you to start by supporting this Bill of Parsham's."

And, with an engaging distinction of syllable, the old peer proceeded to darken Michael's mind.

"I see, sir," said Michael, at last. "This Bill ought to add considerably to Unemployment."

"Temporarily."

"I wonder if I ought to take on any more temporary trouble. I'm finding it difficult enough to interest people in the future as it is — they seem to think the present so important."

Sir Lawrence whinnied.

"You must give him time and pamphlets, Marquess. But, my dear fellow, while your Foggartism is confined to the stable, you'll want a second horse."

"I've been advised already to take up the state of the traffic or penny postage. And, by the way, sir, that case of ours is coming into Court, next week."

Sir Lawrence's loose eyebrow shot up:

"Oh!" he said. "Do you remember, Marquess — your granddaughter and my daughter-inlaw? I came to you about it."

"Something to do with lions? A libel, was it?" said the old peer. "My aunt —"

While Michael was trying to decide whether this was an ejaculation or the beginning of a reminiscence, his father broke in:

"Ah! yes, an interesting case that, Marquess — it's all in Betty Montecourt's Memoirs."

"Libels," resumed the marquess, "had flavour in those days. The words complained of were: 'Her crinoline covers her considerable obliquity.'"

"If anything's to be done to save scandal," muttered Michael, "it must be done now. We're at a deadlock."

"Could YOU put in a word, sir?" said Sir Lawrence.

The marquess's beard quivered.

"I see from the papers that my granddaughter is marrying a man called MacGown, a Member of this House. Is he about?"

“Probably,” said Michael. “But I had a row with him. I think, sir, there would be more chance with her.”

The marquess rose. “I’ll ask her to breakfast. I dislike publicity. Well, I hope you’ll vote for this Bill, Mr. Mont, and think over the question of electrifying the Country. We want young men interested. I’m going to the Peers’ Gallery, now. Good-bye!”

When briskly he had gone, Michael said to his father: “If he’s not going to have it, I wish he’d ask Fleur to breakfast too. There are two parties to this quarrel.”

❦

Chapter III

Soames Drives Home

Soames in the meantime was seated with one of those parties in her 'parlour.' She had listened in silence, but with a stubborn and resentful face. What did he know of the loneliness and frustration she had been feeling? Could he tell that the thrown stone had starred her mirrored image of herself; that the words 'snob,' and 'lion-huntress,' had entered her very soul? He could not understand the spiritual injury she had received, the sudden deprivation of that self-importance, and hope of rising, necessary to all. Concerned by the expression on her face, preoccupied with the practical aspects of the 'circus' before them, and desperately involved in thoughts of how to keep her out of it as much as possible, Soames was reduced to the closeness of a fish.

"You'll be sitting in front, next to me," he said. "I shouldn't wear anything too bright. Would you like your mother there, too?"

Fleur shrugged her shoulders.

"Just so," said Soames. "But if she wants to come, she'd better, perhaps. Brane is not a joking judge, thank goodness. Have you ever been in a Court?"

"No."

"The great thing is to keep still, and pay no attention to anything. They'll all be behind you, except the jury — and there's nothing in them really. If you look at them, don't smile!"

"Why? Aren't they safe, Dad?"

Soames put the levity aside.

"I should wear a small hat. Michael must sit on your left. Have you got over that — er — not telling each other things?"

"Yes."

"I shouldn't begin it again. He's very fond of you."

Fleur nodded.

"Is there anything you want to tell ME? You know I— I worry about you."

Fleur got up and sat on the arm of his chair; he had at once a feeling of assuagement.

"I really don't care now. The harm's done. I only hope SHE'LL have a bad time."

Soames, who had the same hope, was somewhat shocked by its expression.

He took leave of her soon after and got into his car for the dark drive back to Mapledurham.

The Spring evening was cold and he had the windows up. At first he thought of very little; and then of still less. He had passed a tiring afternoon, and was glad of the slight smell of stephanotis provided by Annette. The road was too familiar to rouse his thoughts, beyond wonder at the lot of people there always seemed to be in the world between six and seven. He dozed his way into the new cut, woke, and dozed again. What was this — Slough? Before going to Marlborough he had been at school there with young Nicholas and St. John Hayman, and after his time, some other young Forsytes. Nearly sixty years ago! He remembered his first day — a brand-new little boy in a brand-new little top-hat, with a playbox stored by his mother with things to eat, and blessed with the words: "There, Summy dear, that'll make you popular." He had reckoned on having command of that corruption for some weeks; but no sooner had he produced a bit of it, than they had taken the box, and suggested to him that it would be a good thing to eat the lot. In twenty-two minutes twenty-two boys had materially increased their weight, and he himself, in handing out the contents, had been obliged to eat less than a twenty-third. They had left him one packet of biscuits, and those had caraway seeds, for which he had constitutionally no passion whatever. Afterwards three other new boys had complained that he was a fool for having it all eaten up like that, instead of saving it for them, and he had been obliged to sit on their heads one by one. His popularity had lasted twenty-two minutes, and, so far as he knew, had never come back. He had been against Communism ever since.

Bounding a little on the cushioned seat, he remembered poignantly his own cousin St. John Hayman pushing him into a gorse-bush and holding him there for an appreciable minute. Horrid little brutes, boys! For a moment he felt quite grateful to Michael for trying to get them out of England. And yet —! He had some pleasant memories even of boys. There was his collection of butterflies — he had sold two Red Admirals in poor condition to a boy for one-and-threepence. To be a boy again — h'm — and shoot peas at passengers in a train that couldn't stop, and drink cherry brandy going home, and win a prize by reciting two hundred lines of 'The Lady of the Lake' better than 'Cherry-Tart' Burroughes — Um? What had become of 'Cherry-Tart' Burroughes, who had so much money at school that his father went bankrupt! 'Cherry-Tart' Burroughes!

The loom of Slough faded. One was in rank country now, and he ground the handle of the window to get a little fresh air. A smell of trees and grass came in. Boys out of England! They had funny accents in those great places overseas. Well, they had funny accents here, too. The accent had been all right at Slough — if it wasn't a boy got lammed. He remembered the first time his father and mother — James and Emily — came down; very genteel (before the word was flyblown), all whiskers and crinoline; the beastly boys had made personal remarks which had hurt him! Get 'em out of England! But in those days there had been nowhere for boys to go. He took a long breath of the wayside air. They said England was changed, spoiled, some even said 'done for.' Bosh! It still smelt the same! His great uncle 'Superior Dosset's' brother Simon had gone as a boy to Bermuda at the beginning of the last century, and had he been heard of since? Not he. Young Jon Forsyte and his mother — his own first, unfaithful, still not quite forgotten wife — had gone to the States — would they be heard of again? He hoped not. England! Some day, when he had time and the car was free, he would go and poke round on the border of Dorset and Devon where the Forsytes came from. There was nothing there — he understood, and he wouldn't care to let anybody know of his going; but the earth must be some sort of colour, and there would be a graveyard, and — ha! Maidenhead! These sprawling villas and hotels and gramophones spoiled the river. Funny that Fleur had never been very fond of the river; too slow and wet, perhaps — everything was quick and dry now, like America. But had they such a river as the Thames anywhere out of England? Not they! Nothing that ran green and clear and weedy, where you could sit in a punt and watch the cows, and those big elms, and the poplars. Nothing that was safe and quiet, where you called your soul your own and thought of Constable and Mason and Walker.

His car bumped something slightly, and came to a stand. That fellow Riggs was always bumping something! He looked out. The chauffeur had got down and was examining his mudguard.

"What was that?" said Soames.

"I think it was a pig, sir."

"Where?"

"Shall I drive on, or see?"

Soames looked round. There seemed no habitations in sight.

"Better see."

The chauffeur disappeared behind the car. Soames remained seated. He had never had any pigs. They said the pig was a clean animal. People didn't treat pigs properly. It was very quiet! No cars on the road; in the silence the wind was talking a little in the hedgerow. He noticed some stars.

"It is a pig, sir; he's breathing."

"Oh!" said Soames. If a cat had nine, how many lives had a pig? He remembered his father James' only riddle: "If a herring and a half cost three-a'pence, what's the price of a gridiron?" When still very small, he had perceived that it was unanswerable.

"Where is he?" he said.

"In the ditch, sir."

A pig was property, but if in the ditch, nobody would notice it till after he was home. "Drive on," he said: "No! Wait.'" And, opening the near door, he got out. After all, the pig was in distress. "Show me," he said, and moved in the tail-light of his car to where the chauffeur stood pointing. There, in the shallow ditch, was a dark object emitting cavernous low sounds, as of a man asleep in a Club chair.

"It must belong to one of them cottages we passed a bit back," said the chauffeur.

Soames looked at the pig.

"Anything broken?"

"No, sir; the mudguard's all right. I fancy it copped him pretty fair."

"In the pig, I meant."

The chauffeur touched the pig with his boot. It squealed, and Soames quivered. Some one would hear! Just like that fellow, drawing attention to it — no gumption whatever! But how, without touching, did you find out whether anything was broken in the pig? He moved a step and saw the pig's eyes; and a sort of fellow-feeling stirred in him. What if it had a broken leg! Again the chauffeur touched it with his foot. The pig uttered a lamentable noise, and, upheaving its bulk, squealing and grunting, trotted off. Soames hastily resumed his seat. "Drive on!" he said. Pigs! They never thought of anything but themselves; and cottagers were just as bad — very unpleasant about cars. And he wasn't sure they weren't right — tearing great things! The pig's eye seemed looking at him again from where his feet were resting. Should he keep some, now that he had those meadows on the other side of the river? Eat one's own bacon, cure one's own hams! After all, there was something in it — clean pigs, properly fed! That book of old Foggart said one must grow more food in England, and be independent if there were another war. He sniffed. Smell of baking — Reading, already! They still grew biscuits in England! Foreign countries growing his food — something unpleasant about living on sufferance like that! After all, English meat and English wheat — as for a potato, you couldn't get one fit to eat in Italy, or France. And now they wanted to trade with Russia again! Those Bolshevists hated England. Eat their wheat and eggs, use their tallow and skins? Infra dig, he called it! The car swerved and he was jerked against the side cushions. The village church! — that fellow Riggs was always shying at something. Pretty little old affair, too, with its squat spire and its lichen — couldn't see that out of England — graves, old names, yew-trees. And that reminded him: One would have to be buried, some day. Here, perhaps. Nothing flowery! Just his name, 'Soames Forsyte,' standing out on rough stone, like that grave he had sat on at Highgate; no need to put 'Here lies'— of course he'd lie! As to a cross, he didn't know. Probably they'd put one, whatever he wished. He'd like to be in a corner, though, away from people — with an apple-tree or something, over him. The less they remembered him, the better. Except Fleur — and she would have other things to think of!

The car turned down the last low hill to the level of the river. He caught a glimpse of it flowing dark between the poplars, like the soul of England, running hidden. The car rolled into the drive, and stopped before the door. He shouldn't tell Annette yet about this case coming into Court — she wouldn't feel as he did — she had no nerves!

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CHAPTER IV

CATECHISM

Marjorie Ferrar's marriage was fixed for the day of the Easter Recess; her honeymoon to Lugano; her trousseau with Clothilde; her residence in Eaton Square; her pin-money at two thousand a year; and her affections on nobody. When she received a telephone message: Would she come to breakfast at Shropshire House? she was surprised. What could be the matter with the old boy?

At five minutes past nine, however, on the following day she entered the ancestral precincts, having left almost all powder and pigment on her dressing-table. Was he going to disapprove of her marriage? Or to give her some of her grandmother's lace, which was only fit to be in a museum?

The marquess was reading the paper in front of an electric fire. He bent on her his bright, shrewd glance.

"Well, Marjorie? Shall we sit down, or do you like to breakfast standing? There's porridge, scrambled eggs, fish — ah! and grapefruit — very considerate of them! Pour out the coffee, will you?"

"What'll you have, Grandfather?"

"Thank you, I'll roam about and peck a bit. So you're going to be married. Is that fortunate?"

"People say so."

"He's in Parliament, I see. Do you think you could interest him in this Electricity Bill of Parsham's?"

"Oh! yes. He's dead keen on electricity."

"Sensible man. He's got Works, I suppose. Are they electrified?"

"I expect so."

The marquess gave her another glance.

"You know nothing about it," he said. "But you're looking very charming. What's this I hear of a libel?"

She might have known! Grandfather was too frightfully spry! He missed nothing!

"It wouldn't interest you, dear."

"I disagree. My father and OLD Sir Lawrence Mont were great friends. Why do you want to wash linen in Court?"

"I don't."

"Are you the plaintiff?"

"Yes."

"What do you complain of?"

"They've said things about me."

"Who?"

"Fleur Mont and her father."

"Ah! the relation of the tea-man. What have they said?"

"That I haven't a moral about me."

"Well, have you?"

"As much as most people."

"Anything else?"

"That I'm a snake of the first water."

"I don't like that. What made them say so?"

"Only that I was heard calling her a snob; and so she is."

The marquess, who had resigned a finished grapefruit, placed his foot on a chair, his elbow on his knee, his chin on his hand, and said:

"No divinity hedges our Order in these days, Marjorie; but we still stand for something. It's a mistake to forget that."

She sat very still. Everybody respected grandfather; even her father, to whom he did not speak. But to be told that she stood for something was really too dull for anything! All very well for grandfather at his age, and with his lack of temptations! Besides, SHE had no handle to her name, owing to the vaunted nature of British institutions. Even if she felt that — by Lord Charles out of Lady Ursula — she ought not to be dictated to, she had never put on frills — had always liked to be thought a mere Bohemian. And, after all, she did stand — for not being stuffy, and not being dull.

“Well, Grandfather, I tried to make it up, but she wouldn’t. Coffee?”

“Yes, coffee. But tell me, are you happy about yourself?”

Marjorie Ferrar handed him the cup. “No. Who is?”

“A hit,” said the marquess. “You’re going to be very well off, I hear. That means power. It’s worth using well, Marjorie. He’s a Scotsman, isn’t he? Do you like him?” Again the shrewd bright glance.

“At times.”

“I see. With your hair, you must be careful. Red hair is extraordinarily valuable on occasion. In the Eton and Harrow Match, or for speaking after dinner; but don’t let it run away with you after you’re married. Where are you going to live?”

“In Eaton Square. There’s a Scotch place, too.”

“Have your kitchens electrified. I’ve had it done here. It saves the cook’s temper. I get very equable food. But about this libel. Can’t you all say you’re sorry — why put money into the lawyers’ pockets?”

“She won’t, unless I do, and I won’t, unless she does.”

The marquess drank off his coffee.

“Then what is there in the way? I dislike publicity, Marjorie. Look at that suit the other day. Anything of this nature in Society, nowadays, is a nail in our coffins.”

“I’ll speak to Alec, if you like.”

“Do! Has he red hair?”

“No; black.”

“Ah! What would you like for a wedding-present — lace?”

“Oh! no, please, dear. Nobody’s wearing lace.”

With his head on one side, the marquess looked at her. “I can’t get that lace off,” he seemed to say.

“Perhaps you’d like a Colliery. Electrified, it would pay in no time.”

Marjorie Ferrar laughed. “I know you’re hard up, Grandfather; but I’d rather not have a Colliery, thanks. They’re so expensive. Just give me your blessing.”

“I wonder,” said the marquess, “if I could sell blessings? Your uncle Dangerfield has gone in for farming; he’s ruining me. If only he’d grow wheat by electricity; it’s the only way to make it pay at the present price. Well, if you’ve finished breakfast, good-bye. I must go to work.”

Marjorie Ferrar, who had indeed begun breakfast, stood up and pressed his hand. He was a dear old boy, if somewhat rapid! . . .

That same evening, in a box at the St. Anthony, she had her opportunity, when MacGown was telling her of Soames’ visit.

“Oh, dear! Why on earth didn’t you settle it, Alec? The whole thing’s a bore. I’ve had my grandfather at me about it.”

“If they’ll apologise,” said MacGown, “I’ll settle it tomorrow. But an apology they must make.”

“And what about me? I don’t want to stand up to be shot at.”

“There are some things one can’t sit down under, Marjorie. Their whole conduct has been infamous.”

Visited by a reckless impulse, she said:

“What d’you suppose I’m realty like, Alec?”

MacGown put his hand on her bare arm.

“I don’t suppose; I know.”

“Well?”

“Defiant.”

Curious summary! Strangely good in a way — only —!

“You mean that I like to irritate people till they think I’m — what I’m not. But suppose”— her eyes confronted his —“I really am.”

MacGown’s grasp tightened.

“You’re not; and I won’t have it said.”

“You think this case will whitewash my — defiance?”

“I know what gossip is; and I know it buzzes about you. People who say things are going to be taught, once for all, that they can’t.”

Marjorie Ferrar turned her gaze towards the still life on the dropped curtain, laughed and said:

“My dear man, you’re dangerously provincial.”

“I know a straight line when I see one.”

“Yes; but there aren’t any in London. You’d better hedge, Alec, or you’ll be taking a toss over me.”

MacGown said, simply: “I believe in you more than you believe in yourself.”

She was glad that the curtain rose just then, for she felt confused and rather touched.

Instead of confirming her desire to drop the case, that little talk gave her a feeling that by the case her marriage stood or fell. Alec would know where he was when it was over, and so would she! There would be precious little secret about her and she would either not be married to him, or at least not married under false pretences. Let it rip! It was, however, a terrible bore; especially the preparatory legal catechism she had now to undergo. What effect, for instance, had been produced among her friends and acquaintances by those letters? From the point of view of winning, the question was obviously not without importance. But how was she to tell? Two hostesses had cancelled week-end invitations: a rather prim Countess, and a Canadian millionairess married to a decaying baronet. It had not occurred to her before that this was the reason, but it might have been. Apart from them she would have to say she didn’t know, people didn’t tell you to your face what they heard or thought of you. They were going to try and make her out a piece of injured innocence! Good Lord! What if she declared her real faith in Court, and left them all in the soup! Her real faith — what was it? Not to let a friend down; not to give a man away; not to funk; to do things differently from other people; to be always on the go; not to be ‘stuffy’; not to be dull! The whole thing was topsy-turvy! Well, she must keep her head!

❦

Chapter V

The Day

On the day of the case Soames rose, in Green Street, with a sort of sick impatience. Why wasn't it the day after!

Renewed interviews with very young Nicholas and Sir James Foskisson had confirmed the idea of defence by attack on modern morality. Foskisson was evidently going to put his heart into that — perhaps he'd suffered from it; and if he was anything like old Bobstay, who had just published his reminiscences at the age of eighty-two, that cat would lose her hair and give herself away. Yesterday afternoon Soames had taken an hour's look at Mr. Justice Brane, and been very favourably impressed; the learned judge, though younger than himself — he had often briefed him in other times — looked old-fashioned enough now for anything.

Having cleaned his teeth, put in his plate, and brushed his hair, Soames went into the adjoining room and told Annette she would be late. She always looked terribly young and well in bed, and this, though a satisfaction to him, he could never quite forgive. When he was gone, fifteen years hence, perhaps, she would still be under sixty, and might live another twenty years.

Having roused her sufficiently to say: "You will have plenty of time to be fussy in that Court, Soames," he went back and looked out of his window. The air smelled of Spring — aggravating! He bathed and shaved with care — didn't want to go into the Box with a cut on his chin! — then went back to see that Annette was not putting on anything bright. He found her in pink underclothes.

"I should wear black," he said. Annette regarded him above her hand-mirror. "Whom do you want me to fascinate, Soames?"

"These people will bring their friends, I shouldn't wonder; anything conspicuous —"

"Don't be afraid; I shall not try to be younger than my daughter."

Soames went out again. The French! Well, she had good taste in dress.

After breakfast he went off to Fleur's. Winifred and Imogen would look after Annette — they too were going to the Court — as if there were anything to enjoy about this business!

Spruce in his silk hat, he walked across the Green Park, conning over his evidence. No buds on the trees — a late year; and the Royal Family out of town! Passing the Palace, he thought: 'They're very popular!' He supposed they liked this great Empire group in front of them, all muscle and flesh and large animals! The Albert Memorial, and this — everybody ran them down; but, after all, peace and plenty — nothing modern about them! Emerging into Westminster, he cut his way through a smell of fried fish into the Parliamentary backwater of North Street, and, between its pleasant little houses, gazed steadily at the Wren Church. Never going inside any church except St. Paul's, he derived a sort of strength from their outsides — churches were solid and stood back, and didn't seem to care what people thought of them! He felt a little better, rounding into South Square. The Dandie met him in the hall. Though he was not over fond of dogs, the breadth and solidity of this one always affected Soames pleasurably — better than that little Chinese abortion they used to have! This dog was a character — masterful and tenacious — you would get very little out of HIM in a witness-box! Looking up from the dog, he saw Michael and Fleur coming down the stairs. After hurriedly inspecting Michael's brown suit and speckled tie, his eyes came to anchor on his daughter's face. Pale but creamy, nothing modern — thank goodness! — no rouge, salve, powder, or eye-blacking; perfectly made up for her part! In a blue dress, too, very good taste, which must have taken some finding! The desire that she should not feel nervous stilled Soames' private qualms.

"Quite a smell of Spring!" he said: "Shall we start?"

While a cab was being summoned, he tried to put her at ease.

"I had a look at Brane yesterday; he's changed a good deal from when I used to know him. I was one of the first to give him briefs."

"That's bad, isn't it, sir?" said Michael.

"How?"

"He'll be afraid of being thought grateful."

Flippant, as usual!

"Our judges," he said, "are a good lot, take them all round."

"I'm sure they are. Do you know if he ever reads, sir?"

"How d'you mean — reads?"

"Fiction. We don't, in Parliament."

"Nobody reads novels, except women," said Soames. And he felt Fleur's dress. "You'll want a fur; that's flimsy."

While she was getting the fur, he said to Michael: "How did she sleep?"

"Better than I did, sir."

"That's a comfort, anyway. Here's the cab. Keep away from that Scotchman."

"I see him every day in the House, you know."

"Ah!" said Soames; "I forgot. You make nothing of that sort of thing there, I believe." And taking his daughter's arm, he led her forth.

"I wonder if old Blythe will turn up," he heard Michael say, when they passed the office of The Outpost. It was the first remark made in the cab, and, calling for no response, it was the last.

The Law Courts had their customary air, and people, in black and blue, were hurrying into them. "Beetletrap!" muttered Michael. Soames rejected the simile with his elbow — for him they were just familiar echoing space, concealed staircases, stuffy corridors, and the square enclosures of one voice at a time.

Too early, they went slowly up the stairs. Really, it was weak-minded! Here they had come — they and the other side — to get — what? He was amazed at himself for not having insisted on Fleur's apologising. Time and again in the case of others, all this had appeared quite natural — in the case of his own daughter, it now seemed almost incredibly idiotic. He hurried her on, however, past lingering lawyers' clerks, witnesses, what not. A few low words to an usher, and they were inside, and sitting down. Very young Nicholas was already in his place, and Soames so adjusted himself that there would only be the thickness of Sir James, when he materialised, between them. Turning to confer, he lived for a cosey moment in the past again, as might some retired old cricketer taking block once more. Beyond young Nicholas he quartered the assemblage with his glance. Yes, people had got wind of it! He knew they would — with that cat always in the public eye — quite a lot of furbelows up there at the back, and more coming. He reversed himself abruptly; the Jury were filing in-special, but a common-looking lot! Why were juries always common-looking? He had never been on one himself. He glanced at Fleur. There she sat, and what she was feeling he couldn't tell. As for young Michael, his ears looked very pointed. And just then he caught sight of Annette. She'd better not come and sit down here, after all — the more there were of them in front, the more conspicuous it would be! So he shook his head at her, and waved towards the back. Ah! She was going! She and Winifred and Imogen would take up room — all rather broad in the beam; but there were still gaps up there. And suddenly he saw the plaintiff and her lawyer and MacGown; very spry they looked, and that insolent cat was smiling! Careful not to glance in their direction, Soames saw them sit down, some six feet off. Ah! and here came Counsel — Foskisson and Bullfry together, thick as thieves. They'd soon be calling each other 'my friend' now, and cutting each other's throats! He wondered if he wouldn't have done better after all to have let the other side have Foskisson, and briefed Bullfry — an ugly-looking customer, broad, competent and leathery. He and Michael with Fleur between them, and behind — Foskisson and his junior; Settlewhite and the Scotchman with 'that cat' between them, and behind — Bullfry and his junior! Only the Judge wanted now to complete the pattern! And here he came! Soames gripped Fleur's arm and raised her with himself. Bob! Down again! One side of Brane's face seemed a little fuller than the other; Soames wondered if he had toothache, and how it would affect the proceedings.

And now came the usual 'shivaree' about such and such a case, and what would be taken next week, and so on. Well! that was over, and the judge was turning his head this way and that, as if to see where the field was placed. Now Bullfry was up:

"If it please Your Lordship —"

He was making the usual opening, with the usual flowery description of the plaintiff — granddaughter of a marquess, engaged to a future Prime Minister . . . or so you'd think! . . . prominent in the most brilliant circles, high-spirited, perhaps a thought too high-spirited. . . . Baggage! . . . the usual smooth and sub-acid description of the defendant! . . . Rich and ambitious young married lady. . . . Impudent beggar! . . . Jury would bear in mind that they were dealing in both cases with members of advanced Society, but they would bear in mind, too, that primary words had primary meanings and consequences, whatever the Society in which they were uttered. H'm! Very sketchy reference to the incident in Fleur's drawing-room — minimised, of course — ha! an allusion to himself — man of property and standing — thank you for nothing! Reading the libellous letters now! Effect of them . . . very made-up, all that! . . . Plaintiff obliged to take action. . . . Bunkum! "I shall now call Mrs. Ralph Ppynrryn."

"How do you spell that name, Mr. Bullfry?"

"With two p's, two y's, two n's and two r's, my lord."

"I see."

Soames looked at the owner of the name. Good-looking woman of the flibberty-gibbet type! He listened to her evidence with close attention. Her account of the incident in Fleur's drawing-room seemed substantially correct. She had received the libellous letter two days later; had thought it her duty, as a friend, to inform Miss Ferrar. Should say, as a woman in Society, that this incident and these letters had done Miss Ferrar harm. Had talked it over with a good many people. A public incident. Much feeling excited. Had shown her letter to Mrs. Maltese, and been shown one that she had received. Whole matter had become current gossip. H'm!

Bullfry down, and Foskisson up!

Soames adjusted himself. Now to see how the fellow shaped — the manner of a cross-examiner was so important! Well, he had seen worse — the eye, like frozen light, fixed on unoccupied space while the question was being asked, and coming round on to the witness for the answer; the mouth a little open, as if to swallow it; the tongue visible at times on the lower lip, the unoccupied hand clasping something under the gown behind.

"Now, Mrs. — er — Ppynrryn. This incident, as my friend has called it, happened at the house of Mrs. Mont, did it not? And how did you come there? As a friend. Quite so! And you have nothing against Mrs. Mont? No. And you thought it advisable and kind, madam, to show this letter to the plaintiff and to other people — in fact, to foment this little incident to the best of your ability?" Eyes round!

"If a friend of mine received such a letter about me, I should expect her to tell me that the writer was going about abusing me."

"Even if your friend knew of the provocation and was also a friend of the letter-writer?"

"Yes."

"Now, madam, wasn't it simply that the sensation of this little quarrel was too precious to be burked? It would have been so easy, wouldn't it, to have torn the letter up and said nothing about it? You don't mean to suggest that it made you think any the worse of Miss Ferrar — you knew her too well, didn't you?"

"Ye-es."

"Exactly. As a friend of both parties you knew that these expressions were just spleen and not to be taken seriously."

"I can't say that."

"Oh! You regarded them as serious? Am I to take it that you thought they touched the ham-bone? In other words, that they were true?"

"Certainly not."

"Could they do Miss Ferrar any harm if they were palpably untrue?"

"I think they could."

"Not with you — you were a friend?"

"Not with me."

"But with other people, who would never have heard of them but for you. In fact, madam, you enjoyed the whole thing. Did you?"

"Enjoyed? No."

"You regarded it as your duty to spread this letter? Don't you enjoy doing your duty?"

The dry cackle within Soames stopped at his lips.

Foskisson down, and Bullfry up!

“It is, in fact, your experience, Mrs. Ppynrryn, as well as that of most of us not so well constituted, perhaps, as my learned friend, that duty is sometimes painful.”

“Yes.”

“Thank you. Mrs. Edward Maltese.”

During the examination of this other young woman, who seemed to be dark and solid, Soames tried to estimate the comparative effect produced by Fleur and ‘that cat’ on the four jurymen whose eyes seemed to stray towards beauty. He had come to no definite conclusion, when Sir James Foskisson rose to cross-examine.

“Tell me, Mrs. Maltese, which do you consider the most serious allegation among those complained of?”

“The word ‘treacherous’ in my letter, and the expression ‘a snake of the first water’ in the letter to Mrs. Ppynrryn.”

“More serious than the others?”

“Yes.”

“That is where you can help me, madam. The circle you move in is not exactly the plaintiff’s, perhaps?”

“Not exactly.”

“Intersecting, um?”

“Yes.”

“Now, in which section, yours or the plaintiff’s, would you say the expression ‘she hasn’t a moral about her’ would be the more, or shall we say the less, damning?”

“I can’t say.”

“I only want your opinion. Do you think your section of Society as advanced as Miss Ferrar’s?”

“Perhaps not.”

“It’s well known, isn’t it, that her circle is very free and easy?”

“I suppose so.”

“Still, YOUR section is pretty advanced — I mean, you’re not ‘stuffy’?”

“Not what, Sir James?”

“Stuffy, my lord; it’s an expression a good deal used in modern Society.”

“What does it mean?”

“Strait-laced, my lord.”

“I see. Well, he’s asking you if you’re stuffy?”

“No, my lord. I hope not.”

“You hope not. Go on, Sir James.”

“Not being stuffy, you wouldn’t be exactly worried if somebody said to you: ‘My dear, you haven’t a moral about you’?”

“Not if it was said as charmingly as that.”

“Now come, Mrs. Maltese, does such an expression, said charmingly or the reverse, convey any blame to you or to your friends?”

“If the reverse, yes.”

“Am I to take it that the conception of morality in your circle is the same as in-my lord’s?”

“How is the witness to answer that, Sir James?”

“Well, in your circle are you shocked when your friends are divorced, or when they go off together for a week in Paris, say, or wherever they find convenient?”

“Shocked? Well, I suppose one needn’t be shocked by what one wouldn’t do oneself.”

“In fact, you’re not shocked?”

“I don’t know that I’m shocked by anything.”

“That would be being stuffy, wouldn’t it?”

“Perhaps.”

“Well, will you tell me then — if that’s the state of mind in your circle; and you said, you know, that your circle is less free and easy than the plaintiff’s — how it is possible that such words as ‘she hasn’t a moral about her’ can have done the plaintiff any harm?”

“The whole world isn’t in our circles.”

“No. I suggest that only a very small portion of the world is in your circles. But do you tell me that you or the plaintiff pay any —?”

“How can she tell, Sir James, what the plaintiff pays?”

“That YOU, then, pay any attention to what people outside your circle think?”

Soames moved his head twice. The fellow was doing it well. And his eye caught Fleur’s face turned towards the witness; a little smile was curling her lip.

“I don’t personally pay much attention even to what anybody IN my circle thinks.”

“Have you more independence of character than the plaintiff, should you say?”

“I dare say I’ve got as much.”

“Is she notoriously independent?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Maltese.”

Foskisson down, Bullfry up!

“I call the plaintiff, my lord.”

Soames uncrossed his legs.

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CHAPTER VI

IN THE BOX

Marjorie Ferrar stepped into the Box, not exactly nervous, and only just ‘made-up.’ The papers would record a black costume with chinchilla fur and a black hat. She kissed the air in front of the book, took a deep breath, and turned to Mr. Bullfry.

For the last five days she had resented more and more the way this case had taken charge of her. She had initiated it, and it had completely deprived her of initiative. She had, in fact, made the old discovery, that when the machinery of quarrel is once put in motion, much more than pressure of the starting button is required to stop its revolutions. She was feeling that it would serve Alec and the lawyers right if all went wrong.

The voice of Mr. Bullfry, carefully adjusted, soothed her. His questions were familiar, and with each answer her confidence increased, her voice sounded clear and pleasant in her ears. And she stood at ease, making her figure as boyish as she could. Her performance, she felt, was interesting to the judge, the jury, and all those people up there, whom she could dimly see. If only ‘that little snob’ had not been seated, expressionless, between her and her Counsel! When at length Mr. Bullfry sat down and Sir James Foskisson got up, she almost succumbed to the longing to powder her nose. Clasping the Box, she resisted it, and while he turned his papers, and hitched his gown, the first tremor of the morning passed down her spine. At least he might look at her when he spoke!

“Have you ever been party to an action before, Miss Ferrar?”

“No.”

“You quite understand, don’t you, that you are on your oath?”

“Quite.”

“You have told my friend that you had no animus against Mrs. Mont. Look at this marked paragraph in The Evening Sun of October 3rd. Did you write that?”

Marjorie Ferrar felt exactly as if she had stepped out of a conservatory into an East wind. Did they know everything, then?

“Yes; I wrote it.”

“It ends thus: ‘The enterprising little lady is losing no chance of building up her salon on the curiosity which ever surrounds any buccaneering in politics.’ Is the reference to Mrs. Mont?”

“Yes.”

“Not very nice, is it — of a friend?”

“I don’t see any harm in it.”

“The sort of thing, in fact, you’d like written about yourself?”

“The sort of thing I should expect if I were doing the same thing.”

“That’s not quite an answer, but let me put it like this: The sort of thing your father would like to read about you, is it?”

“My father would never read that column.”

“Then it surprises you to hear that Mrs. Mont’s father did? Do you write many of these cheery little paragraphs about your friends?”

“Not many.”

“Every now and then, eh? And do they remain your friends?”

“It’s not easy in Society to tell who’s a friend and who isn’t.”

“I quite agree, Miss Ferrar. You have admitted making one or two critical — that was your word, I think — remarks concerning Mrs. Mont, in her own house. Do you go to many houses and talk disparagingly of your hostess?”

“No; and in any case I don’t expect to be eavesdropped.”

“I see; so long as you’re not found out, it’s all right, eh? Now, on this first Wednesday in October last, at Mrs. Mont’s, in speaking to this gentleman, Mr. Philip — er — Quinsey, did you use the word 'snob' of your hostess?"

"I don't think so."

"Be careful. You heard the evidence of Mrs. Ppynrryn and Mrs. Maltese. Mrs. Maltese said, you remember, that Mr. Forsyte — that is Mrs. Mont's father — said to you on that occasion: 'You called my daughter a snob in her own house, madam — be so kind as to withdraw; you are a traitress.' Is that a correct version?"

"Probably."

"Do you suggest that he invented the word 'snob'?"

"I suggest he was mistaken."

"Not a nice word, is it —'snob'? Was there any other reason why he should call you a traitress?"

"My remarks weren't meant for his ears. I don't remember exactly what I said."

"Well, we shall have Mr. Forsyte in the box to refresh your memory as to exactly what you said. But I put it to you that you called her a snob, not once but twice, during that little conversation?"

"I've told you I don't remember; he shouldn't have listened."

"Very well! So you feel quite happy about having written that paragraph and said nasty things of Mrs. Mont behind her back in her own drawing-room?"

Marjorie Ferrar grasped the Box till the blood tingled in her palms. His voice was maddening.

"Yet it seems, Miss Ferrar, that you object to others saying nasty things about you in return. Who advised you to bring this action?"

"My father first; and then my fiance."

"Sir Alexander MacGown. Does he move in the same circles as you?"

"No; he moves in Parliamentary circles."

"Exactly; and he wouldn't know, would he, the canons of conduct that rule in your circle?"

"There are no circles so definite as that."

"Always willing to learn, Miss Ferrar. But tell me, do you know what Sir Alexander's Parliamentary friends think about conduct and morality?"

"I can guess. I don't suppose there's much difference."

"Are you suggesting, Miss Ferrar, that responsible public men take the same light-hearted view of conduct and morals as you?"

"Aren't you rather assuming, Sir James, that her view IS light-hearted?"

"As to conduct, my lord, I submit that her answers have shown the very light-hearted view she takes of the obligations incurred by the acceptance of hospitality, for instance. I'm coming to morals now."

"I think you'd better, before drawing your conclusions. What have public men to do with it?"

"I'm suggesting, my lord, that this lady is making a great to-do about words which a public man, or any ordinary citizen, would have a perfect right to resent, but which she, with her views, has no right whatever to resent."

"You must prove her views then. Go on!"

Marjorie Ferrar, relaxed for a moment, gathered herself again. Her views!

"Tell me, Miss Ferrar — we all know now the meaning of the word 'stuffy'— are public men 'stuffier' than you?"

"They may say they are."

"You think them hypocrites?"

"I don't think anything at all about them."

"Though you're going to marry one? You are complaining of the words: 'She hasn't a moral about her.' Have you read this novel 'Can-thar'?" He was holding up a book.

"I think so."

"Don't you know?"

"I've skimmed it."

"Taken off the cream, eh? Read it sufficiently to form an opinion?"

"Yes."

"Would you agree with the view of it expressed in this letter to a journal? 'The book breaks through the British "stuffiness," which condemns any frank work of art — and a good thing too!' It is a good thing?"

"Yes. I hate Grundyism."

"'It is undoubtedly Literature.' The word is written with a large L. Should you say it was?"

"Literature — yes. Not great literature, perhaps."

"But it ought to be published?"

"I don't see why not."

"You know that it is not published in England?"

"Yes."

"But it ought to be?"

"It isn't everybody's sort of book, of course."

"Don't evade the question, please. In your opinion ought this novel 'Canthar' to be published in England? . . . Take your time, Miss Ferrar."

The brute lost nothing! Just because she had hesitated a moment trying to see where he was leading her.

"Yes, I think literature should be free."

"You wouldn't sympathise with its suppression, if it were published?"

"No."

"You wouldn't approve of the suppression of any book on the ground of mere morals?"

"I can't tell you unless I see the book. People aren't bound to read books, you know."

"And you think your opinion generally on this subject is that of public men and ordinary citizens?"

"No; I suppose it isn't."

"But your view would be shared by most of your own associates?"

"I should hope so."

"A contrary opinion would be 'stuffy,' wouldn't it?"

"If you like to call it so. It's not my word."

"What is your word, Miss Ferrar?"

"I think I generally say 'ga-ga.'"

"Do you know, I'm afraid the Court will require a little elaboration of that."

"Not for me, Sir James; I'm perfectly familiar with the word; it means 'in your dotage.'"

"The Bench is omniscient, my lord. Then any one, Miss Ferrar, who didn't share the opinion of yourself and your associates in the matter of this book would be 'ga-ga,' that is to say, in his or her dotage?"

"Aesthetically."

"Ah! I thought we should arrive at that word. You, I suppose, don't connect art with life?"

"No."

"Don't think it has any effect on life?"

"It oughtn't to."

"When a man's theme in a book is extreme incontinence, depicted with all due emphasis, that wouldn't have any practical effect on his readers, however young?"

"I can't say about other people, it wouldn't have any effect on me."

"You are emancipated, in fact."

"I don't know what you mean by that."

"Isn't what you are saying about the divorce of art from life the merest claptrap; and don't you know it?"

"I certainly don't."

"Let me put it another way: Is it possible for those who believe in current morality, to hold your view that art has no effect on life?"

"Quite possible; if they are cultured."

"Cultured! Do you believe in current morality yourself?"

"I don't know what you call current morality."

"I will tell you, Miss Ferrar. I should say, for instance, it was current morality that women should not have liaisons before they're married, and should not have them after."

"What about men?"

"Thank you; I was coming to men. And that men should at least not have them after."

"I shouldn't say that was CURRENT morality at all."

In yielding to that satiric impulse she knew at once she had made a mistake — the judge had turned his face towards her. He was speaking.

"Do I understand you to imply that in your view it is moral for women to have liaisons before marriage, and for men and women to have them after?"

"I think it's current morality, my lord."

"I'm not asking you about current morality; I'm asking whether in YOUR view it is moral?"

"I think many people think it's all right, who don't say it, yet."

She was conscious of movement throughout the jury; and of a little flump in the well of the Court. Sir Alexander had dropped his hat. The sound of a nose being loudly blown broke the stillness; the face of Bullfry K. C. was lost to her view. She felt the blood mounting in her cheeks.

"Answer my question, please. Do YOU say it's all right?"

"I— I think it depends."

"On what?"

"On — on circumstances, environment, temperament; all sorts of things."

"Would it be all right for you?"

Marjorie Ferrar became very still. "I can't answer that question, my lord."

"You mean — you don't want to?"

"I mean I don't know."

And, with a feeling as if she had withdrawn her foot from a bit of breaking ice, she saw Bullfry's face re-emerge from his handkerchief.

"Very well. Go on, Sir James!"

"Anyway, we may take it, Miss Ferrar, that those of us who say we don't believe in these irregularities are hypocrites in your view?"

"Why can't you be fair?"

He was looking at her now; and she didn't like him any the better for it.

"I shall prove myself fair before I've done, Miss Ferrar."

"You've got your work cut out, haven't you?"

"Believe me, madam, it will be better for you not to indulge in witticism. According to you, there is no harm in a book like 'Canthar'?"

"There ought to be none."

"You mean if we were all as aesthetically cultured — as you."— Sneering beast! —"But are we?"

"No."

"Then there is harm. But you wouldn't mind its being done. I don't propose, my lord, to read from this extremely unpleasant novel. Owing apparently to its unsavoury reputation, a copy of it now costs nearly seven pounds. And I venture to think that is in itself an answer to the plaintiff's contention that 'art' so called has no effect on life. We have gone to the considerable expense of buying copies, and I shall ask that during the luncheon interval the jury may read some dozen marked passages."

"Have you a copy for me, Sir James?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And one for Mr. Bullfry? . . . If there is any laughter, I shall have the Court cleared. Go on."

"You know the 'Ne Plus Ultra' Play-Producing Society, Miss Ferrar? It exists to produce advanced plays, I believe."

"Plays — I don't know about 'advanced.'"

"Russian plays, and the Restoration dramatists?"

"Yes."

"And you have played in them?"

"Sometimes."

"Do you remember a play called 'The Plain Dealer,' by Wycherley, given at a matinee on January 7th last — did you play in that the part of Olivia?"

"Yes."

"A nice part?"

"A very good part?"

"I said 'nice.'"

"I don't like the word."

"Too suggestive of 'prunes and prisms,' Miss Ferrar? Is it the part of a modest woman?"

"No."

"Is it, toward the end, extremely immodest? I allude to the dark scene."

"I don't know about extremely."

"Anyway, you felt no hesitation about undertaking and playing the part — a little thing like that doesn't worry you?"

"I don't know why it should. If it did, I shouldn't act."

"You don't act for money?"

"No; for pleasure."

"Then, of course, you can refuse any part you like?"

"If I did, I shouldn't have any offered me."

"Don't quibble, please. You took the part of Olivia not for money but for pleasure. You enjoyed playing it?"

"Pretty well."

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask the jury, my lord, to run their eyes over the dark scene in 'The Plain Dealer.'"

"Are you saying, Sir James, that a woman who plays an immoral part is not moral — that would asperse a great many excellent reputations."

"No, my lord; I'm saying that here is a young lady so jealous of her good name in the eyes of the world, that she brings a libel action because some one has said in a private letter that she 'hasn't a moral about her.' And at the same time she is reading and approving books like this 'Canthar,' playing parts like that of Olivia in 'The Plain Dealer,' and, as I submit, living in a section of Society that really doesn't know the meaning of the word morals, that looks upon morals, in fact, rather as we look upon measles. It's my contention, my lord, that the saying in my client's letter: 'She hasn't a moral about her,' is rather a compliment to the plaintiff than otherwise."

"Do you mean that it was intended as a compliment?"

"No, no, my lord."

"Well, you want the jury to read that scene. You will have a busy luncheon interval, gentlemen. Go on, Sir James."

"Now, Miss Ferrar — my friend made a point of the fact that you are engaged to a wealthy and highly respected Member of Parliament. How long have you been engaged to him?"

"Six months."

"You have no secrets from him, I suppose?"

"Why should I answer that?"

"Why should she, Sir James?"

"I am quite content to leave it at her reluctance, my lord."

Sneering brute! As if everybody hadn't secrets from everybody!

"Your engagement was not made public till January, was it?"

"No."

"May I take it that you were not sure of your own mind till then?"

"If you like."

"Now, Miss Ferrar, did you bring this action because of your good name? Wasn't it because you were hard up?"

She was conscious again of blood in her cheeks.

"No."

"WERE you hard up when you brought it?"

"Yes."

"Very?"

"Not worse than I have been before."

"I put it to you that you owed a great deal of money, and were hard pressed."

"If you like."

"I'm glad you've admitted that, Miss Ferrar; otherwise I should have had to prove it. And you didn't bring this action with a view to paying some of your debts?"

"No."

"Did you in early January become aware that you were not likely to get any sum in settlement of this suit?"

"I believe I was told that an offer was withdrawn."

"And do you know why?"

"Yes; because Mrs. Mont wouldn't give the apology I asked for."

"Exactly! And was it a coincidence that you thereupon made up your mind to marry Sir Alexander MacGown?"

"A coincidence?"

"I mean the announcement of your engagement, you know?"

Brute!

"It had nothing to do with this case."

"Indeed! Now when you brought this action did you really care one straw whether people thought you moral or not?"

"I brought it chiefly because I was called 'a snake.'"

"Please answer my question."

"It isn't so much what *I* cared, as what my friends cared."

"But their view of morality is much what yours is — thoroughly accommodating?"

"Not my fiance's.

"Ah! no. He doesn't move in your circle, you said. But the rest of your friends. You're not ashamed of your own accommodating philosophy, are you?"

"No."

"Then why be ashamed of it for them?"

"How can I tell what THEIR philosophy is?"

"How can she, Sir James?"

"As your lordship pleases. Now, Miss Ferrar! You like to stand up for your views, I hope. Let me put your philosophy to you in a nutshell: You believe, don't you, in the full expression of your personality; it would be your duty, wouldn't it, to break through any convention — I don't say law — but any so-called moral convention that cramped you?"

"I never said I had a philosophy."

"Don't run away from it, please."

"I'm not in the habit of running away."

"I'm so glad of that. You believe in being the sole judge of your own conduct?"

"Yes."

"You're not alone in that view, are you?"

"I shouldn't think so."

"It's the view, in fact, of what may be called the forward wing of modern Society, isn't it — the wing you belong to, and are proud of belonging to? And in that section of Society — so long as you don't break the actual law — you think and do as you like, eh?"

"One doesn't always act up to one's principles."

"Quite so. But among your associates, even if you and they don't always act up to it, it IS a principle, isn't it, to judge for yourselves and go your own ways without regard to convention?"

"More or less."

"And, living in that circle, with that belief, you have the effrontery to think the words: 'She hasn't a moral about her,' entitles you to damages?"

Her voice rang out angrily: "I have morals. They may not be yours, but they may be just as good, perhaps better. I'm not a hypocrite, anyway."

Again she saw him look at her, there was a gleam in his eyes; and she knew she had made another mistake.

"We'll leave my morals out of the question, Miss Ferrar. But we'll go a little further into what you say are yours. In your own words, it should depend on temperament, circumstances, environment, whether you conform to morality or not?"

She stood silent, biting her lip.

"Answer, please."

She inclined her head. "Yes."

"Very good!" He had paused, turning over his papers, and she drew back in the box. She had lost her temper — had made him lose his; at all costs she must keep her head now! In this moment of search for her head she took in everything — expressions, gestures, even the atmosphere — the curious dramatic emanation from a hundred and more still faces; she noted the one lady juryman, the judge breaking the nib of a quill, with his eyes turned away from it as if looking at something that had run across the well of the Court. Yes, and down there, the lengthening lip of Mr. Settlewhite, Michael's face turned up at her with a rueful frown, Fleur Mont's mask with red spots in the cheeks, Alec's clenched hands, and his eyes fixed on her. A sort of comic intensity about it all! If only she were the size of Alice in 'Wonderland,' and could take them all in her hands and shake them like a pack of cards — so motionless, there, at her expense! That sarcastic brute had finished fiddling with his papers, and she moved forward again to attention in the Box.

"Now, Miss Ferrar, his lordship put a general question to you which you did not feel able to answer. I am going to put it in a way that will be easier for you. Whether or no it was right for you to have one"— she saw Michael's hand go up to his face —"have you IN FACT had a — liaison?" And from some tone in his voice, from the look on his face, she could tell for certain that he knew she had.

With her back to the wall, she had not even a wall to her back. Ten, twenty, thirty seconds — judge, jury, that old fox with his hand under the tail of his gown, and his eyes averted! Why did she not spit out the indignant: No! which she had so often rehearsed? Suppose he proved it — as he had said he would prove her debts?

"Take your time, Miss Ferrar. You know what a liaison is, of course."

Brute! On the verge of denial, she saw Michael lean across, and heard his whisper: 'Stop this!' And then 'that little snob' looked up at her — the scrutiny was knowing and contemptuous: 'Now hear her lie!' it seemed to say. And she answered, quickly: "I consider your question insulting."

"Oh! come, Miss Ferrar, after your own words! After what —"

"Well! I shan't answer it."

A rustle, a whispering in the Court.

"You won't answer it?"

"No."

"Thank you, Miss Ferrar." Could a voice be more sarcastic?

The brute was sitting down.

Marjorie Ferrar stood defiant, with no ground under her feet. What next? Her counsel was beckoning. She descended from the Box, and, passing her adversaries, resumed her seat next her betrothed. How red and still he was! She heard the judge say:

"I shall break for lunch now, Mr. Bullfry," saw him rise and go out, and the jury getting up. The whispering and rustling in the Court swelled to a buzz. She stood up. Mr. Settlewhite was speaking to her.

❦

CHAPTER VII

‘FED UP’

Guided by him into a room designed to shelter witnesses, Marjorie Ferrar looked at her lawyer.

“Well?”

“An unfortunate refusal, Miss Ferrar — very. I’m afraid the effect on the jury may be fatal. If we can settle it now, I should certainly say we’d better.”

“It’s all the same to me.”

“In that case you may take it I shall settle. I’ll go and see Sir Alexander and Mr. Bullfry at once.”

“How do I get out quietly?”

“Down those stairs. You’ll find cabs in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Excuse me,” he made her a grave little bow and stalked away.

Marjorie Ferrar did not take a cab; she walked. If her last answer had been fatal, on the whole she was content. She had told no lies to speak of, had stood up to ‘that sarcastic beast,’ and given him sometimes as good as she had got. Alec! Well, she couldn’t help it! He had insisted on her going into Court; she hoped he liked it now she’d been! Buying a newspaper, she went into a restaurant and read a description of herself, accompanied by a photograph. She ate a good lunch, and then continued her walk along Piccadilly. Passing into the Park, she sat down under a tree coming into bud, and drew the smoke of a cigarette quietly into her lungs. The Row was almost deserted. A few persons of little or no consequence occupied a few chairs. A riding mistress was teaching a small boy to trot. Some sparrows and a pigeon alone seemed to take a distant interest in her. The air smelled of Spring. She sat some time with the pleasant feeling that nobody in the world knew where she was. Odd, when you thought of it — millions of people every day, leaving their houses, offices, shops, on their way to the next place, were as lost to the world as stones in a pond! Would it be nice to disappear permanently, and taste life incognita? Bertie Curfew was going to Moscow again. Would he take her as secretary, and bonne amie? Bertie Curfew — she had only pretended to be tired of him! The thought brought her face to face with the future. Alec! Explanations! It was hardly the word! He had a list of her debts, and had said he would pay them as a wedding-present. But — if there wasn’t to be a wedding? Thank God, she had some ready money. The carefully ‘laid-up’ four-year-old in her father’s stable had won yesterday. She had dribbled ‘a pony’ on at a nice price. She rose and sauntered along, distending her bust — in defiance of the boylike fashion, which, after all, was on the wane — to take in the full of a sweet wind.

Leaving the Park, she came to South Kensington station and bought another paper. It had a full account under the headlines: ‘Modern Morality Attacked.’ ‘Miss Marjorie Ferrar in the Box.’ It seemed funny to stand there reading those words among people who were reading the same without knowing her from Eve, except, perhaps, by her clothes. Continuing her progress towards Wren Street, she turned her latch-key in the door, and saw a hat. Waiting for her already! She took her time; and, pale from powder, as though she had gone through much, entered the studio.

MacGown was sitting with his head in his hands. She felt real pity for him — too strong, too square, too vital for that attitude! He raised his face.

“Well, Alec!”

“Tell me the truth, Marjorie. I’m in torment.”

She almost envied him the depth of his feeling, however unreasonable after her warnings. But she said, ironically:

“Who was it knew me better than I knew myself?”

In the same dull voice he repeated:

“The truth, Marjorie, the truth!”

But why should she go into the confessional? Was he entitled to her past? His rights stopped at her future. It was the old business — men expecting more from women than they could give them. Inequality of the sexes. Something in that, perhaps, in the old days when women bore children, and men didn’t; but now that women knew all about sex and only bore children when they wanted to, and not always even then, why should men be freer?

And she said, slowly: “In exchange for your adventures I’ll tell you mine.”

“For God’s sake don’t mock me; I’ve had hell these last hours.”

His face showed it, and she said with feeling:

“I said you’d be taking a toss over me, Alec. Why on earth did you insist on my bringing this case? You’ve had your way, and now you don’t like it.”

“It’s true, then?”

“Yes. Why not?”

He uttered a groan, recoiling till his back was against the wall, as if afraid of being loose in the room.

“Who was he?”

“Oh! no! That I can’t possibly tell you. And how many affairs have you had?”

He paid no attention. He wouldn’t! He knew she didn’t love him; and such things only mattered if you loved! Ah! well! His agony was a tribute to her, after all!

“You’re well out of me,” she said, sullenly; and, sitting down, she lighted a cigarette. A scene! How hateful! Why didn’t he go? She’d rather he’d be violent than deaf and dumb and blind like this.

“Not that American fellow?”

She could not help a laugh.

“Oh! no, poor boy!”

“How long did it last?”

“Nearly a year.”

“My God!”

He had rushed to the door. If only he would open it and go! That he could feel so violently! That figure by the door was just not mad! His stuffy passions!

And then he did pull the door open and was gone.

She threw herself at full length on the divan; not from lassitude, exactly, nor despair — from a feeling rather as if nothing mattered. How stupid and pre-war! Why couldn’t he, like her, be free, be supple, take life as it came? Passions, prejudices, principles, pity — old-fashioned as the stuffy clothes worn when she was a tot. Well! Good riddance! Fancy living in the same house, sharing the same bed, with a man so full of the primitive that he could ‘go off his chump’ with jealousy about her! Fancy living with a man who took life so seriously that he couldn’t even see himself doing it! Life was a cigarette to be inhaled and thrown away, a dance to be danced out. On with that dance! . . . Yes, but she couldn’t let him pay her debts, now, even if he wanted to. Married, she would have repaid him with her body; as it was — no! Oh! why didn’t some one die and leave her something? What a bore it all was! And she lay still, listening to the tea-time sounds of a quiet street — taxis rounding the corner from the river; the dog next door barking at the postman; that one-legged man — ex-Service — who came most afternoons and played on a poor fiddle. He expected her shilling — unhappy fellow! — she’d have to get up and give it him. She went to the little side window that looked on to the street, and suddenly recoiled. Francis Wilmot in the doorway with his hand up to the bell! Another scene! No, really! This was too much! There went the bell! No time to say ‘Not at home’! Well, let them all come — round her past, like bees round a honey-pot!

“Mr. Francis Wilmot.”

He stood there, large as the life he had nearly resigned — a little thinner, that was all.

“Well, Francis,” she said, “I thought you were ‘through with that fool business’?”

Francis Wilmot came gravely up and took her hand. “I sail tomorrow.”

Sail! Well, she could put up with that. He seemed to her just a thin, pale young man with dark hair and eyes and no juices in his system.

“I read the evening papers. I wondered if, perhaps, you’d wish to see me.”

Was he mocking her? But he wore no smile; there was no bitterness in his voice; and, though he was looking at her intently, she could not tell from his face whether he still had any feeling.

“You think I owe you something? I know I treated you very badly.”

He looked rather as if she’d hit him.

“For heaven’s sake, Francis, don’t say you’ve come out of chivalry. That’d be too funny.”

“I don’t follow you; I just thought, perhaps, you didn’t like to answer that question about a love-affair — because of me.”

Marjorie Ferrar broke into hysterical laughter.

“Senor Don Punctilio! Because of you? No, no, my dear!”

Francis Wilmot drew back, and made her a little bow.

“I shouldn’t have come,” he said.

She had a sudden return of feeling for that slim unusual presence, with its grace and its dark eyes.

“I’m a free-lance again now, Francis, anyway.”

A long moment went by, and then he made her another little bow. It was a clear withdrawal.

“Then for God’s sake,” she said, “go away! I’m fed up!” And she turned her back on him.

When she looked round, he HAD gone, and that surprised her. He was a new variety, or a dead one, dug up! He didn’t know the rudiments of life — old-fashioned, a faire rire! And, back at full length on the divan, she brooded. Well, her courage was ‘not out’! To-morrow was Bella Magussie’s ‘At Home,’ to meet — some idiot. Everybody would be there, and so would she!

❦

CHAPTER VIII

FANTOCHES

Michael, screwed towards Sir James Foskisson's averted face, heard the words: "Well, I shan't answer," he spun round. It was just as if she had said: "Yes, I have." The judge was looking at her, every one looking at her. Wasn't Bullfry going to help her? No! He was beckoning her out of the Box. Michael half rose, as she passed him. By George! He was sorry for MacGown! There he sat, poor devil! — with every one getting up all round him, still, and red as a turkey-cock.

Fleur! Michael looked at her face, slightly flushed, her gloved hands clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed on the ground. Had his whisper: 'Stop this!' his little abortive bow, offended her? How could one have helped sympathising with the 'Pet of the Panjoys' in so tight a place! Fleur must see that! The Court was emptying — fine birds, many — he could see her mother and her aunt and cousin, and Old Forsyte, talking with Foskisson. Ah! he had finished; was speaking: "We can go now."

They followed him along the corridor, down the stairs, into the air.

"We've time for a snack," Soames was saying. "Come in here!"

In one of several kennels without roofs in a celebrated room with a boarded floor, they sat down.

"Three chump chops, sharp," said Soames, and staring at the cruet-stand, added: "She's cooked her goose. They'll drop it like a hot potato. I've told Foskisson he can settle, with both sides paying their own costs. It's more than they deserve."

"He ought never to have asked that question, sir."

Fleur looked up sharply.

"Really, Michael!"

"Well, darling, we agreed he shouldn't. Why didn't Bullfry help her out, sir?"

"Only too glad to get her out of the Box; the judge would have asked her himself in another minute. It's a complete fiasco, thank God!"

"Then we've won?" said Fleur.

"Unless I'm a Dutchman," answered Soames.

"I'm not so sure," muttered Michael.

"I tell you it's all over; Bullfry'll never go on with it."

"I didn't mean that, sir."

Fleur said acidly: "Then what DO you mean, Michael?"

"I don't think we shall be forgiven, that's all."

"What for?"

"Well, I dare say I'm all wrong. Sauce, sir?"

"Worcester — yes. This is the only place in London where you can rely on a floury potato. Waiter — three glasses of port, quick!"

After fifteen minutes of concentrated mastication, they returned to the Court.

"Wait here," said Soames, in the hall; "I'll go up and find out."

In that echoing space, where a man's height was so inconsiderable, Fleur and Michael stood, not speaking, for some time.

"She couldn't know that Foskisson had been told not to follow it up, of course," he said, at last. "Still, she must have expected the question. She should have told a good one and have done with it. I couldn't help feeling sorry for her."

"You'd feel sorry for a flea that bit you, Michael. What do you mean by our not being forgiven?"

"Well! The drama was all on her side, and it's drama that counts. Besides, there's her engagement!"

"That'll be broken off."

"Exactly! And if it is, she'll have sympathy; while if it isn't, he'll have it. Anyway, we shan't. Besides, you know, she stood up for what we all really believe nowadays."

"Speak for yourself."

"Well, don't we talk of every one being free?"

"Yes, but is there any connection between what we say and what we do?"

"No," said Michael.

And just then Soames returned.

"Well, sir?"

"As I told you, Bullfry caught at it. They've settled. It's a moral victory."

"Oh! not moral, I hope, sir."

"It's cost a pretty penny, anyway," said Soames, looking at Fleur. "Your mother's quite annoyed — she's no sense of proportion. Very clever the way Foskisson made that woman lose her temper."

"He lost his, at the end. That's his excuse, I suppose."

"Well," said Soames, "it's all over! Your mother's got the car; we'll take a taxi."

On the drive back to South Square, taking precisely the same route, there was precisely the same silence.

When a little later Michael went over to the House, he was edified by posters.

"Society Libel Action."

"Marquess's Granddaughter and K. C."

"Dramatic Evidence."

"Modern Morality!"

All over — was it? With publicity — in Michael's opinion — it had but just begun! Morality! What was it — who had it, and what did they do with it? How would he have answered those questions himself? Who could answer them, nowadays, by rote or rule? Not he, or Fleur! They had been identified with the Inquisition, and what was their position, now? False, if not odious! He passed into the House. But, try as he would, he could not fix his attention on the Purity of Food, and passed out again. With a curious longing for his father, he walked rapidly down Whitehall. Drawing blank at 'Snooks" and The Aeroplane, he tried the Parthenaeum as a last resort. Sir Lawrence was in a corner of a forbidden room, reading a life of Lord Palmerston. He looked up at his son.

"Ah! Michael! They don't do justice to old Pam. A man without frills, who worked like a nigger. But we mustn't talk here!" And he pointed to a member who seemed awake. "Shall we take a turn before the old gentleman over there has a fit? The books here are camouflage; it's really a dormitory."

He led the way, with Michael retailing the events of the morning.

"Foskisson?" said Sir Lawrence, entering the Green Park. "He was a nice little chap when I left Winchester. To be professionally in the right is bad for a man's character — counsel, parsons, policemen, they all suffer from it. Judges, High Priests, Arch-Inspectors, aren't so bad — they've suffered from it so long that they've lost consciousness."

"It was a full house," said Michael, glumly, "and the papers have got hold of it."

"They would." And Sir Lawrence pointed to the ornamental water. "These birds," he said, "remind me of China. By the way, I met your friend Desert yesterday at The Aeroplane — he's more interesting now that he's dropped Poetry for the East. Everybody ought to drop something. I'm too old now, but if I'd dropped baronetcy in time, I could have made quite a good contortionist."

"What would you recommend for us in the House?" asked Michael, with a grin.

"Postmanship, my dear — carrying on, you know; a certain importance, large bags, dogs to bark at you, no initiative, and conversation on every door-step. By the way, do you see Desert?"

"I have seen him."

Sir Lawrence screwed up his eyes.

"The providential," he said, "doesn't happen twice."

Michael coloured; he had not suspected his father of such shrewd observation. Sir Lawrence swung his cane.

"Your man Boddick," he said, "has persuaded some of his hens to lay; he's giving us quite good eggs."

Michael admired his reticence. But somehow that unexpected slanting allusion to a past domestic crisis roused the feeling that for so long now had been curled like a sleepy snake in his chest, that another crisis was brewing and must soon be faced.

"Coming along for tea, sir? Kit had tummy-ache this morning. How's your last book doing? Does old Danby advertise it properly?"

"No," said Sir Lawrence, "no; he's keeping his head wonderfully; the book is almost dead."

"I'm glad I dropped HIM, anyway," said Michael, with emphasis. "I suppose, sir, you haven't a tip to give us, now this case is over?"

Sir Lawrence gazed at a bird with a long red bill.

"When victorious," he said, at last, "lie doggo. The triumphs of morality are apt to recoil on those who achieve them."

"That's what I feel, sir. Heaven knows *I* didn't want to achieve one. My father-inlaw says my hitting MacGown on the boko really brought it into Court."

Sir Lawrence whinnied.

"The tax on luxuries. It gets you everywhere. I don't think I will come along, Michael — Old Forsyte's probably there. Your mother has an excellent recipe for child's tummyache; you almost lived on it at one time. I'll telephone it from Mount Street. Good-bye!"

Michael looked after that thin and sprightly figure moving North. Had he troubles of his own? If so, he disguised them wonderfully. Good old Bart! And he turned towards South Square.

Soames was just leaving.

"She's excited," he said, on the door-step. "It's the reaction. Give her a Seidlitz powder tonight. Be careful, too; I shouldn't talk about politics."

Michael went in. Fleur was at the open window of the drawing-room.

"Oh! here you are!" she said. "Kit's all right again. Take me to the Cafe Royal to-night, Michael, and if there's anything funny anywhere, for goodness' sake, let's see it. I'm sick of feeling solemn. Oh! And, by the way, Francis Wilmot's coming in to say good-bye. I've had a note. He says he's all right again."

At the window by her side, Michael sniffed the unaccountable scent of grass. There was a South-West wind, and slanting from over the housetops, sunlight was sprinkling the soil, the buds, the branches. A blackbird sang; a piano-organ round a corner was playing 'Rigoletto.' Against his own, her shoulder was soft, and to his lips her cheek was warm and creamy . . . .

When Francis Wilmot left them that evening after dinner at the Cafe Royal, Fleur said to Michael:

"Poor Francis! Did you ever see any one so changed? He might be thirty. I'm glad he's going home to his river and his darkies. What are live oaks? Well! Are we going anywhere?"

Michael cloaked her shoulders.

"'Great Itch,' I think; there's no other scream so certain."

After their scream they came out into a mild night. High up in red and green the bright signs fled along the air: 'Tomber's Tires for Speed and Safety,' 'Milkoh Makes Mothers Merry.' Through Trafalgar Square they went and down Whitehall, all moonlight and Portland stone.

"The night's unreal," said Fleur. "'Fantoches'!"

Michael caught her waist.

"Don't. Suppose some Member saw you!"

"He'd only sympathise. How nice and solid you feel!"

"No! Fantoches have no substance."

"Then give me shadow."

"The substance is in Bethnal Green."

Michael dropped his arm.

"That's a strange thought."

"I have intuitions, Michael."

"Because I can admire a good woman, can I not love you?"

"*I* shall never be 'good'; it isn't in me."

"Whatever you are's enough for me."

"Prettily said. The Square looks jolly, tonight! Open the doll's house."

The hall was dark, with just a glimmer coming through the fanlight. Michael took off her cloak and knelt down. He felt her fingers stir his hair; real fingers, and real all this within his arms; only the soul elusive. Soul?

"Fantoches!" came her voice, soft and mocking. "And so to bed!"

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CHAPTER X

ROUT AT MRS. MAGUSSIE'S

There are routs social, political, propagandic; and routs like Mrs. Magussie's. In one of Anglo-American birth, inexhaustible wealth, unimpeachable widowhood, and catholic taste, the word hostess had found its highest expression. People might die, marry, and be born with impunity so long as they met, preferably in her house, one of the largest in Mayfair. If she called in a doctor, it was to meet another doctor; if she went to church, it was to get Canon Forant to meet Dean Kimble at lunch afterwards. Her cards of invitation had the words: "To meet" printed on them; and she never put "me." She was selfless. Once in a way she had a real rout, because once in a way a personality was available, whose name everybody, from poets to prelates, must know. In her intimate belief people loved to meet anybody sufficiently distinguished; and this was where she succeeded, because almost without exception they did. Her two husbands had 'passed on,' having met in their time nearly everybody. They had both been distinguished, and had first met in her house; and she would never have a third, for Society was losing its landmarks, and she was too occupied. People were inclined to smile at mention of Bella Magussie, and yet, how do without one who performed the function of cement? Without her, bishops could not place their cheeks by the jowls of ballet-girls, or Home Secretaries be fertilised by disorderly dramatists. Except in her house, the diggers-up of old civilisations in Beluchistan never encountered the levellers of modern civilisation in London. Nor was there any chance for lights of the Palace to meet those lights of the Halls — Madame Nemesia and Top Nobby. Nowhere else could a Russian dancer go in to supper with Sir Walter Peddel, M. D., F. R. S. T. R., P. M. V. S., 'R. I. P.,' as Michael would add. Even a bowler with the finest collection of ducks' eggs in first-class cricket was not without a chance of wringing the hand of the great Indian economist Sir Banerjee Bath Babore. Mrs. Magussie's, in fine, was a house of chief consequence; and her long face, as of the guardian of some first principle, moving above the waters of celebrity, was wrinkled in a great cause. To meet or not to meet? She had answered the question for good and all.

The "meetee" as Michael always called it for her opening rout in 1925 was the great Italian violinist Luigi Sporza, who had just completed his remarkable tour of the world, having in half the time played more often than any two previous musicians. The prodigious feat had been noted in the Press of all countries with every circumstance — the five violins he had tired out, the invitation he had received to preside over a South American Republic, the special steamer he had chartered to keep an engagement in North America, and his fainting fit in Moscow after the Beethoven and Brahms concertos, the Bach chaconne, and seventeen encores. During the lingering year of his great effort, his fame had been established. As an artist he had been known to a few, as an athlete he was now known to all.

Michael and Fleur, passing up the centre stairway, saw a man 'not 'arf like a bull'— Michael muttered — whose hand people were seizing, one after the other, to move away with a look of pain.

"Only Italy can produce men like that," Michael said in Fleur's ear. "Give him the go-by. He'll hurt you."

But Fleur moved forward.

"Made of sterner stuff," murmured Michael. It was not the part of his beloved to miss the hand of celebrity, however horny! No portion of her charming face quivered as the great athlete's grip closed on hers, and his eyes, like those of a tired minotaur, traversed her gracefulness with a gleam of interest.

'Hulking brute!' thought Michael, disentangling his own grasp, and drifting with her over shining space. Since yesterday's ordeal and its subsequent spring-running, he had kept his unacceptable misgivings to himself; he did not even know whether, at this rout, she was deliberately putting their position to the test, or merely, without forethought, indulging her liking to be in the swim. And what a swim! In that great pillared salon, Members of Parliament, poets, musicians, very dry in the smile, as who should say: 'I could have done it better,' or 'Imagine doing that!' peers, physicians, dancers, painters, Labour Leaders, cricketers, lawyers, critics, ladies of fashion, and ladies who 'couldn't bear it'— every mortal person that Michael knew or didn't know, seemed present. He watched Fleur's eyes quartering them, busy as bees beneath the white lids he had kissed last night. He envied her that social curiosity; to live in London without it was like being at the sea without bathing. She was quietly — he could tell — making up her mind whom she wanted to speak to among those she knew, and whom, among those she didn't yet know, she wanted to speak to her. 'I hope to God she's not in for a snubbing,' he thought, and as soon as she was engaged in talk, he slipped towards a pillar. A small voice behind him said: “Well, young Mont!” Mr. Blythe, looking like a Dover sole above Kew Bridge, was squeezed against the same pillar, his eyes goggling timorously above his beard.

“Stick to me!” he said. “These bees are too bee busy.”

“Were you in Court yesterday?” asked Michael.

“No; one read about it. You did well.”

“She did better.”

“H’m!” said Mr. Blythe. “By the way, The Evening Sun was at us again this afternoon. They compared us to kittens playing with their tails. It’s time for your second barrel, Mont.”

“I thought — on the agricultural estimates.”

“Good! Governmental purchase and control of wheat. Stress use of the present machinery. No more officials than are absolutely necessary.”

“Blythe,” said Michael suddenly, “where were you born?”

“Lincolnshire.”

“You’re English, then?”

“Pure,” said Mr. Blythe.

“So am I; so’s old Foggart — I looked him up in the stud-book. It’s lucky, because we shall certainly be assailed for lack of patriotism.”

“We ARE,” said Mr. Blythe. “‘People who can see no good in their own country. . . . Birds who foul their own nest . . . . Gentry never happy unless running England down in the eyes of the world. . . . Calamity-mongers. . . . Pessimists . . . .’ You don’t mind that sort of gup, I hope?”

“Unfortunately,” said Michael, “I do; it hurts me inside. It’s so damned unjust. I simply can’t bear the idea of England being in a fix.”

Mr. Blythe’s eyes rolled.

“She’s bee well not going to be, if we can help it.”

“If only I amounted to something,” murmured Michael; “but I always feel as if I could creep into one of my back teeth.”

“Have it crowned. What you want is brass, Mont. And talking of brass: There’s your late adversary! SHE’S got brass all right. Look at her!”

Michael saw Marjorie Ferrar moving away from the great Italian, in not too much of a sea-green gown, with her red-gold head held high. She came to a stand a small room’s length from Fleur, and swept her eyes this way and that. Evidently she had taken up that position in deliberate challenge.

“I must go to Fleur.”

“So must I,” said Mr. Blythe, and Michael gave him a grateful look.

And now it would have been so interesting to one less interested than Michael. The long, the tapering nose of Society could be seen to twitch, move delicately upwards, and like the trunk of some wild elephant scenting man, writhe and snout this way and that, catching the whiff of sensation. Lips were smiling and moving closer to ears; eyes turning from that standing figure to the other; little reflective frowns appeared on foreheads, as if, beneath cropped and scented scalps, brains were trying to make choice. And Marjorie Ferrar stood smiling and composed; and Fleur talked and twisted the flower in her hand; and both went on looking their best. So began a battle without sign of war declared, without even seeming recognition of each other’s presence. Mr. Blythe, indeed, stood pat between the two of them. Bulky and tall, he was an effective screen. But Michael, on the other side of her, could see and grimly follow. The Nose was taking time to apprehend the full of the aroma; the Brain to make its choice. Tide seemed at balance, not moving in or out. And then, with the slow implacability of tides, the water moved away from Fleur and lapped round her rival. Michael chattered, Mr. Blythe goggled, using the impersonal pronoun with a sort of passion; Fleur smiled, talked, twisted the flower. And, over there, Marjorie Ferrar seemed to hold a little Court. Did people admire, commiserate, approve of, or sympathise with her? Or did they disapprove of himself and Fleur? Or was it just that the ‘Pet of the Panjoys’ was always the more sensational figure? Michael watched Fleur growing paler, her smile more nervous, the twitching of the flower spasmodic. And he dared not suggest going; for she would see in it an admission of defeat. But on the faces, turned their way, the expression became more and more informative. Sir James Foskisson had done his job too well; he had slavered his clients with his own self-righteousness. Better the confessed libertine than those who brought her to judgment! And Michael thought: 'Dashed natural, after all! Why didn't the fellow take my tip, and let us pay and look pleasant.'

And just then close to the great Italian he caught sight of a tall young man with his hair brushed back, who was looking at his fingers. By George! It was Bertie Curfew! And there, behind him, waiting for his turn 'to meet,' who but MacGown himself! The humour of the gods had run amok! Head in air, soothing his mangled fingers, Bertie Curfew passed them, and strayed into the group around his former flame. Her greeting of him was elaborately casual. But up went the tapering Nose, for here came MacGown! How the fellow had changed — grim, greyish, bitter? The great Italian had met his match for once. And he too, stepped into that throng.

A queer silence was followed by a burst of speech, and then by dissolution. In twos and threes they trickled off, and there were MacGown and his betrothed standing alone. Michael turned to Fleur.

"Let's go."

Silence reigned in their homing cab. He had chattered himself out on the field of battle, and must wait for fresh supplies of camouflage. But he slipped his hand along till it found hers, which did not return his pressure. The card he used to play at times of stress — the eleventh baronet — had failed for the last three months; Fleur seemed of late to resent his introduction as a remedy. He followed her into the dining-room, sore at heart, bewildered in mind. He had never seen her look so pretty as in that oyster-coloured frock, very straight and simply made, with a swing out above the ankles. She sat down at the narrow dining-table, and he seated himself opposite, with the costive feeling of one who cannot find words that will ring true. For social discomfiture he himself didn't care a tinker's curse; but she —!

And, suddenly, she said:

"And you don't mind?"

"For myself — not a bit."

"Yes, you've still got your Foggartism and your Bethnal Green."

"If YOU care, Fleur, I care a lot."

"IF I care!"

"How — exactly?"

"I'd rather not increase your feeling that I'm a snob."

"I never had any such feeling."

"Michael!"

"Hadn't you better say what you mean by the word?"

"You know perfectly well."

"I know that you appreciate having people about you, and like them to think well of you. That isn't being a snob."

"Yes; you're very kind, but you don't admire it."

"I admire you."

"You mean, desire me. You admire Norah Curfew."

"Norah Curfew! For all I care, she might snuff out tomorrow."

And from her face he had the feeling that she believed him.

"If it isn't her, it's what she stands for — all that I'm not."

"I admire a lot in you," said Michael, fervently; "your intelligence, your flair; I admire you with Kit and your father; your pluck; and the way you put up with me."

"No, I admire you much more than you admire me. Only, you see, I'm not capable of devotion."

"What about Kit?"

"I'm devoted to myself — that's all."

He reached across the table and touched her hand.

"Morbid, darling."

"No. I see too clearly to be morbid."

She was leaning back, and her throat, very white and round, gleamed in the alabaster-shaded light; little choky movements were occurring there.

"Michael, I want you to take me round the world."

"And leave Kit?"

"He's too young to mind. Besides, my mother would look after him."

If she had got as far as that, this was a deliberate desire!

"But, your father —"

"He's not really old yet, and he'd have Kit."

"When we rise in August, perhaps —"

"No, now."

"It's only five months to wait. We'd have time in the vacation to do a lot of travelling."

Fleur looked straight at him.

"I knew you cared more for Foggartism now than for me."

"Be reasonable, Fleur."

"For five months — with the feeling I've got here!" she put her hand to her breast. "I've had six months of it already. You don't realise, I suppose, that I'm down and out?"

"But, Fleur, it's all so —"

"Yes, it's always petty to mind being a dead failure, isn't it?"

"But, my child —"

"Oh! If you can't feel it —"

"I can — I felt wild this evening. But all you've got to do is to let them see that you don't care; and they'll come buzzing round again like flies. It would be running away, Fleur."

"No," said Fleur, coldly, "it's not that — I don't try twice for the same prize. Very well, I'll stay and be laughed at."

Michael got up.

"I know you don't think there's anything to my job. But there is, Fleur, and I've put my hand to it. Oh! don't look like that. Dash it! This is dreadful!"

"I suppose I could go by myself. That would be more thrilling."

"Absurd! Of course you couldn't! You're seeing blue to-night, old thing. It'll all seem different tomorrow."

"To-morrow and tomorrow! No, Michael, mortification has set in, my funeral can take place any day you like!"

Michael's hands went up. She meant what she was saying! To realise, he must remember how much store she had set on her powers as hostess; how she had worked for her collection and shone among it! Her house of cards all pulled about her ears! Cruel! But would going round the world help her? Yes! Her instinct was quite right. He had been round the world himself, nothing else would change her values in quite that way; nothing else would so guarantee oblivion in others and herself! Lippinghall, her father's, the sea for the five months till vacation came — they wouldn't meet her case! She needed what would give her back importance. And yet, how could he go until the vacation? Foggartism — that lean and lonely plant — unwatered and without its only gardener, would wither to its roots, if, indeed, it had any. There was some movement in it now, interest here and there — this Member and that was pecking at it. Private efforts in the same direction were gathering way. And time was going on — Big Ben had called no truce; unemployment swelling, trade dawdling, industrial trouble brewing — brewing, hope losing patience! And what would old Blythe say to his desertion now?

"Give me a week," he muttered. "It's not easy. I must think it over."

◆

CHAPTER X

THE NEW LEAF

When MacGown came up to her, Marjorie Ferrar thought: 'Does he know about Bertie?' Fresh from her triumph over 'that little snob,' fluttered by the sudden appearance of her past, and confronted with her present, she was not in complete possession of her head. When they had moved away into an empty side room, she faced him.

"Well, Alec, nothing's changed. I still have a past as lurid as it was yesterday. I'm extremely sorry I ever kept it from you. But I did practically tell you, several times; only you wouldn't take it."

"Because it was hell to me. Tell me everything, Marjorie!"

"You want to revel in it?"

"Tell me everything, and I'll marry you still."

She shook her head. "Marry! Oh! no! I don't go out of my depth any more. It was absurd anyway. I never loved you, Alec."

"Then you loved that — you still —"

"My dear Alec, enough!"

He put his hands to his head, and swayed. And she was touched by genuine compassion.

"I'm awfully sorry, I really am. You've got to cut me out; that's all."

She had turned to leave him, but the misery in his face stopped her. She had not quite realised.

He was burnt up! He was —! And she said quickly:

"Marry you I won't; but I'd like to pay up, if I could —"

He looked at her.

Quivering all over from that look, she shrugged her shoulders, and walked away. Men of an old fashion! Her own fault for stepping outside the charmed circle that took nothing too seriously. She walked over the shining floor, conscious of many eyes, slipped past her hostess, and soon was in a cab.

She lay awake, thinking. Even without announcement, the return of presents would set London by the ears and bring on her again an avalanche of bills. Five thousand pounds! She got up and rummaged out the list, duplicate of that which Alec had. He might still want to pay them! After all, it was he who had spilled the ink by making her go into Court! But then his eyes came haunting her. Out of the question! And, shivering a little, she got back into bed. Perhaps she would have a brain-wave in the morning. She had so many in the night, that she could not sleep. Moscow with Bertie Curfew? The stage? America and the 'movies'? All three? She slept at last, and woke languid and pale. With her letters was one from Shropshire House.

"DEAR MARJORIE,

"If you've nothing better to do, I should like to see you this morning.

"Affectionately,

"SHROPSHIRE."

What now? She looked at herself in the glass, and decided that she MUST make up a little. At eleven o'clock she was at Shropshire House. The marquess was in his workroom at the top, among a small forest of contraptions. With coat off, he was peering through a magnifying-glass at what looked like nothing.

"Sit down, Marjorie," he said; "I'll have done in a minute."

Except the floor, there seemed nowhere to sit, so she remained standing.

"I thought so," said the marquess; "the Italians are wrong."

He put the spy-glass down, ran his hand through his silvery hair, and drew his ruffled beard into a peak. Then, taking an eyebrow between finger and thumb, he gave it an upward twist, and scratched himself behind one ear.

"They're wrong; there's no reaction whatever."

Turning towards his granddaughter, he screwed up his eyes till they were bright as pins. “You’ve never been up here before. Sit in the window.”

She seated herself on a broad window-ledge covering some sort of battery, with her back to the light.

“So you brought that case, Marjorie?”

“I had to.”

“Now, why?” He was standing with his head a little to one side, his cheeks very pink, and his eyes very shrewd. And she thought: ‘After all, I’m his granddaughter. I’ll plunge.’

“Common honesty, if you want to know.”

The marquess pouted, as if trying to understand the words.

“I read your evidence,” he said, “if you mean that.”

“No. I meant that I wanted to find out where I stood.”

“And did you?”

“Very much so.”

“Are you still going to be married?”

Really, he was a spry old boy!

“No.”

“Whose doing? Yours or his?”

“He still says he’ll marry me if I tell him everything. But I don’t choose to.”

The marquess moved two steps, placed his foot on a box, and assumed his favourite attitude. He had a red silk tie this morning which floated loose; his tweed trousers were of a blue-green, his shirt of a green-blue. He looked wonderfully bright.

“Is there much to tell?”

“A good deal.”

“Well, Marjorie, you know what I said to you.”

“Yes, Grandfather, but I don’t quite see it. *I* don’t want to stand for anything.”

“Ah! you’re an exception in our class — luckily! But it’s the exceptions that do the harm.”

“If people took one as any better than themselves, perhaps. But they don’t nowadays.”

“Not quite honest, that,” interrupted the marquess; “what about the feeling in your bones?”

She smiled.

“It’s good to mortify oneself, Grandfather.”

“By having a better time than you ought, um? So your marriage is off?”

“Very much so.”

“Are you in debt?”

“Yes.”

“How much do you owe?”

Marjorie Ferrar hesitated. Should she compromise, or blurt it out?

“No heel-taps, Marjorie.”

“Well, then, five thousand about.”

The old peer screwed up his lips, and a melancholy little whistle escaped.

“A good deal of it, of course, is due to my engagement.”

“Your father won a race the other day, I see.”

The old boy knew everything!

“Yes; but I believe it’s all gone.”

“It would be,” said the marquess. “What are you going to do now?”

She had a strong desire to answer: “What are you?” but restrained it, and said:

“I thought of going on the stage.”

“Well, I suppose that might be suitable. Can you act?”

“I’m not a Duse.”

“Duse?” The marquess shook his head. “One must go back to Ristori for really great acting. Duse! Very talented, of course, but always the same. So you don’t choose to marry him now?” He looked at her intently. “That, I think, is right. Have you a list of your debts?”

Marjorie Ferrar rummaged in her vanity bag. “Here it is.”

She could see his nose wrinkling above it, but whether at its scent, or its contents, she could not tell.

“Your grandmother,” he said, “spent about a fifth of what you seem to on about five times the acreage of clothes. You wear nothing nowadays, and yet it costs all this.”

“The less there is, Grandfather, the better it has to be cut, you know.”

“Have you sent your presents back?”

“I’m having them packed.”

“They must all go,” said the marquess. “Keep nothing he or any one else gave you.”

“Of course not.”

“To frank you,” he said, suddenly, “I should have to sell the Gainsborough.”

“Oh, no!”

Gainsborough’s picture of his own grandmother as a little girl — that beautiful thing. She stretched out her hand for the list. Still holding it, he put his foot to the ground, and stood peering at her with his bright, intent old eyes.

“The question is, Marjorie, how far it’s possible to strike a bargain with you. Have you a ‘word’ to keep?”

She felt the blood mounting in her cheeks.

“I think so. It depends on what I’ve got to promise. But, Grandfather, I don’t WANT you to sell the Gainsborough.”

“Unfortunately,” said the marquess, “without doing your uncle Dangerfield in the eye, I’ve nothing else. It’s been my fault, I suppose, for having had expensive children. Other people don’t seem to have had them to the same degree.”

She stifled a smile.

“Times are hard,” went on the marquess. “Land costs money, collieries cost money, Shropshire House costs money; and where’s the money? I’ve got an invention here that ought to make my fortune, but nobody will look at it.”

The poor old boy — at his age! She said with a sigh:

“I really didn’t mean to bother you with this, Grandfather. I’ll manage somehow.”

The old peer took several somewhat hampered steps, and she noticed that his red slippers were heelless. He halted, a wonderfully bright spot among the contraptions.

“To come back to what we were saying, Marjorie. If your idea of life is simply to have a good time, how can you promise anything?”

“What do you want me to promise?”

He came and stood before her again, short and a little bent.

“You look as if you had stuff in you, too, with your hair. Do you really think you could earn your living?”

“I believe I can; I know a lot of people.”

“If I clear you, will you give me your word to pay ready money in future? Now don’t say ‘Yes,’ and go out and order yourself a lot of fallals. I want the word of a lady, if you understand what that implies.”

She stood up.

“I suppose you’ve every right to say that. But I don’t want you to clear me if you have to sell the Gainsborough.”

“You must leave that to me. I might manage, perhaps, to scrape it up without. About that promise?”

“Yes; I promise that.”

“Meaning to keep it?”

“Meaning to keep it.”

“Well, that’s something.”

“Anything else, Grandfather?”

“I should have liked to ask you not to cheapen our name any more, but I suppose that would be putting the clock back. The spirit of the age is against me.”

Turning from his face, she stood looking out of the window. The spirit of the age! It was all very well, but he didn’t understand what it was. Cheapen? Why! she had RAISED the price of the family name; hoicked it out of a dusty cupboard, and made of it current coin. People sat up when they read of her. Did they sit up when they read of grandfather? But he would never see that! And she murmured:

“All right, dear, I’ll be careful. I think I shall go to America.”

His eyes twinkled.

“And start a fashion of marrying American husbands? It’s not yet been done, I believe. Get one who’s interested in electricity, and bring him over. There are great things for an American to do here. Well, I’ll keep this list and work it off somehow. Just one thing, Marjorie: I’m eighty, and you’re — what are you — twenty-five? Don’t get through life so fast — you’ll be dreadfully bored by the time you’re fifty, and there’s no greater bore than a bored person. Good-bye!” He held out his hand.

She took a long breath. Free!

And, seizing his hand, she put it to her lips. Oh! He was gazing at it — oh! Had her lips come off? And she hurried out. The old boy! He was a darling to have kept that list! A new leaf! She would go at once to Bertie Curfew and get him to turn it over for her! The expression in his eye last night!

❦

CHAPTER XI

OVER THE WINDMILL

During his period of indecision Michael struck no attitudes, and used practically no words; the thing was too serious. Perhaps Kit would change Fleur's mood, or she would see other disadvantages, such as her father. The complete cessation, however, of any social behaviour on her part — no invitation issued, or received, no function attended, or even discussed, during that rather terrible week, proved that the iron had really seared her spirit. She was not sulky, but she was mum and listless. And she was always watching him, with a wistful expression on her face, and now and then a resentful look, as if she had made up her mind that he was going to refuse. He could consult no one, too, for to any who had not lived through this long episode, Fleur's attitude would seem incomprehensible, even ridiculous. He could not give her away; could not even go to old Blythe, until he had decided. Complicating his mental conflict was the habitual doubt whether he was really essential to Foggartism. If only his head would swell! He had not even the comfort of feeling that a sturdy negative would impress Fleur; she thought his job a stunt, useful to make him conspicuous, but of no real importance to the country. She had the political cynicism of the woman in the street; only what threatened property or Kit would really ruffle her! He knew that his dilemma was comic. The future of England against the present of a young woman socially snubbed! But, after all, only Sir James Foggart and old Blythe so far seriously connected Foggartism with the future of England; and if, now, he went off round the world, even they would lose their faith.

On the last morning of that week, Michael, still in doubt, crossed Westminster Bridge and sought the heart of the Surrey side. It was unfamiliar, and he walked with interest. Here, he remembered, the Bickets had lived; the Bickets who had failed, and apparently were failing in Australia, too. Street after mean street! Breeding-ground of Bickets! Catch them early, catch them often, catch them before they were Bickets, spoiled for the land; make them men and women of property, give them air and give them sun — the most decent folk in the world, give them a chance! Ugly houses, ugly shops, ugly pubs! No, that wouldn't do! Keep Beauty out of it; Beauty never went down in 'the House'! No sentiment went down! At least, only such as was understood —'British stock,' 'Patriotism,' 'Empire,' 'Moral Fibre.' Thews and productive power — stick to the cliches! He stood listening outside a school to the dull hum of education. The English breed with its pluck and its sense of humour and its patience, all mewed-up in mean streets!

He had a sudden longing for the country. His motor-cycle! Since taking his seat in Parliament he had not been on a machine so inclined to bump his dignity. But he would have it out now, and go for a run — it might shake him into a decision!

Fleur was not in, and no lunch ordered. So he ate some ham, and by two o'clock had started.

With spit and bluster he ran out along the road past Chiswick, Slough, and Maidenhead; crossed the river and sputtered towards Reading. At Caversham he crossed again, and ran on to Pangbourne. By the towing path he tipped his machine into some bushes and sat down to smoke a pipe. Quite windless! The river between the bare poplars had a grey, untroubled look; the catkins were forming on the willows. He plucked a twig, and stirred it round the bowl of his pipe before pressing in tobacco. The shaking had done him good; his mind was working freely. The war! One had no hesitations then; but then — one had no Fleur. Besides, that was a clear, a simple issue. But now, beyond this 'to stay or not to stay,' Michael seemed seeing the future of his married life. The decision that he made would affect what might last another fifty years. To put your hand to the plough, and at the first request to take it off again! You might be ploughing crooked, and by twilight; but better plough by dim light than no light; a crooked furrow than none at all! Foggartism was the best course he could see, and he must stick to it! The future of England! A blackbird, close by, chuckled. Quite so! But, as old Blythe said, one must stand up to laughter! Oh! Surely in the long run Fleur would see that he couldn't play fast and loose; see that if she wanted him to remain in Parliament — and she did — he must hang on to the line he had taken, however it amused the blackbirds. She wouldn't like him to sink to the nonentity of a turntail. For after all she was his wife, and with his self-respect her own was bound up.

He watched the smoke from his pipe, and the low grey clouds, the white-faced Herefords grazing beyond the river, and a man fishing with a worm. He took up the twig and twirled it, admiring the yellowish-grey velvet of its budding catkins. He felt quiet in the heart, at last, but very sorry. How make up to Fleur? Beside this river, not two miles away, he had courted — queer word — if not won her! And now they had come to this snag. Well, it was up to her now, whether or no they should come to grief on it. And it seemed to him, suddenly, that he would like to tell Old Forsyte . . . .

When he heard the splutter of Michael's motorcycle, Soames was engaged in hanging the Fred Walker he had bought at the emporium next to Messrs. Settlewhite and Stark, memorialising his freedom from the worry of that case, and soothing his itch for the British School. Fred Walker! The fellow was old-fashioned; he and Mason had been succeeded by a dozen movements. But — like old fiddles, with the same agreeable glow — there they were, very good curiosities such as would always command a price.

Having detached a Courbet, early and about ripe, he was standing in his shirt-sleeves, with a coil of wire in his hand, when Michael entered.

"Where have you sprung from?" he said, surprised.

"I happened to be passing, sir, on my old bike. I see you've kept your word about the English School."

Soames attached the wire.

"I shan't be happy," he said, "till I've got an old Crome — best of the English landscapists."

"Awfully rare, isn't he, old Crome?"

"Yes, that's why I want him."

The smile on Michael's face, as if he were thinking: 'You mean that's why you consider him the best,' was lost on Soames giving the wire a final twist.

"I haven't seen your pictures for a long time, sir. Can I look round?"

Observing him sidelong, Soames remembered his appearance there one summer Sunday, after he had first seen Fleur in that Gallery off Cork Street. Only four years? It seemed an age! The young fellow had worn better than one had hoped; looked a good deal older, too, less flighty; an amiable chap, considering his upbringing, and that war! And suddenly he perceived that Michael was engaged in observing him. Wanted something, no doubt — wouldn't have come down for nothing! He tried to remember when anybody had come to see him without wanting something; but could not. It was natural!

"Are you looking for a picture to go with that Fragonard?" he said. "There's a Chardin in the corner."

"No, no, sir; you've been much too generous to us already."

Generous! How could one be generous to one's only daughter?

"How is Fleur?"

"I wanted to tell you about her. She's feeling awfully restless."

Soames looked out of the window. The Spring was late!

"She oughtn't to be, with that case out of the way."

"That's just it, sir."

Soames gimleted the young man's face. "I don't follow you."

"We're being cold-shouldered."

"How? You won."

"Yes, but you see, people resent moral superiority."

"What's that? Who —?" Moral superiority — he resented it himself!

"Foskisson, you know; we're tarred with his brush. I told you I was afraid of it. It's the being laughed at Fleur feels so bitterly."

"Laughed at? Who has the impudence —?"

"To attack modern morality was a good stunt, sir, with the judge and the jury, and any one professionally pompous; but it makes one ridiculous nowadays in Society, you know, when everybody prides himself on lack of prejudice."

"Society!"

"Yes, sir; but it's what we live in. *I* don't mind, got used to it over Foggartism; but Fleur's miserable. It's natural, if you think of it — Society's her game."

"She ought to have more strength of mind," said Soames. But he was gravely perturbed. First she'd been looked on as a snob, and now there was this!

"What with that German actor hanging himself at Lippinghall," Michael went on, "and my Foggartism, and this Ferrar rumpus, our pitch is badly queered. We've had a wretched week of it since the case. Fleur feels so out of her plate, that she wants me to take her round the world."

A bomb bursting on the dove-cote down there could not have been more startling. Round the world! He heard Michael murmuring on:

"She's quite right, too. It might be the very best thing for her; but I simply can't leave my job until the long vacation. I've taken up this thing, and I must stick to it while Parliament's sitting."

Sitting! As if it were a hen, addling its precious eggs! Round the world!

But Michael ran on:

"It's only today I've quite decided. I should feel like a deserter, and that wouldn't be good for either of us in the long run. But she doesn't know yet."

For Soames the dove-cote was solidifying again, now that he knew Michael was not going to take her away for goodness knew how long!

"Round the world!" he said. "Why not — er — Pontresina?"

"I think," answered Michael, slowly, like a doctor diagnosing, "that she wants something dramatic. Round the world at twenty-three! She feels somehow that she's lost caste."

"How can she think of leaving that little chap?"

"Yes, that shows it's pretty desperate with her. I wish to goodness I COULD go."

Soames stared. The young fellow wasn't expecting him to do anything about it, was he? Round the world? A crazy notion!

"I must see her," he said. "Can you leave that thing of yours in the garage and come up with me in the car? I'll be ready in twenty minutes. You'll find tea going down-stairs."

Left alone with the Fred Walker still unhung, Soames gazed at his pictures. He saw them with an added clarity, a more penetrating glance, a sort of ache in his heart, as if — Well! A good lot they were, better than he had thought, of late! SHE had gone in for collecting people! And now she'd lost her collection! Poor little thing! All nonsense, of course — as if there were any satisfaction in people! Suppose he took her up that Chardin? It was a good Chardin. Dumetrius had done him over the price, but not too much. And, before Chardin was finished with, he would do Dumetrius. Still — if it would give her any pleasure! He unhooked the picture, and, carrying it under his arm, went down-stairs.

Beyond certain allusions to the characteristics of the eleventh baronet, and the regrettable tendencies of the police to compel slow travelling over the new cut constructed to speed up traffic, little was said in the car. They arrived in South Square about six o'clock. Fleur had not been in since lunch; and they sat down uneasily to wait for her. The Dandie, having descended to look for strange legs, had almost immediately ascended again, and the house was very quiet. Michael was continually looking at his watch.

"Where do you think she's got to?" said Soames, at last.

"Haven't an idea, sir; that's the worst of London, it swallows people up."

He had begun to fidget; Soames, who also wanted to fidget, was thinking of saying: "Don't!" when from the window Michael cried:

"Here she is!" and went quickly to the door.

Soames sat on, with the Chardin resting against his chair.

They were a long time out there! Minute after minute passed, and still they did not come.

At last Michael reappeared. He looked exceedingly grave.

"She's in her little room up-stairs, sir. I'm afraid my decision has upset her awfully. Perhaps you wouldn't mind going up."

Soames grasped the Chardin.

"Let's see, that's the first door on the left, isn't it?" He mounted slowly, his mind blank, and without waiting for her to answer his mild knock, went in.

Fleur was sitting at the satinwood bureau, with her face buried on her arms. Her hair, again in its more natural 'bob,' gleamed lustrously under the light. She seemed unconscious of his entry. This sight of private life affected Soames, unaccustomed to give or receive undefended glimpses of self, and he stood, uncertain. Had he the right to surprise her, with her ears muffled like that, and her feelings all upset? He would have gone out and come in again, but he was too concerned. And, moving to her side, he put his finger on her shoulder, and said:

"Tired, my child?"

Her face came round — queer, creased, not like her face; and Soames spoke the phrase of her childhood:

"See what I've brought you!"

He raised the Chardin; she gave it just a glance, and he felt hurt. After all, it was worth some hundreds of pounds! Very pale, she had crossed her arms on her chest, as if shutting herself up. He recognised the symptom. A spiritual crisis! The sort of thing his whole life had been passed in regarding as extravagant; like a case of appendicitis that will not wait decently.

"Michael," he said, "tells me you want him to take you round the world."

"Well, he can't; so that ends it."

"If she had said: 'Yes, and why can't he?' Soames would have joined the opposition automatically. But her words roused his natural perversity. Here she was, and here was her heart's desire — and she wasn't getting it! He put the Chardin down, and took a walk over the soft carpet.

"Tell me," he said, coming to a halt, "where do you feel it exactly?"

Fleur laughed: "In my head, and my eyes, and my ears, and my heart."

"What business," muttered Soames, "have they to look down their confounded noses!" And he set off again across the room. All the modern jackanapes whom from time to time he had been unable to avoid in her house, seemed to have come sniggering round him with lifted eyebrows, like a set of ghosts. The longing to put them in their places — a shallow lot — possessed him at that moment to the exclusion of a greater sanity.

"I— I don't see how *I* can take you," he said, and stopped short.

What was that he was saying? Who had asked him to take her? Her eyes, widely open, were fixed on him.

"But of course not, Dad!"

Of course not! He didn't know about that!

"I shall get used to being laughed at, in time." Soames growled.

"I don't see why you should," he said. "I suppose people do go round the world."

Fleur's pallor had gone, now.

"But not you, dear; why, it would bore you stiff! It's very sweet of you, even to think of it; but of course I couldn't let you — at your age!"

"At my age?" said Soames. "I'm not so very old."

"No, no, Dad; I'll just dree my weird."

Soames took another walk, without a sound. Dree her weird, indeed!

"I won't have it," he ejaculated; "if people can't behave to you, I— I'll show them!"

She had got up, and was breathing deeply, with her lips parted, and her cheeks very flushed. So she had stood, before her first party, holding out her frock for him to see.

"We'll go," he said, gruffly. "Don't make a fuss! That's settled."

Her arms were round his neck; his nose felt wet. What nonsense! as if —! . . .

He stood unbuttoning his braces that night in the most peculiar state of mind. Going round the world — was he? Preposterous! It had knocked that young fellow over anyway — he was to join them in August wherever they were by that time! Good Lord! It might be China! The thing was fantastic; and Fleur behaving like a kitten! The words of a comic ditty, sung by a clergyman, in his boyhood, kept up a tattoo within him:

> "I see Jerusalem and Madagascar,

And North and South Amerikee . . . .”

Yes! Indeed! His affairs were in apple-pie order, luckily! There was nothing to do, in Timothy’s or Winifred’s Trusts — the only two he had on his hands now; but how things would get on without him, he couldn’t tell! As to Annette! She wouldn’t be sorry, he supposed. There was no one else to care, except Winifred, a little. It was, rather, an intangible presence that troubled his thoughts, about to forsake it for months on end! Still, the cliffs of Dover would be standing, he supposed, and the river still running past his lawn, when he came back, if he ever came back! You picked up all sorts of things out there — microbes, insects, snakes — never knew what you’d run into! Pretty business, steering Fleur clear of all that. And the sightseeing he would have to do! For SHE wouldn’t miss anything! Trust her! Going round among a lot of people with their mouths open — he couldn’t stand that; but he would have to! H’m! A relief when that young fellow could join them. And yet — to have her to himself; he hadn’t, for a long time now. But she would pick up with everybody, of course. He would have to make himself agreable to Tom, Dick, and Harry. A look at Egypt, then to India, and across to China and Japan, and back through that great sprawling America — God’s own country, didn’t they call it! She had it all mapped out. Thank goodness, no question of Russia! She hadn’t even proposed that — it was all to pieces now, they said! Communism! Who knew what would happen at home before they got back? It seemed to Soames as if England, too, must all go to pieces, if he left it. Well, he’d said he would take her! And she had cried over it. Phew! He threw the window up, and in the Jaeger dressing-gown kept there for stray occasions, leaned into the mild air. No Westminster Square did he seem to see out there, but his own river and its poplars, with the full moon behind them, a bright witness — the quiet beauty he had never put into words, the green tranquility he had felt for thirty years, and only permitted to seep into the back of his being. He would miss it — the scents, the sighs of the river under the wind, the chuckle down at the weir, the stars. They had stars out there, of course, but not English stars. And the grass — those great places had no grass, he believed! The blossom, too, was late this year — no blossom before they left! Well, the milk was spilled! And that reminded him: The dairyman would be certain to let the cows go out of milk — he was a ‘natural,’ that chap! He would have to warn Annette. Women never seemed to understand that a cow didn’t go on giving milk for ever, without being attended to. If he only had a man to rely on in the country, like old Gradman in Town! H’m! Old Gradman’s eyes would drop out when he heard this news! Bit of old England there; and wouldn’t be left long, now! It would be queer to come back and find old Gradman gone. One — Two — Three — Eleven! That clock! It had kept him awake before now; still — it was a fine old clock! That young fellow was to go on sitting under it. And was there anything in the notions that kept him sitting there, or were they just talk? Well, he was right to stick to his guns, anyway. But five months away from his young wife — great risk in that! ‘Youth’s a stuff’— Old Shakespeare knew the world. Well! Risk, or no risk, there it was! After all, Fleur had a good head; and young Michael had a good heart. Fleur had a good heart, too; he wouldn’t have it said that she hadn’t! She would feel leaving the baby when it came to the point. She didn’t realise, yet. And Soames felt within him the stir of a curious conflict, between hope that, after all, she might give it up, and apprehension lest she should. Funny — that! His habits, his comfort, his possessions . . . and here he was, flinging them all over the windmill! Absurd! And yet —!

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CHAPTER XII

ENVOI

Away from Fleur five months at least!

Soames' astounding conduct had indeed knocked Michael over. And yet, after all, they had come to a crisis in their life together, the more serious because concerned with workaday feelings. Perhaps out there she would become afflicted, like himself, with an enlarged prospect; lose her idea that the world consisted of some five thousand people of advanced tastes, of whom she knew at the outside five hundred. It was she who had pushed him into Parliament, and until he was hoofed therefrom as a failure, their path was surely conjoined along the crest of a large view. In the fortnight before her departure he suffered and kept smiling; wryly thankful that she was behaving 'like a kitten,' as her father called it. Her nerves had been on edge ever since the autumn over that wretched case — what more natural than this reaction? At least she felt for him sufficiently to be prodigal of kisses — great consolation to Michael while it lasted. Once or twice he caught her hanging with wet eyes over the eleventh baronet; once found her with a wet face when he awoke in the morning. These indications were a priceless assurance to him that she meant to come back. For there were moments when possibilities balled into a nightmare. Absurd! She was going with her father, that embodiment of care and prudence! Who would have thought Old Forsyte could uproot himself like this? He, too, was leaving a wife, though Michael saw no signs of it. One didn't know much about Old Forsyte's feelings, except that they centred round his daughter, and that he was continually asking questions about labels and insects. He had bought himself, too, a life-saving waistcoat and one for Fleur. Michael held with him only one important conversation.

"I want you," Soames said, "to keep an eye on my wife, and see she doesn't go getting into a mess with the cows. She'll have her mother with her, but women are so funny. You'll find her first-rate with the baby. How will you be off for money?"

"Perfectly all right, sir."

"Well, if you want some for any good purpose, go to old Gradman in the City; you remember him, perhaps?"

"Yes, and I'm afraid he'll remember me."

"Never mind; he's a faithful old fellow." And Michael heard him sigh. "I'd like you to look in at Green Street, too, now and then. Your aunt-inlaw may feel my being away a little. I'll let you have news of Fleur from time to time — now they've got this wireless she'll want to know about the baby. I'm taking plenty of quinine. Fleur says she's a good sailor. There's nothing like champagne for that, I'm told. And, by the way, you know best, but I shouldn't press your notions too far in Parliament; they're easily bored there, I believe. We'll meet you at Vancouver, at the end of August. She'll be tired of travelling by then. She's looking forward to Egypt and Japan, but I don't know. Seems to me it'll be all travelling."

"Have you plenty of ducks, sir? You'll want them at this time of year in the Red Sea; and I should take a helmet."

"I've got one," said Soames; "they're heavy great things," and, looking suddenly at Michael, he added:

"I shall look after her, and you'll look after yourself, I hope."

Michael understood him.

"Yes, sir. And thank you very much. I think it's most frightfully sporting of you."

"It's to be hoped it'll do her good; and that the little chap won't miss her."

"Not if I can help it."

Soames, who was seated in front of 'The White Monkey,' seemed to go into a trance. At last he stirred in his chair, and said:

"The war's left everything very unsettled. I suppose people believe in something nowadays, but *I* don't know what it is."

Michael felt a fearful interest.

"Do you mind telling me, sir, what you believe in yourself?"

"What was good enough for my fathers is good enough for me. They expect too much now; there's no interest taken in being alive."

“Interest taken in being alive!” The words were singularly comprehensive. Were they the answer to all modern doubt?

The last night, the last kiss came; and the glum journey to the Docks in Soames’ car. Michael alone went to see them off! The gloomy dockside, and the grey river; the bustle with baggage, and the crowded tender. An aching business! Even for her, he almost believed — an aching business. And the long desultory minutes on the ship; the initiation of Soames into its cramped, shining, strangely odoured mysteries. The ghastly smile one had to keep on the lips, the inane jokes one had to make. And then that moment, apart, when she pressed her breast to his and gave him a clinging kiss.

“Good-bye, Michael; it’s not for very long.”

“Good-bye, darling! Take care of yourself. You shall have all the news I can send you, and don’t worry about Kit.”

His teeth were clinched, and her eyes — he saw — were wet! And, then, once more:

“Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!”

Back on the tender, with the strip of grey water opening, spreading, between him and the ship’s side, and that high line of faces above the bulwark — Fleur’s face under the small fawn hat, her waving hand; and, away to the left, seen out of the tail of his eye, Old Forsyte’s face alone — withdrawn so that they might have their parting to themselves — long, chinny, grey-moustached, very motionless; absorbed and lonely, as might be that of some long-distance bird arrived on an unknown shore, and looking back towards the land of its departure. Smaller and smaller they grew, merged in blur, vanished.

For the whole journey back to Westminster, Michael smoked cigarette on cigarette, and read the same sentence over and over in the same journal, and the sentence was:

‘Robbery at Highgate, Cat Burglar gets clear away.’

He went straight into the House of Commons. And all the afternoon sat listening and taking in a few words now and then, of a debate on education. What chance — what earthly chance — had his skyscraping in this place, where they still talked with calm disagreement, as if England were the England of 1906, and where the verdict on him was: ‘Amiable but very foolish young man!’ National unity — national movement! No jolly fear! The country wouldn’t have it! One was battering at a door which everybody said must be opened, but through which nobody could pass. And a long strip of grey water kept spreading between him and the talkers; the face under the fawn hat confused itself with that of the Member for Wasbaston; the face of Old Forsyte above the bulwark rail appeared suddenly between two Labour Leaders; and the lines of faces faded to a blur on a grey river where gulls were flighting.

Going out, he passed a face that had more reality — MacGown’s! Grim! It wasn’t the word. No one had got any change out of that affair. Multum ex parvo! Parvum ex multo! That was the modern comedy!

Going home to have a look at Kit and send Fleur a wireless, he passed four musicians playing four instruments with a sort of fury. They had able bodies in shabby clothes. ‘By Jove!’ thought Michael, ‘I know that chap’s face! — surely he was in my Company, in France!’ He watched till the cheeks collapsed. Yes! A good man, too! But they had all been good men. By George, they had been wonders! And here they were! And he within an ace of abandoning them! Though everybody had his nostrum, and one perhaps was as good as another, still one could only follow what light one had! And if the Future was unreadable, and Fate grinned, well — let it grin!

How empty the house felt! To-morrow Kit and the dog were to go down to ‘The Shelter’ in the car, and it would be still emptier. From room after room he tried to retrieve some sight or scent of Fleur. Too painful! His dressing-room, his study were the only places possible — in them he would abide.

He went to the nursery, and opened the door softly. Whiteness and dimity; the dog on his fat silver side, the Magicoal fire burning; the prints on the white walls so carefully selected for the moment when the eleventh baronet should begin to take notice — prints slightly comic, to avoid a moral; the high and shining fender-guard that even Magicoal might not be taken too seriously; the light coming in between bright chintz. A charming room! The nurse, in blue, was standing with her back to the door, and did not see him. And, in his little high chair, the eleventh baronet was at table; on his face, beneath its dark chestnut curls, was a slight frown; and in his tiny hand he held a silver spoon, with which over the bowl before him he was making spasmodic passes.

Michael heard the nurse saying:

"Now that mother's gone, you must be a little man, Kit, and learn to use your spoon."

Michael saw his offspring dip at the bowl and throw some of its contents into the air.

"That's not the way at all."

The eleventh baronet repeated the performance, and looked for applause, with a determined smile.

"Naughty!"

"A— a!" said the eleventh baronet, plopping the spoon. The contents spurted wastefully.

"Oh! you spoiled boy!"

"'England, my England!'" thought Michael, "as the poet said."

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PASSERSBY

I

In Washington, District of Columbia, the "Fall" sun shone, and all that was not evergreen or stone in Rock Creek Cemetery was glowing. Before the Saint Gaudens statue Soames Forsyte sat on his overcoat, with the marble screen to his back, enjoying the seclusion and a streak of sunlight passaging between the cypresses.

With his daughter and her husband he had been up here already, the afternoon before, and had taken a fancy to the place. Apart from the general attraction of a cemetery, this statue awakened the connoisseur within him. Though not a thing you could acquire, it was undoubtedly a work of art, and produced a very marked effect. He did not remember a statue that made him feel so thoroughly at home. That great greenish bronze figure of seated woman within the hooding folds of her ample cloak seemed to carry him down to the bottom of his own soul. Yesterday, in the presence of Fleur, Michael, and other people, all gaping like himself, he had not so much noted the mood of the thing as its technical excellence, but now, alone, he could enjoy the luxury of his own sensations. Some called it "Grief," some "The Adams Memorial." He didn't know, but in any case there it was, the best thing he had come across in America, the one that gave him the most pleasure, in spite of all the water he had seen at Niagara and those skyscrapers in New York. Three times he had changed his position on that crescent marble seat, varying his sensations every time. From his present position the woman had passed beyond grief. She sat in a frozen acceptance deeper than death itself, very remarkable! There was something about death! He remembered his own father, James, a quarter of an hour after death, as if — as if he had been told at last!

A red-oak leaf fell on to his lapel, another on to his knee; Soames did not brush them off. Easy to sit still in front of that thing! They ought to make America sit there once a week!

He rose, crossed towards the statue, and gingerly touched a fold in the green bronze, as if questioning the possibility of everlasting nothingness.

"Got a sister living in Dallas — married a railroad man down there as a young girl. Why! Texas is a wonderful State. I know my sister laughs at the idea that the climate of Texas isn't about right."

Soames withdrew his hand from the bronze, and returned to his seat. Two tall thin elderly figures were entering the sanctuary. They moved into the middle and stood silent. Presently one said "Well!" and they moved out again at the other end. A little stir of wind fluttered some fallen leaves at the base of the statue. Soames shifted along to the extreme left. From there the statue was once more woman — very noble! And he sat motionless in his attitude of a thinker, the lower part of his face buried in his hand.

Considerably browned and distinctly healthy-looking, he was accustomed to regard himself as worn out by his long travel, which, after encircling the world, would end, the day after tomorrow, by embarkation on the Adelphic. This three-day run to Washington was the last straw, and he was supporting it very well. The city was pleasing; it had some fine buildings and a great many trees with the tints on; there wasn't the rush of New York, and plenty of houses that people could live in, he should think. Of course the place was full of Americans, but that was unavoidable. He was happy about Fleur too; she had quite got over that unpleasant Ferrar business, seemed on excellent terms with young Michael, and was looking forward to her home and her baby again. There was, indeed, in Soames a sense of culmination and of peace — a feeling of virtue having been its own reward, and beyond all, the thought that he would soon be smelling English grass and seeing again the river flowing past his cows. Annette, even, might be glad to see him — he had bought her a really nice emerald bracelet in New York. To such general satisfaction this statue of "Grief" was putting the finishing touch.

"Here we are, Anne."

An English voice, and two young people at the far end — going to chatter, he supposed! He was preparing to rise when he heard the girl say, in a voice American, indeed, but soft and curiously private:

"John, it's terribly great. It makes me sink here." From the gesture of her hand, Soames saw that it was where the thing had made HIM sink, too.

"Everlasting stillness. It makes me sad, John."

As the young man's arm slid under hers his face came into view. Quick as thought, half of Soames's face disappeared again into his hand. "John?" "Jon" was what she had meant to say. Young Jon Forsyte — not a doubt of it! And this girl, his wife, sister — as he had heard — of that young American Francis Wilmot! What a mischance! He remembered the boy's face perfectly, though he had only seen it in that Gallery off Cork Street, and the pastrycook's after, and once on that grim afternoon when he had gone down to Robin Hill to beg his own divorced first wife to let HER son marry HIS daughter! Never had he been more pleased to be refused! Never had the fitness of things been better confirmed; and yet, the pain of telling Fleur of that refusal remained in his memory like a still-live ember, red and prickly under the ashes of time. Behind his shadowing hat and screening hand Soames made sure. The young man was standing bare-headed, as if in reverence to the statue. A Forsyte look about him, in spite of too much hair. A poet — he had heard! The face wasn't a bad one; it had what they called charm; the eyes were deep-set, like his grandfather's, old Jolyon's, and the same colour, dark grey; the touch of brightness on his head came from his mother, no doubt; but the chin was a Forsyte's chin. Soames looked at the girl. A fair height, brownish pale, brown hair, dark eyes; pretty trick of the neck, nice way of standing too; very straight, an attractive figure! But how could the young man have taken to her after Fleur? Still, for an American, she looked very natural; a little bit like a nymph, with a kind of privacy about her.

Nothing in America had struck Soames so much as the lack of privacy. If you wanted to be private you had to disconnect your telephone and get into a bath — otherwise they rang you up just as you were going to sleep, to ask if you were Mr. and Mrs. Newberg. The houses, too, were not divided from each other, nor even from the roads. In the hotels the rooms all ran into each other, and as likely as not there'd be a drove of bankers in the hall. Dinner too — nothing private about that; even if you went out to dinner, it was always the same: lobster-cocktails, shad, turkey, asparagus, salad, and ice cream; very good dishes, no doubt, and you put on weight, but nothing private about them.

Those two were talking; he remembered the young man's voice.

"It's the greatest man-made thing in America, Anne. We haven't anything so good at home. It makes me hungry — we'll have to go to Egypt."

"Your mother would just love that, Jon; and so would I."

"Come and see it from the other side."

Soames rose abruptly and left the alcove. Though not recognised, he was flustered. A ridiculous, even a dangerous encounter. He had travelled for six months to restore Fleur's peace of mind, and now that she was tranquil, he would not for the world have her suddenly upset again by a sight of her first love. He remembered only too well how a sight of Irene used to upset himself. Yes — and as likely as not Irene was here too! Well, Washington was a big place. Not much danger! They were going to Mount Vernon in the afternoon, and tomorrow morning early were off again! At the top of the cemetery his taxicab was waiting. One of those other cars must belong to those two young people; and he glanced at them sidelong. Did there rise in him some fear, some hope, that in one of them he would see her whom, in another life, he had seen, day by day, night by night, waiting for what — it seemed — he could not give her. No! only the drivers and their voices, their "Yeahs!" and their "Yeps!" Americans no longer said "Yes," it seemed. And getting into his taxi, he said:

"Hotel PO-tomac."

"Hotel Po-TO-mac?"

"If you prefer it."

The driver grinned and shut Soames in. . . . The Veterans' Home! They said the veterans had pretty well died off. Still, they'd have plenty coming on from this last war. Besides, what was space and money to America? They had so much they didn't know what to do with it. Well, he didn't mind that, now that he was leaving. He didn't mind anything. Indeed, he had invited quite a number of Americans to come and see his pictures if they came to England. They had been very kind, very hospitable; he had seen a great many fine pictures too, including some Chinese; and a great many high buildings, and the air was very stimulating. It wouldn't suit him to live here, but it was all very much alive, and a good tonic, for a bit. 'I can't see HER living here!' he thought suddenly. 'There never was anyone more private.' The cars streamed past him, or stood parked in rows. America was all cars and newspapers! And a sudden thought disturbed him. They put everything into the newspapers over here; what if his name were among the arrivals?

Reaching his hotel, he went at once towards the kiosk in the hall where you could buy newspapers, tooth-paste, "candy" to pull your teeth out — teeth to replace them, he shouldn't be surprised. List of arrivals? Here it was: "Hotel

Potomac: Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus K. McGunn; the Misses Errick; Mr. H. Yellam Roof; Mr. Semmes Forsyth; Mr. and Mrs. Munt." As large as life, but, fortunately, only half as natural! Forsyth! Munt! They never could get anything right in the papers. "Semmes!" Unrecognisable, he should hope. And going over to the bureau, he turned the register towards him. Yes! he had written the names quite clearly. Lucky, too, or they'd have got 'em right, by mistake. And then, turning the leaf, he read: "Mr. and Mrs. Jolyon Forsyte." Here! At this hotel — those two! A day before them; yes, and at the very top, dated some days ago: "Mrs. Irene Forsyte." His mind travelled with incredible swiftness. He must deal with this at once. Where were Fleur and Michael? They had seen the Freer Gallery with him yesterday, and a beautiful little Gallery it was, he had never seen anything better, and the Lincoln Memorial, and that great tower thing which he had refused to go up. This morning they had said they should go to the Corcoran Gallery, where there was a Centenary Exhibition. He had known what that meant. He had seen English centenaries in his time. All the fashionable painters of their day — and the result too melancholy for words! And to the clerk he said:

"Is there a restaurant here where I can get a good lunch?"

"Sure; they cook fine at Filler's."

"Good! If my daughter and her husband come in, kindly tell them to meet me at Filler's at one o'clock."

And, going back to the kiosk, he bought some tickets for the opera, so that they should be out in the evening, and in ten minutes was on his way to the Corcoran Gallery. From Filler's they would go straight off to Mount Vernon; they would dine at another hotel before the opera, and tomorrow be off by the first train — he would take no chances. If only he could catch them at the Corcoran!

Arriving, he mechanically bought a catalogue and walked up-stairs. The rooms opened off the gallery and he began at the end room. Ah! there they were, in front of a picture of the setting sun! Sure of them now, but not sure of himself — Fleur was so sharp — Soames glanced at the pictures. Modern stuff, trailing behind those French extravagances Dumetrius had shown him six months ago in London. As he had thought, too, a wholesale lot; might all have been painted by the same hand. He saw Fleur touch Michael's arm and laugh. How pretty she looked! A thousand pities to have her applecart upset again! He came up behind them. What? That setting sun was a man's face, was it? Well, you never knew nowadays.

And he said: "I thought I'd have a look in. We're lunching at Filler's; they tell me it's better than the hotel; and we can go straight on from there to Mount Vernon. I've got some seats for the opera, to-night, too."

And, conscious of Fleur's scrutiny, he stared at the picture. He did not feel too comfortable.

"Are the older pictures better?" he asked.

"Well, sir, Fleur was just saying — how can anyone go on painting in these days?"

"How do you mean?"

"If you walk through, you'll say the same. Here's a hundred years of it."

"The best pictures never get into these shows," said Soames; "they just take anything they can get. Ryder, Innes, Whistler, Sargent — the Americans have had some great painters."

"Of course," said Fleur. "But do you really want to go round, Dad? I'm frightfully hungry."

"No," said Soames; "after that Saint Gaudens thing I don't feel like it. Let's go and lunch."

II

Mount Vernon! The situation was remarkable! With all that colour on the trees, the grassy cliff, and below it the broad blue Potomac, which, even Soames confessed, was more imposing than the Thames. And the low white house up here, dignified and private, indeed, except for the trippers, almost English, giving him a feeling he had not had since he left home. He could imagine that fellow George Washington being very fond of it. One could have taken to the place oneself. Lord John Russell's old house on the hill at Richmond was something like this, except, of course, for the breadth of river, and the feeling you always had in America and Canada, so far as he had seen, that they were trying to fill the country and not succeeding — such a terrific lot of space, and apparently no time. Fleur was in raptures, and young Michael had remarked that it was "absolutely topping." The sun fell warmly on his cheek while he took his last look from the wide porch, before entering the house itself. He should remember this — America had not all been run up yesterday! He passed into the hall and proceeded, mousing, through the lower rooms. Really! They had done it extraordinarily well. Nothing but the good old original stuff, from a century and a half ago, reminding Soames of half-hours spent in the antique shops of Taunton and Tunbridge Wells. Too much "George Washington" of course! George Washington's mug, George Washington's foot-bath, and his letter to so-and-so, and the lace on his collar, and his sword and his gun and everything that was his! Still, that was unavoidable! Detached from the throng, detached even from his daughter, Soames moved — covered, as in a cloak, by his collector's habit of silent appraisement; he so disliked his judgments to be confused by uncritical imbecilities. He had reached the bedroom up-stairs where George Washington had died, and was gazing through the grille, when he heard sounds which almost froze his blood; the very voices he had listened to that morning before the Saint Gaudens statue, and with those voices Michael's voice conjoined! Was Fleur there too? A backward glance relieved him. No! the three were standing at the head of the main stairs exchanging the remarks of strangers casually interested in the same thing. He heard Michael say, "Jolly good taste in those days." And Jon Forsyte answering, "All hand-made, you see."

Soames dived for the back stairs, jostled a stout lady, recoiled, stammering, and hurried on down. If Fleur was not with Michael it meant that she had got hold of the curator. Take her away, while those three were still up-stairs! That was the thought in his mind. Two young Englishmen were not likely to exchange names or anything else, and, if they did, he must get hold of Michael quickly. But how to get Fleur away? Yes, there she was — talking to the curator in front of George Washington's flute laid down on George Washington's harpsichord in the music-room! And Soames suffered. Revolting to seem unwell, still more revolting to pretend to seem! And yet — what else? He could not go up to her and say: "I've had enough. Let's go to the car!" Swallowing violently, he put his hand to his head and went towards the harpsichord.

"Fleur!" he said, and without pausing to let her take him in, went on: "I'm not feeling the thing. I must go to the car."

The words no doubt were startling, coming from one so undramatic.

"Dad! What is it?"

"I don't know," said Soames; "giddy. Give me your arm."

Really dreadful to him — the whole thing! On the way to the car, parked at the entrance, her concern was so embarrassing that he very nearly abandoned his ruse. But he managed to murmur:

"I've been doing too much, I expect; or else it's that cookery. I'll just sit quiet in the car."

To his great relief she sat down with him, got out her smelling-bottle, and sent the chauffeur to tell Michael. Soames was touched, though incommoded by having to sniff the salts, which were very strong.

"Great fuss about nothing," he muttered.

"We'd better get home, dear, at once, so that you can lie down."

In a few minutes Michael came hurrying. He too expressed what seemed to Soames a genuine concern, and the car was started. Soames sat back with his hand in Fleur's, and his mouth and eyes tight closed, feeling perhaps better than he'd ever felt in his life. Before they reached Alexandria he opened his lips to say that he had spoiled their trip for them; they must go home by way of Arlington, and he would stay in the car while they had a look at it. Fleur was for going straight on, but he insisted. Arrived, however, at this other white house, also desirably situated on the slope above the river, he almost had a fit while waiting for them in the car. What if the same idea had occurred to Jon Forsyte and he were suddenly to drive up? It was an intense relief when they came out again, saying that it was nice but not a patch on Mount Vernon: the porch columns were too thick. When the car was again traversing the bright woods Soames opened his eyes for good.

"I'm all right again, now. It was liver, I expect."

"You ought to have some brandy, Dad. We can get some on a doctor's prescription."

"Doctor? Nonsense. We'll dine up-stairs and I'll get over the waiter; they must have something in the house."

Dine up-stairs! That was a happy thought!

In their sitting-room he lay down on the sofa, touched and gratified, for Fleur was plopping up his cushions, shading the light, looking over the top of her book to see how he was. He did not remember when he had felt so definitely that she really did care about him. He even thought: 'I ought to be ill a little, every now and then!' And yet, if he ever complained of feeling ill at home, Annette at once complained of feeling worse!

Close by, in the little salon opposite the stairs, a piano was being played.

"Does that music worry you, dear?"

Into Soames' mind flashed the thought 'Irene!' If it were, and Fleur were to go out to stop it, then, indeed, would fat be in the fire!

"No; I rather like it," he said, hastily.

"It's a very good touch."

Irene's touch! He remembered how June used to praise her touch; remembered how he had caught that fellow Bosinney listening to her, in the little drawing-room in Montpellier Square, with the wild-cat look on his face, the fellow had; remembered how she used to stop playing when he himself came in-from consideration, or the feeling that it was wasted on him — which? He had never known. He had never known anything! Well — another life! He closed his eyes, and instantly saw Irene in her emerald-green dinner-gown, standing in the Park Lane hall, first feast after their honeymoon, waiting to be cloaked! Why did such pictures come back before closed eyes — pictures without rhyme or reason? Irene brushing her hair — grey now, of course! As he was seventy, she must be nearly sixty-two! How time went! Hair feuille morte — old Aunt Juley used to call it with a certain pride in having picked up the expression — and eyes so velvet dark! Ah! but handsome was as handsome did! Still — who could say! Perhaps, if he had known how to express his feelings! If he had understood music! If she hadn't so excited his senses! Perhaps — oh, perhaps your grandmother! No riddling that out! And here — of all places. A tricksy business! Was one never to forget?

Fleur went to pack and dress. Dinner came up. Michael spoke of having met a refreshing young couple at Mount Vernon, "an Englishman; he said Mount Vernon made him awfully homesick."

"What was his name, Michael?"

"Name? I didn't ask. Why?"

"Oh! I don't know. I thought you might have."

Soames breathed again. He had seen her prick her ears. Give it a chance, and her feeling for that boy of Irene's would flare up again. It was in the blood!

"Bright Markland," said Michael, "has been gassing over the future of America — he's very happy about it because there are so many farmers still, and people on the land; but he's also been gassing over the future of England — he's very happy about it, and there's hardly anybody on the land."

"Who's Bright Markland?" muttered Soames.

"Editor of our Scrutator, sir. Never was a better example of optimism, or the science of having things both ways."

"I'd hoped," said Soames heavily, "that seeing these new countries would have made you feel there's something in an old one, after all."

Michael laughed. "No need to persuade me of that, sir. But you see I belong to what is called the fortunate class, and so, I believe, do you."

Soames stared. This young man was getting sarcastic!

"Well," he said, "I shall be glad to be home. Are you packed?"

They were; and presently he telephoned for a cab to take them to the opera. So that they might not hang about in the hall, he went down, himself, to see them into it. The incident passed without let or hindrance; and with a deep sigh of relief he resumed his place in the lift, and was restored to his room.

III

He stood there at the window, looking out at the tall houses, the lights, the cars moving below and the clear starry sky. He was really tired now; another day of this, and he would not need to simulate indisposition. A narrow squeak, indeed — a series of them! He wished he were safe home. To be under the same roof with that woman — how very queer! He had not passed a night under the same roof with her since that dreadful day in November '87, when he walked round and round Montpellier Square in such mortal agony, and came to his front door to find young Jolyon there. One lover dead, and the other already on his threshold! That night she had stolen away from his house; never again till this night had the same roof covered them. That music again — soft and teasing! WAS it she playing? To get away from it, he went into his bedroom and put his things together. He was not long about that, for he had only a suitcase with him. Should he go to bed? To bed, and lie awake? This thing had upset him. If it were she, sitting at that piano, a few yards away, what did she look like now? Seven times — no, eight — he had seen her since that long ago November night. Twice in her Chelsea flat; then by that fountain in the Bois de Boulogne; at Robin Hill when he delivered his ultimatum to her and young Jolyon; at Queen Victoria's funeral; at Lord's Cricket ground; again at Robin Hill when he went to beg for Fleur; and in the Goupenor Gallery just before she came out here. Each meeting he could remember in every detail, down to the lifting of her gloved hand at the last — the faint smiling of her lips.

And Soames shivered. Too hot — these American rooms! He went back into the sitting-room; they had cleared away and brought him the evening paper; no good in that! He could never find anything in the papers over here. At this distance from the past, all this space and all this time — what did he feel about her? Hate? The word was too strong. One didn't hate those who weren't near one. Besides, he had never hated her! Not even when he first knew she was unfaithful. Contempt? No. She had made him ache too much for that. He didn't know what he felt. And he began walking up and down, and once or twice stood at the door and listened, as might a prisoner in his cell. Undignified! And going to the sofa he stretched himself out on it. He would think about his travels. Had he enjoyed them? One long whirl of things, and — water. And yet, all had gone according to programme, except China, to which they had given as wide a berth as possible, owing to its state. The Sphinx and the Taj Mahal, Vancouver Harbour, and the Rocky Mountains, they played a sort of hide-and-seek within him; and now — that strumming; was it She? Strange! You had, it seemed, only just one season of real heat. Everything else that happened to you was in a way tepid, and perhaps it was as well, or the boiler would burst. His emotions in the years when he first knew her — would he go through them again? Not for the world. And yet! Soames got up. That music was going on and on; but when it stopped, the player — She or not She! — would be no longer visible. Why not walk past that little salon — just walk past, and — and take a glimpse? If it were She, well, probably she'd lost her looks — the beauty that had played such havoc with him? He had noticed the position of the piano; yes — the player would be in profile to him. He opened the door; the music swelled, and he stole forth.

The breadth of Fleur's room, only, separated him from that little open salon opposite the stairs. No one was in the corridor, not even a bell boy. Very likely some American woman after all, possibly that girl — Jon's wife! Yet no — there was something — something in the sound! And holding up the evening paper before him, he moved along. Three pillars, with spaces between them, divided the salon from the corridor, avoiding what Soames so missed in America — the fourth wall. At the first of these pillars he came to a stand. A tall lamp with an orange shade stood by the keyboard, and the light from it fell on the music, on the keys, on the cheek and hair of the player. SHE! Though he had supposed her grey by now, the sight of that hair without a thread in it of the old gold affected him strangely. Curved, soft, shining, it covered her like a silver casque. She was in evening dress, and he could see that her shoulders, neck, and arms were still rounded and beautiful. All her body from the waist was moving lightly to the rhythm of her playing. Her frock was of a greyish heliotrope. Soames stood behind his pillar gazing, his hand over his face, lest she should turn her head. He did not exactly feel — the film of remembrance was unrolled too quickly. From the first sight of her in a Bournemouth drawing-room to the last sight of her in the Goupenor Gallery — the long sequence passed him by in its heat and its frost and its bitterness; the long struggle of sense, the long failure of spirit; the long aching passion, and its long schooling into numbness and indifference. The last thing he wanted, standing there, was to speak with her, and yet he could not take his eyes away. Suddenly she stopped playing; bending forward she closed the music and reached to turn out the lamp. Her face came round in the light, and, cowering back, Soames saw it, still beautiful, perhaps more beautiful, a little worn, so that the eyes looked even darker than of old, larger, softer under the still-dark eyebrows. And once more he had that feeling: "There sits a woman I have never known." With a sort of anger he craned back till he could see no longer. Ah! she had had many faults, but the worst of her faults had always been, was still, her infernal mystery! And, stepping silently like a cat, he regained his room.

He felt tired to death now, and, going into his bedroom, undressed hurriedly and got into bed. He wished with all his heart that he were on board, under the British flag. 'I'm old,' he thought suddenly, 'old.' This America was too young for him, so full of energy, bustling about to ends he could not see. Those Eastern places had been different. And yet, after all, he was a mere seventy. His father had lived to be ninety — old Jolyon eighty-five, Timothy a hundred, and so with all the old Forsytes. At seventy THEY weren't playing golf; and yet they were younger, younger anyway than he felt to-night. The sight of that woman had — had —! Old!

'I'm not going back to be old,' he thought. 'If I feel like this again I shall consult someone.' They had some monkey thing nowadays they could inject. He shouldn’t try that. Monkeys indeed! Why not pigs or tigers? Hold on somehow another ten or fifteen years! By that time they would have found out where they were in England. That precious capital levy would have been exploded. He would know what he had to leave to Fleur; would see her baby grow into a boy and go to school — public school — even! Eton? No — young Jolyon had been there. Winchester, the Monts’ school? Not there either, if he could help it. Harrow was handy; or his own old school — Marlborough? Perhaps he would see him play at Lord’s. Another fifteen years before Kit could play at Lord’s! Well — something to look forward to, something to hold on for. If you hadn’t that, you felt old, and if you FELT old, you WERE old, and the end soon came. How well that woman had worn! She —! There were his pictures too; take them up more seriously. That Freer Gallery! Leave them to the nation, and your name lived — much comfort in THAT! She! SHE would never die!

A crack of light on the wall close to the door.

“Asleep, Dad?”

So Fleur had remembered to come and have a look at him!

“How are you now, dear?”

“All right; tired. How was the opera?”

“Middling.”

“I’ve told them to call us at seven. We’ll breakfast on the train.”

Her lips touched his forehead. If — if that woman — but never — never once — never of her own accord —!

“Good night,” he said. “Sleep well!”

The light on the wall narrowed and was gone! Well! He was drowsy now. But, in this house — Shapes — Shapes! Past — present — at the piano — at his bedside — passing — passing by — and there, behind them, the great bronze-hooded woman, with the closed eyes, deep sunk in everlasting — profound — pro —! And from Soames a gentle snore escaped.

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SWAN SONG
PART I

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on;
and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."
— The Tempest,

CHAPTER I

INITIATION OF THE CANTEEN

In modern Society, one thing after another, this spice on that, ensures a kind of memoristic vacuum, and Fleur Mont's passage of arms with Marjorie Ferrar was, by the spring of 1926, well-nigh forgotten. Moreover, she gave Society's memory no encouragement, for, after her tour round the world, she was interested in the Empire — a bent so out of fashion as to have all the flavour and excitement of novelty with a sort of impersonality guaranteed.

Colonials, Americans, and Indian students, people whom nobody could suspect of being lions, now encountered each other in the 'bimetallic parlour,' and were found by Fleur 'very interesting,' especially the Indian students, so supple and enigmatic, that she could never tell whether she were 'using' them or they were 'using' her.

Perceiving the extraordinarily uphill nature of Foggartism, she had been looking for a second string to Michael's Parliamentary bow, and, with her knowledge of India, where she had spent six weeks of her tour, she believed that she had found it in the idea of free entrance for the Indians into Kenya. In her talks with these Indian students, she learned that it was impossible to walk in a direction unless you knew what it was. These young men might be complicated and unpractical, meditative and secret, but at least they appeared to be convinced that the molecules in an organism mattered less than the organism itself — that they, in fact, mattered less than India. Fleur, it seemed, had encountered faith — a new and "intriguing" experience. She mentioned the fact to Michael.

"It's all very well," he answered, "but our Indian friends didn't live for four years in the trenches, or the fear thereof, for the sake of their faith. If they had, they couldn't possibly have the feeling that it matters as much as they think it does. They might want to, but their feelers would be blunted. That's what the war really did to all of us in Europe who were in the war."

"That doesn't make 'faith' any less interesting," said Fleur, drily.

"Well, my dear, the prophets abuse us for being at loose ends, but can you have faith in a life force so darned extravagant that it makes mince-meat of you by the million? Take it from me, Victorian times fostered a lot of very cheap and easy faith, and our Indian friends are in the same case — their India has lain doggo since the Mutiny, and that was only a surface upheaval. So you needn't take 'em too seriously."

"I don't; but I like the way they believe they're serving India."

And at his smile she frowned, seeing that he thought she was only increasing her collection.

Her father-inlaw, who had really made some study of orientalism, lifted his eyebrow over these new acquaintances.

"My oldest friend," he said, on the first of May, "is a judge in India. He's been there forty years. When he'd been there two, he wrote to me that he was beginning to know something about the Indians. When he'd been there ten, he wrote that he knew all about them. I had a letter from him yesterday, and he says that after forty years he knows nothing about them. And they know as little about us. East and West — the circulation of the blood is different."

"Hasn't forty years altered the circulation of your friend's blood?"

"Not a jot," replied Sir Lawrence. "It takes forty generations. Give me another cup of your nice Turkish coffee, my dear. What does Michael say about the general strike?"

"That the Government won't budge unless the T. U. C. withdraw the notice unreservedly."

"Exactly! And but for the circulation of English blood there'd be 'a pretty mess,' as old Forsyte would say."

"Michael's sympathies are with the miners."

"So are mine, young lady. Excellent fellow, the miner — but unfortunately cursed with leaders. The mine-owners are in the same case. Those precious leaders are going to grind the country's nose before they've done. Inconvenient product — coal; it's blackened our faces, and now it's going to black our eyes. Not a merry old soul! Well, good-bye! My love to Kit, and tell Michael to keep his head."

This was precisely what Michael was trying to do. When 'the Great War' broke out, though just old enough to fight, he had been too young to appreciate the fatalism which creeps over human nature with the approach of crisis. He was appreciating it now before 'the Great Strike,' together with the peculiar value which the human being attaches to saving face. He noticed that both sides had expressed the intention of meeting the other side in every way, without, of course, making any concessions whatever; that the slogans, 'Longer hours, less wages,' 'Not a minute more, not a bob off,' curtsied, and got more and more distant as they neared each other. And now, with the ill-disguised impatience of his somewhat mercurial nature, Michael was watching the sober and tentative approaches of the typical Britons in whose hands any chance of mediation lay. When, on that memorable Monday, not merely the faces of the gentlemen with slogans, but the very faces of the typical Britons, were suddenly confronted with the need for being saved, he knew that all was up; and, returning from the House of Commons at midnight, he looked at his sleeping wife. Should he wake Fleur and tell her that the country was "for it," or should he not? Why spoil her beauty sleep? She would know soon enough. Besides, she wouldn't take it seriously. Passing into his dressing-room, he stood looking out of the window at the dark square below. A general strike at twelve hours' notice! 'Some' test of the British character! The British character? Suspicion had been dawning on Michael for years that its appearances were deceptive; that members of Parliament, theatre-goers, trotty little ladies with dresses tight blown about trotty little figures, plethoric generals in armchairs, pettish and petted poets, parsons in pulpits, posters in the street — above all, the Press, were not representative of the national disposition. If the papers were not to come out, one would at least get a chance of feeling and seeing British character; owing to the papers, one never had seen or felt it clearly during the war, at least not in England. In the trenches, of course, one had — there, sentiment and hate, advertisement and moonshine, had been 'taboo,' and with a grim humour the Briton had just 'carried on,' unornamental and sublime, in the mud and the blood, the stink and the racket, and the endless nightmare of being pitchforked into fire without rhyme or reason! The Briton's defiant humour that grew better as things grew worse, would — he felt — get its chance again now. And, turning from the window, he undressed and went back into the bedroom.

Fleur was awake.

"Well, Michael?"

"The strike's on."

"What a bore!"

"Yes; we shall have to exert ourselves."

"What did they appoint that Commission for, and pay all that subsidy, if not to avoid this?"

"My clear girl, that's mere common-sense — no good at all."

"Why can't they come to an agreement?"

"Because they've got to save face. Saving face is the strongest motive in the world."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, it caused the war; it's causing the strike now; without 'saving face' there'd probably be no life on the earth at all by this time."

"Don't be absurd!"

Michael kissed her.

"I suppose you'll have to do something," she said, sleepily. "There won't be much to talk about in the House while this is on."

"No; we shall sit and glower at each other, and use the word 'formula' at stated intervals."

"I wish we had a Mussolini."

"I don't. You pay for him in the long run. Look at Diaz and Mexico; or Lenin and Russia; or Napoleon and France; or Cromwell and England, for the matter of that."

"Charles the Second," murmured Fleur into her pillow, "was rather a dear."

Michael stayed awake a little, disturbed by the kiss, slept a little, woke again. To save face! No one would make a move because of their faces. For nearly an hour he lay trying to think out a way of saving them all, then fell asleep. He woke at seven with the feeling that he had wasted his time. Under the appearance of concern for the country, and professions of anxiety to find a 'formula,' too many personal feelings, motives, and prejudices were at work. As before the war, there was a profound longing for the humiliation and dejection of the adversary; each wished his face saved at the expense of the other fellow's!

He went out directly after breakfast.

People and cars were streaming in over Westminster Bridge, no 'buses ran, no trams; but motor lorries, full or empty, rumbled past. Some 'specials' were out already, and emaciated men were selling an emaciated print called The British Gazette. Everybody wore an air of defiant jollity. Michael moved on towards Hyde Park. Over night had sprung up this amazing ordered mish-mash of lorries and cans and tents! In the midst of all the mental and imaginative lethargy which had produced this national crisis — what a wonderful display of practical and departmental energy! 'They say we can't organise!' thought Michael; 'can't we just — AFTER THE EVENT!'

He went on to a big railway station. It was picketed, but they were running trains already, with volunteer labour. Poking round, he talked here and there among the volunteers. 'By George!' he thought, 'these fellows'll want feeding! What about a canteen?' And he returned post haste to South Square.

Fleur was in.

"Will you help me run a railway canteen for volunteers?" He saw the expression, 'Is that a good stunt?' rise on her face, and hurried on:

"It'll mean frightfully hard work; and getting anybody we can to help. I daresay I could rope in Norah Curfew and her gang from Bethnal Green for a start. But it's your quick head that's wanted, and your way with men."

Fleur smiled. "All right," she said.

They took the car — a present from Soames on their return from round the world — and went about, picking people up and dropping them again. They recruited Norah Curfew and 'her gang' in Bethnal Green; and during this first meeting of Fleur with one whom she had been inclined to suspect as something of a rival, Michael noted how, within five minutes, she had accepted Norah Curfew as too 'good' to be dangerous. He left them at South Square in conference over culinary details, and set forth to sap the natural opposition of officialdom. It was like cutting barbed wire on a dark night before an 'operation.' He cut a good deal, and went down to the 'House.' Humming with unformulated 'formulas,' it was, on the whole, the least cheerful place he had been in that day. Everyone was talking of the 'menace to the Constitution.' The Government's long face was longer than ever, and nothing — they said — could be done until it had been saved. The expressions 'Freedom of the Press' and 'At the pistol's mouth,' were being used to the point of tautology! He ran across Mr. Blythe brooding in the Lobby on the temporary decease of his beloved Weekly, and took him over to South Square 'for a bite' at nine o'clock. Fleur had come in for the same purpose. According to Mr. Blythe, the solution was to 'form a group' of right-thinking opinion.

"Exactly, Blythe! But what is right-thinking, at 'the present time of speaking'?"

"It all comes back to Foggartism," said Mr. Blythe.

"Oh!" said Fleur, "I do wish you'd both drop that. Nobody will have anything to say to it. You might as well ask the people of today to live like St. Francis d'Assisi."

"My dear young lady, suppose St. Francis d'Assisi had said that, we shouldn't be hearing today of St. Francis."

"Well, what real effect has he had? He's just a curiosity. All those great spiritual figures are curiosities. Look at Tolstoi now, or Christ, for that matter!"

"Fleur's rather right, Blythe."

"Blasphemy!" said Mr. Blythe.

"I don't know, Blythe; I've been looking at the gutters lately, and I've come to the conclusion that they put a stopper on Foggartism. Watch the children there, and you'll see how attractive gutters are! So long as a child can have a gutter, he'll never leave it. And, mind you, gutters are a great civilising influence. We have more gutters here than any other country and more children brought up in them; and we're the most civilised people in the world. This strike's going to prove that.

There'll be less bloodshed and more good humour than there could be anywhere else; all due to the gutter."

"Renegade!" said Mr. Blythe.

"Well," said Michael, "Foggartism, like all religions, is the over-expression of a home truth. We've been too wholesale, Blythe. What converts have we made?"

"None," said Mr. Blythe. "But if we can't take children from the gutter, Foggartism is no more."

Michael wriggled; and Fleur said promptly: "What never was can't be no more. Are you coming with me to see the kitchens, Michael — they've been left in a filthy state. How does one deal with beetles on a large scale?"

"Get a beetle-man — sort of pied piper, who lures them to their fate."

Arrived on the premises of the canteen-to-be, they were joined by Ruth La Fontaine, of Norah Curfew's 'gang,' and descended to the dark and odorous kitchen. Michael struck a match, and found the switch. Gosh! In the light, surprised, a brown-black scuttling swarm covered the floor, the walls, the tables. Michael had just sufficient control of his nerves to take in the faces of those three — Fleur's shuddering frown, Mr. Blythe's open mouth, the dark and pretty Ruth La Fontaine's nervous smile. He felt Fleur clutch his arm.

"How DISGUSTING!"

The disturbed creatures were finding their holes or had ceased to scuttle; here and there, a large one, isolated, seemed to watch them.

"Imagine!" cried Fleur. "And food's been cooked here all these years! Ugh!"

"After all," said Ruth La Fontaine, with a shivery giggle, "they're not so b-bad as b-bugs."

Mr. Blythe puffed hard at his cigar. Fleur muttered:

"What's to be done, Michael?"

Her face was pale; she was drawing little shuddering breaths; and Michael was thinking: 'It's too bad; I must get her out of this!' when suddenly she seized a broom and rushed at a large beetle on the wall. In a minute they were all at it — swabbing and sweeping, and flinging open doors and windows.

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CHAPTER II

ON THE 'PHONE

Winifred Dartie had not received her Morning Post. Now in her sixty-eighth year, she had not followed too closely the progress of events which led up to the general strike — they were always saying things in the papers, and you never knew what was true; those Trades Union people, too, were so interfering, that really one had no patience. Besides, the Government always did something in the end. Acting, however, on the advice of her brother Soames, she had filled her cellars with coal and her cupboards with groceries, and by ten o'clock on the second morning of the strike, was seated comfortably at the telephone.

"Is that you, Imogen? Are you and Jack coming for me this evening?"

"No, Mother. Jack's sworn in, of course. He has to be on duty at five. Besides, they say the theatres will close. We'll go later. 'Dat Lubly Lady's' sure to run."

"Very well, dear. But what a fuss it all is! How are the boys?"

"Awfully fit. They're both going to be little 'specials.' I've made them tiny badges. D'you think the child's department at Harridge's would have toy truncheons?"

"Sure to, if it goes on. I shall be there today; I'll suggest it. They'd look too sweet, wouldn't they? Are you all right for coal?"

"Oh, yes. Jack says we mustn't hoard. He's fearfully patriotic."

"Well, good-bye, dear! My love to the boys!"

She had just begun to consider whom she should call up next when the telephone bell rang.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Val Dartie living there?"

"No. Who is it speaking?"

"My name is Stainford. I'm an old college friend of his. Could you give me his address, please?"

Stainford? It conveyed nothing.

"I'm his mother. My son is not in town; but I dare say he will be before long. Can I give him any message?"

"Well, thanks! I want to see him. I'll ring up again; or take my chance later. Thanks!"

Winifred replaced the receiver.

Stainford! The voice was distinguished. She hoped it had nothing to do with money. Odd, how often distinction was connected with money! Or, rather, with the lack of it. In the old Park Lane days they had known so many fashionables who had ended in the bankruptcy or divorce courts. Emily — her mother — had never been able to resist distinction. That had been the beginning of Monty — he had worn such perfect waistcoats and gardenias, and had known so much about all that was fast — impossible not to be impressed by him. Ah, well! She did not regret him now. Without him she would never have had Val, or Imogen's two boys, or Benedict (almost a colonel), though she never saw him now, living, as he did, in Guernsey, to grow cucumbers, away from the income tax. They might say what they liked about the age, but could it really be more up-to-date than it was in the 'nineties and the early years of the century, when income tax was at a shilling, and that considered high! People now just ran about and talked, to disguise the fact that they were not so 'chic' and up-to-date as they used to be.

Again the telephone bell rang. "Will you take a trunk call from Wansdon? . . ."

"Hallo! That you, Mother?"

"Oh, Val, how nice! Isn't this strike absurd?"

"Silly asses! I say: we're coming up."

"Really, dear. But why? You'll be so much more comfortable in the country."

"Holly says we've got to do things. Who d'you think turned up last night? — her brother — young Jon Forsyte. Left his wife and mother in Paris — said he'd missed the war and couldn't afford to miss this. Been travelling all the winter — Egypt, Italy, and that — chucked America, I gather. Says he wants to do something dirty — going to stoke an engine. We're driving up to the Bristol this afternoon."

"Oh, but why not come to me, dear, I've got plenty of everything?"

"Well, there's young Jon — I don't think —"

"But he's a nice boy, isn't he?"

"Uncle Soames isn't with you, is he?"

"No, dear. He's at Mapledurham. Oh, and by the way, Val, someone has just rung up for you — a Mr. Stainford."

"Stainford? What! Aubrey Stainford — I haven't seen him since Oxford."

"He said he would ring up again or take his chance of finding you here."

"Oh, I'd love to see old Stainford again. Well, if you don't mind putting us up, Mother. Can't leave young Jon out, you know — he and Holly are very thick after six years; but I expect he'll be out all the time."

"Oh, that'll be quite all right, dear; and how is Holly?"

"Topping."

"And the horses?"

"All right. I've got a snorting two-year-old, rather backward. Shan't run him till Goodwood, but he ought to win then."

"That'll be delightful. Well, dear boy, I'll expect you. But you won't be doing anything rash, with your leg?"

"No; just drive a 'bus, perhaps. Won't last, you know. The Government's all ready. Pretty hot stuff. We've GOT 'em this time."

"I'm so glad. It'll be such a good thing to have it over; it's dreadfully bad for the season. Your uncle will be very upset."

An indistinguishable sound; then Val's voice again:

"I say, Holly says SHE'LL want a job — you might ask young Mont. He's in with people. See you soon, then — good-bye!"

Replacing the receiver, Winifred had scarcely risen from the satinwood chair on which she had been seated, when the bell rang again.

"Mrs. Dartie? . . . That you, Winifred? Soames speaking. What did I tell you?"

"Yes; it's very annoying, dear. But Val says it'll soon be over."

"What's he know about it?"

"He's very shrewd."

"Shrewd? H'm! I'm coming up to Fleur's."

"But, why, Soames? I should have thought —"

"Must be on the spot, in case of — accidents. Besides, the car'll be eating its head off down here — may as well be useful. Do that fellow Riggs good to be sworn in. This thing may lead to anything."

"Oh! Do you think —"

"Think? It's no joke. Comes of playing about with subsidies."

"But you told me last summer —"

"They don't look ahead. They've got no more nous than a tom-cat. Annette wants to go to her mother's in France. I shan't stop her. She can't gad about while this is on. I shall take her to Dover with the car today, and come up tomorrow."

"Ought one to sell anything, Soames?"

"Certainly not."

"People seem dreadfully busy about it all. Val's going to drive a 'bus. Oh! and, Soames — that young Jon Forsyte is back. He's left his wife and mother in Paris, and come over to be a stoker."

A deep sound, and then:

"What's he want to do that for? Much better keep out of England."

"Ye-es. I suppose Fleur —"

“Don’t you go putting things into HER head!”

“Of course not, Soames. So I shall see you? Good-bye.”

Dear Soames was always so fussy about Fleur! Young Jon Forsyte and she — of course — but that was ages ago! Calf love! And Winifred smiled, sitting very still. This strike was really most ‘intriguing.’ So long as they didn’t break any windows — because, of course, the milk supply would be all right, the Government always saw to that; and as to the newspapers — well, after all, they were a luxury! It would be very nice to have Val and Holly. The strike was really something to talk about; there had been nothing so exciting since the war. And, obeying an obscure instinct to do something about it, Winifred again took up the receiver. “Give me Westminster 0000. . . . Is that Mrs. Michael Mont’s? Fleur? Aunt Winifred speaking. How are you, dear?”

The voice which answered had that quick little way of shaping words that was so amusing to Winifred, who in her youth had perfected a drawl, which effectually dominated both speed and emotion. All the young women in Society nowadays spoke like Fleur, as if they had found the old way of speaking English slow and flat, and were gingering it with little pinches.

“Perfectly all right, thanks. Anything I can do for you, Auntie?”

“Yes, my dear — your cousin Val and Holly are coming up to me about this strike. And Holly — I think it’s very unnecessary, but she wants to DO something. She thought perhaps Michael would know —”

“Oh, well, of course there are lots of things. We’ve started a canteen for railway workers; perhaps she’d like to help in that.”

“My dear, that would be awfully nice.”

“It won’t, Aunt Winifred; it’s pretty strenuous.”

“It can’t last, dear, of course. Parliament are bound to do something about it. It must be a great comfort to you to have all the news at first-hand. Then, may I send Holly to you?”

“But of course. She’ll be very useful. At her age she’d better do supplies, I think, instead of standing about, serving. I get on with her all right. The great thing is to have people that get on together, and don’t fuss. Have you heard from Father?”

“Yes; he’s coming up to you tomorrow.”

“Oh! But why?”

“He says he must be on the spot, in case of —”

“That’s so silly. Never mind. It’ll make two cars.”

“Holly will have hers, too. Val’s going to drive a ‘bus, he says — and — er — young — well, dear, that’s all! My love to Kit. There are a tremendous lot of milk-cans in the Park already, Smither says. She went out this morning into Park Lane to have a look. It’s all rather thrilling, don’t you think?”

“At the House they say it’ll mean another shilling on the income tax before it’s over.”

“Oh, dear!”

At this moment a voice said: “Have they answered?” And, replacing the receiver, Winifred again sat, placid. Park Lane! From the old house there — home of her youth — one would have had a splendid view of everything — quite the headquarters! But how dreadfully the poor old Pater would have felt it! James! She seemed to see him again with his plaid over his shoulders, and his nose glued to a window-pane, trying to cure with the evidence of his old grey eyes the fatal habit they all had of not telling him anything. She still had some of his wine. And Warmson, their old butler, still kept ‘The Pouter Pigeon,’ on the river at Moulsbridge. He always sent her a Stilton cheese at Christmas, with a memorandum of the exact amount of the old Park Lane port she was to pour into it. His last letter had ended thus:

“I often think of the master, and how fond he was of going down the cellar right up to the end. As regards wine, ma’am, I’m afraid the days are not what they were. My duty to Mr. Soames and all. Dear me, it seems a long time since I first came to Park Lane.

“Your obedient servant,

“GEORGE WARMSON.

“P. S. — I had a pound or two on that colt Mr. Val bred, please to tell him — and came in useful.”

The old sort of servant! And now she had Smither, from Timothy’s, Cook having died — so mysteriously, or, as Smither put it: “Of hornwee, ma’am, I verily believe, missing Mr. Timothy as we did”— Smither as a sort of supercargo — didn’t they call it, on ships? — and really very capable, considering she was sixty, if a day, and the way her corsets creaked. After all, to be with the family again was a great comfort to the poor old soul — eight years younger than Winifred, who, like a true Forsyte, looked down on the age of others from the platform of perennial youth. And a comfort, too, to have about the house one who remembered Monty in his prime — Montague Dartie, so long dead now, that he had a halo as yellow as his gills had so often been. Poor, dear Monty! Was it really forty-seven years since she married him, and came to live in Green Street? How well those satinwood chairs with the floral green design on their top rails, had worn — furniture of times before this seven-hour day and all the rest of it! People thought about their work then, and not about the cinema! And Winifred, who had never had any work to think about, sighed. It had all been great fun — and, if they could only get this little fuss over, the coming season would be most enjoyable. She had seats already for almost everything. Her hand slipped down to what she was sitting on. Yes, she had only had those chairs re-covered twice in all her forty-seven years in Green Street, and, really, they were quite respectable still. True! no one ever sat on them now, because they were straight up without arms; and in these days, of course, everybody sprawled, so restless, too, that no chair could stand it. She rose to judge the degree of respectability beneath her, tilting the satinwood chair forward. The year Monty died they had been re-covered last — 1913, just before the war. Really that had been a marvellous piece of grey-green silk!

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CHAPTER III

HOME-COMING

Jon Forsyte's sensations on landing at Newhaven, by the last possible boat, after five and a half years' absence, had been most peculiar. All the way by car to Wansdon under the Sussex Downs he was in a sort of excited dream. England! What wonderful chalk, what wonderful green! What an air of having been there for ever! The sudden dips into villages, the old bridges, the sheep, the beech clumps! And the cuckoo — not heard for six years! A poet, somewhat dormant of late, stirred within this young man. Delicious old country! Anne would be crazy about this countryside — it was so beautifully finished. When the general strike was over she could come along, and he would show her everything. In the meantime she would be all right with his mother in Paris, and he would be free for any job he could get. He remembered this bit, and Chanctonbury Ring up there, and his walk over from Worthing. He remembered very well. Fleur! His brother-inlaw, Francis Wilmot, had come back from England with much to say about Fleur; she was very modern now, and attractive, and had a boy. How deeply one could be in love; and how completely get over it! Considering what his old feelings down here had been, it was strange but pleasant to be just simply eager to see Holly and 'old Val.'

Beyond a telegram from Dieppe he had made no announcement of his coming; but they would surely be here because of the horses. He would like to have a look at Val's racing stable, and get a ride, perhaps, on the Downs before taking on a strike job. If only Anne were with him, and they could have that ride together! And Jon thought of his first ride with Anne in the South Carolinian woods — that ride from which they had neither of them recovered. There it was! The jolly old house! And here at the door — Holly herself! And at sight of his half-sister, slim and dark-haired in a lilac dress, Jon was visited by a stabbing memory of their father as he had looked that dreadful afternoon, lying dead in the old armchair at Robin Hill. Dad — always lovable — and so good to him!

"Jon! How wonderful to see you!"

Her kiss, he remembered, had always lighted on his eyebrow — she hadn't changed a bit. A half-sister was nicer than a full-sister, after all. With full-sisters you were almost bound to fight a little.

"What a pity you couldn't bring Anne and your mother! But perhaps it's just as well, till this is over. You look quite English still, Jon; and your mouth's as nice and wide as ever. Why do Americans and naval men have such small mouths?"

"Sense of duty, I think. How's Val?"

"Oh, Val's all right. You haven't lost your smile. D'you remember your old room?"

"Rather. And how are you, Holly?"

"So-so. I've become a writer, Jon."

"Splendid!"

"Not at all. Hard labour and no reward."

"Oh!"

"The first book was born too still for anything. A sort of 'African Farm,' without the spiritual frills — if you remember it."

"Rather! But I always left the frills out."

"Yes, we get our objection to frills from the Dad, Jon. He said to me once, 'It'll end in our calling all matter spirit or all spirit matter — I don't know which.'"

"It won't," said Jon; "people love to divide things up. I say, I remember every stick in this room. How are the horses? Can I have a look at them and a ride tomorrow?"

"We'll go forth early and see them at exercise. We've only got three two-year-olds, but one of them's most promising."

"Fine! After that I must go up and get a good, dirty job. I should like to stoke an engine. I've always wanted to know how stokers feel."

"We'll all go. We can stay with Val's mother. It is so lovely to see you, Jon. Dinner's in half an hour."

Jon lingered five minutes at his window. That orchard in full bloom — not mathematically planted, like his just-sold

North Carolinian peach-trees — was as lovely as on that long-ago night when he chased Fleur therein. That was the beauty of England — nothing was planned! How home-sick he had been over there; yes, and his mother, too! He would never go back! How wonderful that sea of apple blossom! Cuckoo again! . . . That alone was worth coming home for. He would find a place and grow fruit, down in the West, Worcestershire or Somerset, or near here — they grew a lot of figs and things at Worthing, he remembered. Turning out his suit-case, he began to dress. Just where he was sitting now, pulling on his American socks, had he sat when Fleur was showing him her Goya dress. Who would have believed then that, six years later, he would want Anne, not Fleur, beside him on this bed! The gong! Dabbing at his hair, bright and stivery, he straightened his tie and ran down.

Val's views on the strike, Val's views on everything, shrewd and narrow as his horseman's face! Those Labour johnnies were up against it this time with a vengeance; they'd have to heel up before it was over. How had Jon liked the Yanks? Had he seen 'Man of War'? No? Good Lord! The thing best worth seeing in America! Was the grass in Kentucky really blue? Only from the distance? Oh! What were they going to abolish over there next? Wasn't there a place down South where you were only allowed to cohabit under the eyes of the town watch? Parliament here were going to put a tax on betting; why not introduce the 'Tote' and have done with it? Personally he didn't care, he'd given up betting! And he glanced at Holly. Jon, too, glanced at her lifted brows and slightly parted lips — a charming face — ironical and tolerant! She drove Val with silken reins!

Val went on: Good job Jon had given up America; if he must farm out of England, why not South Africa, under the poor old British flag; though the Dutch weren't done with yet! A tough lot! They had gone out there, of course, so bright and early that they were real settlers — none of your adventurers, failures-at-home, remittancemen. He didn't like the beggars, but they were stout fellows, all the same. Going to stay in England? Good! What about coming in with them and breeding racing stock?

After an awkward little silence, Holly said slyly:

"Jon doesn't think that's quite a man's job, Val."

"Why not?"

"Luxury trade."

"Blood stock — where would horses be without it?"

"Very tempting," said Jon. "I'd like an interest in it. But I'd want to grow fruit and things for a main line."

"All right, my son; you can grow the apples they eat on Sundays."

"You see, Jon," said Holly, "nobody believes in growing anything in England. We talk about it more and more, and do it less and less. Do you see any change in Jon, Val?"

The cousins exchanged a stare.

"A bit more solid; nothing American, anyway."

Holly murmured thoughtfully: "Why can one always tell an American?"

"Why can one always tell an Englishman?" said Jon.

"Something guarded, my dear. But a national look's the most difficult thing in the world to define. Still, you can't mistake the American expression."

"I don't believe you'll take Anne for one."

"Describe her, Jon."

"No. Wait till you see her."

When, after dinner, Val was going his last round of the stables, Jon said:

"Do you ever see Fleur, Holly?"

"I haven't for eighteen months, I should think. I like her husband; he's an awfully good sort. You were well out of that, Jon. She isn't your kind — not that she isn't charming; but she has to be plumb centre of the stage. I suppose you knew that, really."

Jon looked at her and did not answer. "Of course," murmured Holly, "when one's in love, one doesn't know much."

Up in his room again, the house began to be haunted. Into it seemed to troop all his memories, of Fleur, of Robin Hill — old trees of his boyhood, his father's cigars, his mother's flowers and music; the nursery of his games, Holly's nursery before him, with its window looking out over the clock tower above the stables, the room where latterly he had struggled with rhyme. In through his open bedroom window came the sweet-scented air — England’s self — from the loom of the Downs in the moon-scattered dusk, this first night of home for more than two thousand nights. With Robin Hill sold, this was the nearest he had to home in England now. But they must make one of their own — he and Anne. Home! On the English liner he had wanted to embrace the stewards and stewardesses just because they spoke an English accent. It was, still, as music to his ears. Anne would pick it up faster now — she was very receptive! He had liked the Americans, but he was glad Val had said there was nothing American about him. An owl hooted. What a shadow that barn cast — how soft and old its angle! He got into bed. Sleep — if he wanted to be up to see the horses exercised! Once before, here, he had got up early — for another purpose! And soon he slept; and a form — was it Anne’s, was it Fleur’s — wandered in the corridors of his dreams.

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CHAPTER IV

SOAMES GOES UP TO TOWN

Having seen his wife off from Dover on the Wednesday, Soames Forsyte motored towards town. On the way he decided to make a considerable detour and enter London over Hammersmith, the furthest westerly bridge in reason. There was for him a fixed connection between unpleasantness and the East End, in times of industrial disturbance. And feeling that, if he encountered a threatening proletariat, he would insist on going through with it, he acted in accordance with the other side of a Forsyte's temperament, and looked ahead. Thus it was that he found his car held up in Hammersmith Broadway by the only threatening conduct of the afternoon. A number of persons had collected to interfere with a traffic of which they did not seem to approve. After sitting forward, to say to his chauffeur, "You'd better go round, Riggs," Soames did nothing but sit back. The afternoon was fine, and the car — a landaulette — open, so that he had a good view of the total impossibility of "going round." Just like that fellow Riggs to have run bang into this! A terrific pack of cars crammed with people trying to run out of town; a few cars like his own, half empty, trying to creep past them into town; a motor-omnibus, not overturned precisely, but with every window broken, standing half across the road; and a number of blank-looking people eddying and shifting before a handful of constables! Such were the phenomena which Soames felt the authorities ought to be handling better.

The words, "Look at the blighted plutocrat!" assailed his ears; and in attempting to see the plutocrat in question, he became aware that it was himself. The epithets were unjust! He was modestly attired in a brown overcoat and soft felt hat; that fellow Riggs was plain enough in all conscience, and the car was an ordinary blue. True, he was alone in it, and all the other cars seemed full of people; but he did not see how he was to get over that, short of carrying into London persons desirous of going in the opposite direction. To shut the car, at all events, would look too pointed — so there was nothing for it but to sit still and take no notice! For this occupation no one could have been better framed by Nature than Soames, with his air of slightly despising creation. He sat, taking in little but his own nose, with the sun shining on his neck behind, and the crowd eddying round the police. Such violence as had been necessary to break the windows of the 'bus had ceased, and the block was rather what might have been caused by the Prince of Wales. With every appearance of not encouraging it by seeming to take notice, Soames was observing the crowd. And a vacant-looking lot they were, in his opinion; neither their eyes nor their hands had any of that close attention to business which alone made revolutionary conduct formidable. Youths, for the most part, with cigarettes drooping from their lips — they might have been looking at a fallen horse.

People were born gaping nowadays. And a good thing, too! Cinemas, fags, and football matches — there would be no real revolution while they were on hand; and as there seemed to be more and more on hand every year, he was just feeling that the prospect was not too bleak, when a young woman put her head over the window of his car.

"Could you take me in to town?"

Soames automatically consulted his watch. The hands pointing to seven o'clock gave him extraordinarily little help. Rather a smartly-dressed young woman, with a slight cockney accent and powder on her nose! That fellow Riggs would never have done grinning. And yet he had read in the British Gazette that everybody was doing it. Rather gruffly he said:

"I suppose so. Where do you want to go?"

"Oh, Leicester Square would do me all right."

Great Scott!

The young woman seemed to sense his emotion. "You see," she said, "I got to get something to eat before my show."

Moreover, she was getting in! Soames nearly got out. Restraining himself, he gave her a sidelong look; actress or something — young — round face, made up, naturally — nose a little snub — eyes grey, rather goggly —'mouth — h'm, pretty mouth, slightly common! Shingled — of course.

"It's awfly kind of you!"

"Not at all!" said Soames; and the car moved.

"Think it's going to last, the strike?"

Soames leaned forward.

“Go on, Riggs,” he said; “and put this young lady down in-er — Coventry Street.”

“It’s frightf’ly awk for us, all this,” said the young lady. “I should never’ve got there in time. You seen our show, ‘Dat Lubly Lady’?”

“No.”

“It’s rather good.”

“Oh!”

“We shall have to close, though, if this lasts.”

“Ah!”

The young lady was silent, seeming to recognise that she was not in the presence of a conversationalist.

Soames re-crossed his legs. It was so long since he had spoken to a strange young woman, that he had almost forgotten how it was done. He did not want to encourage her, and yet was conscious that it was his car.

“Comfortable?” he said, suddenly.

The young lady smiled.

“What d’you think?” she said. “It’s a lovely car.”

“I don’t like it,” said Soames.

The young lady’s mouth opened.

“Why?”

Soames shrugged his shoulders; he had only been carrying on the conversation.

“I think it’s rather fun, don’t you?” said the young lady. “Carrying on — you know, like we’re all doing.”

The car was now going at speed, and Soames began to calculate the minutes necessary to put an end to this juxtaposition.

The Albert Memorial, already; he felt almost an affection for it — so guiltless of the times!

“You MUST come and see our show,” said the young lady.

Soames made an effort and looked into her face.

“What do you do in it?” he said.

“Sing and dance.”

“I see.”

“I’ve rather a good bit in the third act, where we’re all in our nighties.”

Soames smiled faintly.

“You’ve got no one like Kate Vaughan now,” he said.

“Kate Vaughan? Who was she?”

“Who was Kate Vaughan?” repeated Soames; “greatest dancer that was ever in burlesque. Dancing was graceful in those days; now it’s all throwing your legs about. The faster you can move your legs, the more you think you’re dancing.” And, disconcerted by an outburst that was bound to lead to something, he averted his eyes.

“You don’t like jazz?” queried the young lady.

“I do not,” said Soames.

“Well, I don’t either — not reely; it’s getting old-fashioned, too.”

Hyde Park Corner already! And the car going a good twenty!

“My word! Look at the lorries; it’s marvellous, isn’t it?”

Soames emitted a confirmatory grunt. The young lady was powdering her nose now, and touching up her lips, with an almost staggering frankness. ‘Suppose anyone sees me?’ thought Soames. And he would never know whether anyone had or not. Turning up the high collar of his overcoat, he said:

“Draughty things, these cars! Shall I put you down at Scott’s?”

“Oh, no. Lyons, please; I’ve only time f’r a snack; got to be on the stage at eight. It’s been awf’ly kind of you. I only hope somebody’ll take me home!” Her eyes rolled suddenly, and she added: “If you know what I mean.”

"Quite!" said Soames, with a certain delicacy of perception. "Here you are. Stop — Riggs!"

The car stopped, and the young lady extended her hand to Soames.

"Good-bye, and thank you!"

"Good-bye!" said Soames. Nodding and smiling, she got out.

"Go on, Riggs, sharp! South Square."

The car moved on. Soames did not look back; in his mind the thought formed like a bubble on the surface of water: 'In the old days anyone who looked and talked like that would have left me her address.' And she hadn't! He could not decide whether or no this marked an advance.

At South Square, on discovering that Michael and Fleur were out, he did not dress for dinner, but went to the nursery. His grandson, now nearly three years old, was still awake, and said: "Hallo!"

"Hallo!" replied Soames, producing a toy watchman's rattle. There followed five minutes of silent and complete absorption, broken fitfully by guttural sounds from the rattle. Then his grandson lay back in his cot, fixed his blue eyes on Soames, and said, "Hallo!"

"Hallo!" replied Soames.

"Ta, ta!" said his grandson.

"Ta, ta!" said Soames, backing to the door, and nearly falling over the silver dog. The interview then terminated, and Soames went downstairs. Fleur had telephoned to say he was not to wait dinner.

Opposite the Goya he sat down. No good saying he remembered the Chartist riots of '48, because he had been born in '55; but he knew his uncle Swithin had been a 'special' at the time. This general strike was probably the most serious internal disturbance that had happened since; and, sitting over his soup, he bored further and further into its possibilities. Bolshevism round the corner — that was the trouble! That and the fixed nature of ideas in England. Because a thing like coal had once been profitable, they thought it must always be profitable. Political leaders, Trades Unionists, newspaper chaps — they never looked an inch before their noses! They'd had since last August to do something about it, and what had they done? Drawn up a report that nobody would look at!

"White wine, sir, or claret?"

"Anything that's open." To have said that in the 'eighties, or even the 'nineties, would have given his father a fit! The idea of drinking claret already opened was then almost equivalent to atheism. Another sign of the slump in ideals.

"What do YOU think about this strike, Coaker?"

The almost hairless man lowered the Sauterne.

"Got no body in it, sir, if you ask me."

"What makes you say that?"

"If it had any body in it, sir, they'd have had the railings of Hyde Park up by now."

Soames poised a bit of his sole. "Shouldn't be surprised if you were right," he said, with a certain approval.

"They make a lot of fuss, but no — there's nothing to it. The dole — that was a clever dodge, sir. Pannus et circesses, as Mr. Mont says, sir."

"Ha! Have you seen this canteen they're running?"

"No, sir; I believe they've got the beetle man in this evening. I'm told there's a proper lot of beetles."

"Ugh!"

"Yes, sir; it's a nahsty insect."

Having finished dinner, Soames lighted the second of his two daily cigars, and took up the earpieces of the wireless. He had resisted this invention as long as he could — but in times like these! "London calling!" Yes, and the British Isles listening! Trouble in Glasgow? There would be — lot of Irish there! More 'specials' wanted? There'd soon be plenty of those. He must tell that fellow Riggs to enlist. This butler chap, too, could well be spared. Trains! They seemed to be running a lot of trains already. After listening with some attention to the Home Secretary, Soames put the earpieces down and took up The British Gazette. It was his first sustained look at this tenuous production, and he hoped it would be his last. The paper and printing were deplorable. Still, he supposed it was something to have got it out at all. Tampering with the freedom of the Press! Those fellows were not finding it so easy as they thought. They had tampered, and the result was a Press much more definitely against them than the Press they had suppressed. Burned their fingers there! And quite unnecessary — old-fashioned notion now — influence of the Press. The war had killed it. Without confidence in truth there was no influence. Politicians or the Press — if you couldn't believe them, they didn't count! Perhaps they would re-discover that some day. In the meantime the papers were like cocktails — tittilators mostly of the appetite and the nerves. How sleepy he was! He hoped Fleur wouldn't be very late coming in. Mad thing, this strike, making everybody do things they weren't accustomed to, just as Industry, too, was beginning — or at least pretending — to recover. But that was it! With every year, in these times, it was more difficult to do what you said you would. Always something or other turning up! The world seemed to live from hand to mouth, and at such a pace, too! Sitting back in the Spanish chair, Soames covered his eyes from the light, and the surge of sleep mounted to his brain; strike or no strike, the soft, inexorable tide washed over him.

A tickling, and over his hand, thin and rather brown, the fringe of a shawl came dangling. Why! With an effort he climbed out of an abyss of dreams. Fleur was standing beside him. Pretty, bright, her eyes shining, speaking quickly, excitedly, it seemed to him.

"Here you are, then, Dad!" Her lips felt hot and soft on his forehead, and her eyes — What was the matter with her? She looked so young — she looked so — how express it?

"So you're in!" he said. "Kit's getting talkative. Had anything to eat?"

"Heaps!"

"This canteen —"

She flung off her shawl.

"I'm enjoying it frightfully."

Soames noted with surprise the rise and fall of her breast, as if she had been running. Her cheeks, too, were very pink.

"You haven't caught anything, have you — in that place?"

Fleur laughed. A sound — delicious and unwarranted.

"How funny you are, Dad! I hope the strike lasts!"

"Don't be foolish!" said Soames. "Where's Michael?"

"Gone up. He called for me, after the House. Nothing doing there, he says."

"What's the time?"

"Past twelve, dear. You must have had a real good sleep."

"Just nodding."

"We saw a tank pass, on the Embankment — going East. It looked awfully queer. Didn't you hear it?"

"No," said Soames.

"Well, don't be alarmed if you hear another. They're on their way to the docks, Michael says."

"Glad to hear it — shows the Government means business. But you must go up. You're overtired."

She gazed at him over the Spanish shawl on her arm — whistling some tune.

"Good-night!" he said. "I shall be coming up in a minute."

She blew him a kiss, twirled round, and went.

"I don't like it," murmured Soames to himself; "I don't know why, but I don't like it."

She had looked too young. Had the strike gone to her head? He rose to squirt some soda-water into a glass — that nap had left a taste in his mouth.

Um — dum — bom — um — dum — bom — um — dum — bom! A grunching noise! Another of those tanks? He would like to see one of those great things! For the idea that they were going down to the docks gave him a feeling almost of exhilaration. With them on the spot the country was safe enough. Putting on his motoring coat and hat, he went out, crossed the empty Square, and stood in the street, whence he could see the Embankment. There it came! Like a great primeval monster in the lamplit darkness, growling and gruntling along, a huge, fantastic tortoise — like an embodiment of inexorable power. 'That'll astonish their weak nerves!' thought Soames, as the tank crawled, grunching, out of sight. He could hear another coming; but with a sudden feeling that it would be too much of a good thing, he turned on his heel. A sort of extravagance about them, when he remembered the blank-looking crowd around his car that afternoon, not a weapon among the lot, nor even a revolutionary look in their eyes!

“No BODY in the strike!” These great crawling monsters! Were the Government trying to pretend that there was? Playing the strong man! Something in Soames revolted slightly. Hang it! This was England, not Russia, or Italy! They might be right, but he didn’t like it! Too — too military! He put his latchkey into the keyhole. Um — dum — bom — um — dum — bom! Well, not many people would see or hear them — this time of night! He supposed they had got here from the country somewhere — he wouldn’t care to meet them wandering about in the old lanes and places. Father and mother and baby tanks — like — like a family of mastodons, m — m? No sense of proportion in things like that! And no sense of humour! He stood on the stairs listening. It was to be hoped they wouldn’t wake the baby!

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CHAPTER V

JEOPARDY

When, looking down the row of faces at her canteen table, Fleur saw Jon Forsyte's, it was within her heart as if, in winter, she had met with honeysuckle. Recovering from that faint intoxication, she noted his appearance from further off. He was sitting seemingly indifferent to food; and on his face, which was smudged with coal-dust and sweat, was such a smile as men wear after going up a mountain or at the end of a long run — tired, charming, and as if they have been through something worth while. His lashes — long and dark as in her memory — concealed his eyes, and quarrelled with his brighter hair, touzled to the limit of its shortness.

Continuing to issue her instructions to Ruth La Fontaine, Fleur thought rapidly. Jon! Dropped from the skies into her canteen, stronger-looking, better knit; with more jaw, and deeper set eyes, but frightfully like Jon! What was to be done about it? If only she could turn out the lights, steal up behind, lean over and kiss him on that smudge above his left eye! Yes! And then — what? Silly! And now, suppose he came out of his far-away smile and saw her! As likely as not he would never come into her canteen again. She remembered his conscience! And she took a swift decision. Not to-night! Holly would know where he was staying. At her chosen time, on her chosen ground, if — on second thoughts, she wanted to play with fire. And, giving a mandate to Ruth La Fontaine concerning buns, she looked back over her shoulder at Jon's absorbed and smiling face, and passed out into her little office.

And second thoughts began. Michael, Kit, her father; the solid security of virtue and possessions; the peace of mind into which she had passed of late! All jeopardised for the sake of a smile, and a scent of honeysuckle! No! That account was closed. To reopen it was to tempt Providence. And if to tempt Providence was the practice of Modernity, she wasn't sure whether she was modern. Besides, who knew whether she COULD reopen that account? And she was seized by a gust of curiosity to see that wife of his — that substitute for herself. Was she in England? Was she dark, like her brother Francis? Fleur took up her list of purchases for the morrow. With so much to do, it was idiotic even to think about such things! The telephone! All day its bell had been ringing; since nine o'clock that morning she had been dancing to its pipe.

"Yes . . .? Mrs. Mont speaking. What? But I've ordered them. . . . Oh! But really I MUST give them bacon and eggs in the morning. They can't start on cocoa only. . . . How? The Company can't afford? . . . Well! Do you want an effective service or not? . . . Come round to see you about it? I really haven't time. . . . Yes, yes . . . now please do be nice to me and tell the manager that they simply must be properly fed. They look so tired. He'll understand. . . . Yes. . . . Thank you ever so!" She hung up the receiver. "Damn!"

Someone laughed. "Oh! It's you, Holly! Cheese-paring and red tape as usual! This is the fourth time today. Well, I don't care — I'm going ahead. Look! Here's Harridge's list for tomorrow. It's terrific, but it's got to be. Buy it all; I'll take the risk, if I have to go round and slobber on him." And beyond the ironic sympathy on Holly's face she seemed to see Jon's smile. He should be properly fed — all of them should! And, without looking at her cousin, she said:

"I saw Jon in there. Where has he dropped from?"

"Paris. He's putting up with us in Green Street."

Fleur stuck her chin forward, and gave a little laugh.

"Quaint to see him again, all smudgy like that! His wife with him?"

"Not yet," said Holly; "she's in Paris still, with his mother."

"Oh! It'd be fun to see him some time!"

"He's stoking an engine on the local service — goes out at six, and doesn't get in till about midnight."

"Of course; I meant after, if the strike ever ends."

Holly nodded. "His wife wants to come over and help; would you like her in the canteen?"

"If she's the right sort."

"Jon says: Very much so."

"I don't see why an American should worry herself. Are they going to live in England?"

“Yes.”

“Oh! Well, we’re both over the measles.”

“If you get them again grown-up, Fleur, they’re pretty bad.”

Fleur laughed. “No fear!” And her eyes, hazel, clear, glancing, met her cousin’s eyes, deep, steady, grey.

“Michael’s waiting for you with the car,” said Holly.

“All right! Can you carry on till they’ve finished? Norah Curfew’s on duty at five tomorrow morning. I shall be round at nine, before you start for Harridge’s. If you think of anything else, stick it on the list — I’ll make them stump up somehow. Good-night, Holly.”

“Good-night, my dear.”

Was there a gleam of pity in those grey eyes? Pity, indeed!

“Give Jon my love. I do wonder how he likes stoking! We must get some more washbasins in.”

Sitting beside Michael, who was driving their car, she saw again, as it were, Jon’s smile in the glass of the wind-screen, and in the dark her lips pouted as if reaching for it. Measles — they spotted you, and raised your temperature! How empty the streets were, now that the taxis were on strike! Michael looked round at her.

“Well, how’s it going?”

“The beetle man was a caution, Michael. He had a face like a ravaged wedge, a wave of black hair, and the eyes of a lost soul; but he was frightfully efficient.”

“Look! There’s a tank; I was told of them. They’re going down to the docks. Rather provocative! Just as well there are no papers for them to get into.”

Fleur laughed.

“Father’ll be at home. He’s come up to protect me. If there really was shooting, I wonder what he’d do — take his umbrella?”

“Instinct. How about you and Kit? It’s the same thing.”

Fleur did not answer. And when, after seeing her father, she went up-stairs, she stood at the nursery door. The tune that had excited Soames’ surprise made a whiffling sound in the empty passage. “L’amour est enfant de Boheme; il n’a jamais jamais connu de loi; si tu ne m’aimes pas, je t’aime, et si je t’aime, prends garde a toi!” Spain, and the heartache of her honeymoon! “Voice in the night crying!” Close the shutters, muffle the ears — keep it out! She entered her bedroom and turned up the lights. It had never seemed to her so pretty, with its many mirrors, its lilac and green, its shining silver. She stood looking at her face, into which had come two patches of red, one in each cheek. Why wasn’t she Norah Curfew — dutiful, uncomplicated, selfless, who would give Jon eggs and bacon at half-past five tomorrow morning — Jon with a clean face! Quickly she undressed. Was that wife of his her equal undressed? To which would he award the golden apple if she stood side by side with Anne? And the red spots deepened in her cheeks. Overtired — she knew that feeling! She would not sleep! But the sheets were cool. Yes, she preferred the old smooth Irish linen to that new rough French grass-bleached stuff. Ah! Here was Michael coming in, coming up to her! Well! No use to be unkind to him — poor old Michael! And in his arms, she saw — Jon’s smile.

* * * * *

That first day spent in stoking an engine had been enough to make anyone smile. An engine-driver almost as youthful, but in private life partner in his own engineering works, had put Jon ‘wise’ to the mystery of getting level combustion. “A tricky job, and very tiring!” Their passengers had behaved well. One had even come up and thanked them. The engine-driver had winked at Jon. There had been some hectic moments. Supping pea soup, Jon thought of them with pleasure. It had been great sport, but his hands and arms felt wrenched. “Oil them tonight,” the engine-driver had said.

A young woman was handing him ‘jacket’ potatoes. She had marvellously clear, brown eyes, something like Anne’s — only Anne’s were like a water nymph’s. He took a potato, thanked her, and returned to a stoker’s dreams. Extraordinary pleasure in being up against it — being in England again, doing something for England! One had to leave one’s country to become conscious of it. Anne had telegraphed that she wanted to come over and join him. If he wired back “No,” she would come all the same. He knew that much after nearly two years of marriage. Well, she would see England at its best. Americans didn't really know what England was. Her brother had seen nothing but London; he had spoken bitterly — a girl, Jon supposed, though nothing had been said of her. In Francis Wilmot's history of England the gap accounted for the rest. But everybody ran down England, because she didn't slop over, or blow her own trumpet.

"Butter?"

"Thanks, awfully. These potatoes are frightfully good."

"So glad."

"Who runs this canteen?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Michael Mont mostly; he's a member of Parliament."

Jon dropped his potato.

"Mrs. Mont? Gracious! She's a cousin of mine. Is she here?"

"Was. Just gone, I think."

Jon's far-sighted eyes travelled round the large and dingy room. Fleur! How amazing!

"Treacle pudding?"

"No, thanks. Nothing more."

"There'll be coffee, tea, or cocoa, and eggs and bacon, tomorrow at 5.45."

"Splendid! I think it's wonderful."

"It is, rather, in the time."

"Thank you awfully. Good-night!"

Jon sought his coat. Outside were Val and Holly in their car.

"Hallo, young Jon! You're a nice object."

"What job have you caught, Val?"

"Motor lorry — begin tomorrow."

"Fine!"

"This'll knock out racing for a bit."

"But not England."

"England? Lord — no! What did you think?"

"Abroad they were saying so."

"Abroad!" growled Val. "They would!"

And there was silence at thirty miles an hour.

From his bedroom door Jon said to his sister:

"They say Fleur runs that canteen. Is she really so old now?"

"Fleur has a very clear head, my dear. She saw you there. No second go of measles, Jon."

Jon laughed.

"Aunt Winifred," said Holly, "will be delighted to have Anne here on Friday, she told me to tell you."

"Splendid! That's awfully good of her."

"Well, good-night; bless you. There's still hot water in the bathroom."

In his bath Jon lay luxuriously still. Sixty hours away from his young wife, he was already looking forward with impatience to her appearance on Friday. And so Fleur ran that canteen! A fashionable young woman with a clear and, no doubt, shingled head — he felt a great curiosity to see her again, but nothing more. Second go of measles! Not much! He had suffered too severely from the first. Besides, he was too glad to be back — result of long, half-acknowledged homesickness. His mother had been home-sick for Europe; but HE had felt no assuagement in Italy and France. It was England he had wanted. Something in the way people walked and talked; in the smell and the look of everything; some good-humoured, slow, ironic essence in the air, after the tension of America, the shrillness of Italy, the clarity of Paris. For the first time in five years his nerves felt coated. Even those features of his native land which offended the aesthetic soul, were comforting. The approaches to London, the countless awful little houses of brick and slate which his own great-grandfather, ‘Superior Dosset’ Forsyte, had helped, so his father had once told him, to build; the many little new houses, rather better, but still bent on compromise; the total absence of symmetry or plan; the ugly railway stations; the cockney voices, the lack of colour, taste, or pride in people’s dress — all seemed comfortable, a guarantee that England would always be England.

And so Fleur was running that canteen! He would be seeing her! He would like to see her! Oh, yes!

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CHAPTER VI

SNUFFBOX

In the next room Val was saying to Holly:

"Had a chap I knew at college to see me today. Wanted me to lend him money. I once did, when I was jolly hard up myself, and never got it back. He used to impress me frightfully — such an awfully good-looking, languid beggar. I thought him top notch as a 'blood.' You should see him now!"

"I did. I was coming in as he was going out; I wondered who he was. I never saw a more bitterly contemptuous expression on a face. Did you lend him money?"

"Only a fiver."

"Well, don't lend him any more."

"Hardly. D'you know what he's done? Gone off with that Louis Quinze snuffbox of Mother's that's worth about two hundred. There's been nobody else in that room."

"Good heavens!"

"Yes, it's pretty thick. He had the reputation of being the fastest man up at the 'Varsity in my time — in with the gambling set. Since I went out to the Boer war I've never heard of him."

"Isn't your mother very annoyed, Val?"

"She wants to prosecute — it belonged to my granddad. But how can we — a college pal! . . . Besides, we shouldn't get the box back."

Holly ceased to brush her hair.

"It's rather a comfort to me — this," she said.

"What is?"

"Why, everybody says the standard of honesty's gone down. It's nice to find someone belonging to our generation that had it even less."

"Rum comfort!"

"Human nature doesn't alter, Val. I believe in the young generation. We don't understand them — brought up in too settled times."

"That may be. My own dad wasn't too particular. But what am I to do about this?"

"Do you know his address?"

"He said the Brummell Club would find him — pretty queer haunt, if I remember. To come to sneaking things like that! It's upset me fright-fully."

Holly looked at him lying on his back in bed. Catching her eyes on him, he said:

"But for you, old girl, I might have gone a holy mucker myself."

"Oh, no, Val! You're too open-air. It's the indoor people who go really wrong."

Val grinned.

"Something in that — the only exercise I ever saw that fellow take was in a punt. He used to bet like anything, but he didn't know a horse from a hedge-hog. Well, Mother must put up with it, I can't do anything."

Holly came up to his bed.

"Turn over, and I'll tuck you up."

Getting into bed herself, she lay awake, thinking of the man who had gone a holy mucker, and the contempt on his face — lined, dark, well-featured, with prematurely greying hair, and prematurely faded rings round the irises of the eyes; of his clothes, too, so preternaturally preserved, and the worn, careful school tie. She felt she knew him. No moral sense, and ingrained contempt for those who had. Poor Val! HE hadn't so much moral sense that he need be despised for it! And yet —! With a good many risky male instincts, Val had been a loyal comrade all these years. If in philosophic reach or aesthetic taste he was not advanced, if he knew more of horses than of poetry, was he any the worse? She sometimes thought he was the better. The horse didn't change shape or colour every five years and start reviling its predecessor. The horse was a constant, kept you from going too fast, and had a nose to stroke — more than you could say of a poet. They had, indeed, only one thing in common — a liking for sugar. Since the publication of her novel Holly had become member of the 1930 Club. Fleur had put her up, and whenever she came to town, she studied modernity there. Modernity was nothing but speed! People who blamed it might as well blame telephone, wireless, flying machine, and quick lunch counter. Beneath that top-dressing of speed, modernity was old. Women had worn fewer clothes when Jane Austen began to write. Drawers — the historians said — were only nineteenth-century productions. And take modern talk! After South Africa the speed of it certainly took one's wind away; but the thoughts expressed were much her own thoughts as a girl, cut into breathless lengths, by car and telephone bell. Take modern courtships! They resulted in the same thing as under George the Second, but took longer to reach it, owing to the motor-cycle and the standing lunch. Take modern philosophy! People had no less real philosophy than Martin Tupper or Izaak Walton; only, unlike those celebrated ancients, they had no time to formulate it. As to a future life — modernity lived in hope, and not too much of that, as everyone had, from immemorial time. In fact, as a novelist naturally would, Holly jumped to conclusions. Scratch — she thought — the best of modern youth, and you would find Charles James Fox and Perdita in golf sweaters! A steady sound retrieved her thoughts. Val was asleep. How long and dark his eyelashes still were, but his mouth was open!

"Val," she said, very softly; "Val! Don't snore, dear!" . . .

* * * * *

A snuffbox may be precious, not so much for its enamel, its period, and its little brilliants, as because it has belonged to one's father. Winifred, though her sense of property had been well proved by her retention of Montague Dartie 'for poorer,' throughout so many years, did not possess her brother Soames' collecting instinct, nor, indeed, his taste in objects which George Forsyte had been the first to call 'of bigotry and virtue.' But the further Time removed her father James — a quarter of a century by now — the more she revered his memory. As some ancient general or philosopher, secured by age from competition, is acclaimed year by year a greater genius, so with James! His objection to change, his perfect domesticity, his power of saving money for his children, and his dread of not being told anything, were haloed for her more and more with every year that he spent underground. Her fashionable aspirations waning with the increase of adipose, the past waxed and became a very constellation of shining memories. The removal of this snuffbox — so tangible a reminder of James and Emily — tried her considerable equanimity more than anything that had happened to her for years. The thought that she had succumbed to the distinction of a voice on the telephone, caused her positive discomfort. With all her experience of distinction, she ought to have known better! She was, however, one of those women who, when a thing is done, admit the fact with a view to having it undone as soon as possible; and, having failed with Val, who merely said, "Awfully sorry, Mother, but there it is — jolly bad luck!" she summoned her brother.

Soames was little less than appalled. He remembered seeing James buy the box at Jobson's for hardly more than one-tenth of what it would fetch now. Everything seemed futile if, in such a way, one could lose what had been nursed for forty years into so really magnificent a state of unearned increment. And the fellow who had taken it was of quite good family, or so his nephew said! Whether the honesty of the old Forsytes, in the atmosphere of which he had been brought up and turned out into the world, had been inherited or acquired — derived from their blood or their Banks — he had never considered. It had been in their systems just as the proverb "Honesty is the best policy" was in that of the private banking which then obtained. A slight reverie on banking was no uncommon affection of the mind in one who could recall the repercussion of "Understart and Darnett's" failure, and the disappearance one by one of all the little, old Banks with legendary names. These great modern affairs were good for credit and bad for novelists — run on a Bank — there had been no better reading! Such monster concerns couldn't 'go broke,' no matter what their clients did; but whether they made for honesty in the individual, Soames couldn't tell. The snuffbox was gone, however; and if Winifred didn't take care, she wouldn't get it back. How, precisely, she was to take care he could not at present see; but he should advise her to put it into the hands of somebody at once.

"But whose, Soames?"

"There's Scotland Yard," answered Soames, gloomily. "I believe they're very little good, except to make a fuss. There's that fellow I employed in the Ferrar case. He charges very high."

"I shouldn't care so much," said Winifred, "if it hadn't belonged to the dear Dad."

"Ruffians like that," muttered Soames, "oughtn't to be at large."

"And to think," said Winifred, "that it was especially to see him that Val came to stay here."

"Was it?" said Soames, gloomily. "I suppose you're sure that fellow took it?"

"Quite. I'd had it out to polish only a quarter of an hour before. After he went, I came back into the room at once, to put it away, and it was gone. Val had been in the room the whole time."

Soames dwelled for a moment, then rejected a doubt about his nephew, for, though connected by blood with that precious father of his, Montague Dartie, and a racing man to boot, he was half a Forsyte after all.

"Well," he said, "shall I send you this man — his name's Becroft — always looks as if he'd over-shaved himself, but he's got a certain amount of nous. I should suggest his getting in touch with that fellow's club."

"Suppose he's already sold the box?" said Winifred.

"Yesterday afternoon? Should doubt that; but it wants immediate handling. I'll see Becroft as I go away. Fleur's overdoing it, with this canteen of hers."

"They say she's running it very well. I do think all these young women are so smart."

"Quick enough," grumbled Soames, "but steady does it in the long run."

At that phrase — a maxim never far away from the lips of the old Forsytes in her youthful days — Winifred blinked her rather too light eyelashes.

"That was always rather a bore, you know, Soames. And in these days, if you're not quick, things move past you, so."

Soames gathered his hat. "That snuffbox will, if we don't look sharp."

"Well, thank you, dear boy. I do hope we get it back. The dear Pater was so proud of it, and when he died it wasn't worth half what it is now."

"Not a quarter," said Soames, and the thought bored into him as he walked away. What was the use of having judgment, if anybody could come along and pocket the results! People sneered at property nowadays; but property was a proof of good judgment — it was one's amour propre half the time. And he thought of the amour propre Bosinney had stolen from him in those far-off days of trouble. Yes, even marriage — was an exercise of judgment — a pitting of yourself against other people. You 'spotted a winner,' as they called it, or you didn't — Irene hadn't been 'a winner'— not exactly! Ah! And he had forgotten to ask Winifred about that young Jon Forsyte who had suddenly come back into the wind. But about this snuffbox! The Brummell Club was some sort of betting place, he had heard; full of gamblers, and people who did and sold things on commission, he shouldn't wonder. That was the vice of the day; that and the dole. Work? No! Sell things on commission — motor-cars, for choice. Brummell Club! Yes! This was the place! It had a window — he remembered. No harm, anyway, in asking if the fellow really belonged there! And entering, he enquired:

"Mr. Stainford a member here?"

"Yes. Don't know if he's in. Mr. Stainford been in, Bob?"

"Just come in."

"Oh!" said Soames, rather taken aback.

"Gentleman to see him, Bob."

A rather sinking sensation occurred within Soames.

"Come with me, sir."

Soames took a deep breath, and his legs moved. In an alcove off the entrance — somewhat shabby and constricted — he could see a man lolling in an old armchair, smoking a cigarette through a holder. He had a little red book in one hand and a small pencil in the other, and held them as still as if he were about to jot down a conviction that he had not got. He wore a dark suit with little lines; his legs were crossed, and Soames noted that one foot in a worn brown shoe, treed and polished against age to the point of pathos, was slowly moving in a circle.

"Gemman to see you, sir."

Soames now saw the face. Its eyebrows were lifted in a V reversed, its eyelids nearly covered its eyes. Together with the figure, it gave an impression of really remarkable languor. Thin to a degree, oval and pale, it seemed all shadow and slightly aquiline feature. The foot had become still, the whole affair still. Soames had the curious feeling of being in the presence of something arrogantly dead. Without time for thought, he began:

"Mr. Stainford, I think? Don't disturb yourself. My name is Forsyte. You called at my sister's in Green Street yesterday afternoon."

A slight contraction of the lines round that small mouth was followed by the words:

"Will you sit down?"

The eyes had opened now, and must once have been beautiful. They narrowed again, so that Soames could not help feeling that their owner had outlived everything except himself. He swallowed a qualm and resumed:

"I just wanted to ask you a question. During your call, did you by any chance happen to notice a Louis Quinze snuffbox on the table? It's — er — disappeared, and we want to fix the time of its loss."

As a ghost might have smiled, so did the man in the chair; his eyes disappeared still further.

"Afraid not."

With the thought, 'He's got it!' Soames went on:

"I'm sorry — the thing had virtue as an heirloom. It has obviously been stolen. I wanted to narrow down the issue. If you'd noticed it, we could have fixed the exact hour — on the little table just where you were sitting — blue enamel."

The thin shoulders wriggled slightly, as though resenting this attempt to place responsibility on them.

"Sorry I can't help you; I noticed nothing but some rather good marqueterie."

'Coolest card I ever saw,' thought Soames. 'Wonder if it's in his pocket.'

"The thing's unique," he said slowly. "The police won't have much difficulty. Well, thanks very much. I apologise for troubling you. You knew my nephew at college, I believe. Good-morning."

"Good-morning."

From the door Soames took a stealthy glance. The figure was perfectly motionless, the legs still crossed, and above the little red book the pale forehead was poised under the smooth grizzling hair. Nothing to be made of that! But the fellow had it, he was sure.

He went out and down to the Green Park with a most peculiar feeling. Sneak thief! A gentleman to come to that! The Elderson affair had been bad, but somehow not pitiful like this. The whitened seams of the excellent suit, the traversing creases in the once admirable shoes, the faded tie exactly tied, were evidences of form preserved, day by day, from hand to mouth. They afflicted Soames. That languid figure! What DID a chap do when he had no money and couldn't exert himself to save his life? Incapable of shame — that was clear! He must talk to Winifred again. And, turning on his heel, Soames walked back towards Green Street. Debouching from the Park, he saw on the opposite side of Piccadilly the languid figure. It, too, was moving in the direction of Green Street. Phew! He crossed over and followed. The chap had an air. He was walking like someone who had come into the world from another age — an age which set all its store on 'form.' He felt that 'this chap' would sooner part with life itself than exhibit interest in anything. Form! Could you carry contempt for emotion to such a pitch that you could no longer feel emotion? Could the lifted eyebrow become more important to you than all the movements of the heart and brain? Threadbare peacock's feathers walking, with no peacock inside! To show feeling was perhaps the only thing of which that chap would be ashamed. And, a little astonished at his own powers of diagnosis, Soames followed round corner after corner, till he was actually in Green Street. By George! The chap WAS going to Winifred's! 'I'll astonish his weak nerves!' thought Soames. And, suddenly hastening, he said, rather breathlessly, on his sister's very doorstep:

"Ah! Mr. Stainford! Come to return the snuffbox?"

With a sigh, and a slight stiffening of his cane on the pavement, the figure turned. Soames felt a sudden compunction — as of one who has jumped out at a child in the dark. The face, unmoved, with eyebrows still raised and lids still lowered, was greenishly pale, like that of a man whose heart is affected; a faint smile struggled on the lips. There was fully half a minute's silence, then the pale lips spoke.

"Depends. How much?"

What little breath was in Soames' body left him. The impudence! And again the lips moved.

“You can have it for ten pounds.”

“I can have it for nothing,” said Soames, “by asking a policeman to step here.”

The smile returned. “You won’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Not done.”

“Not done!” repeated Soames. “Why on earth not? Most barefaced thing I ever knew.”

“Ten pounds,” said the lips. “I want them badly.”

Soames stood and stared. The thing was so sublime; the fellow as easy as if asking for a match; not a flicker on a face which looked as if it might pass into death at any moment. Great art! He perceived that it was not the slightest use to indulge in moral utterance. The choice was between giving him the ten pounds or calling a policeman. He looked up and down the street.

“No — there isn’t one in sight. I have the box here — ten pounds.”

Soames began to stammer. The fellow was exercising on him a sort of fascination. And suddenly the whole thing tickled him. It was rich!

“Well!” he said, taking out two five-pound notes. “For brass —!”

A thin hand removed a slight protuberance from a side pocket.

“Thanks very much. Here it is! Good-morning!”

The fellow was moving away. He moved with the same incomparable languor; he didn’t look back. Soames stood with the snuffbox in his hand, staring after him.

“Well,” he said, aloud, “that’s a specimen they can’t produce now,” and he rang Winifred’s bell.

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Chapter VII

Michael has Qualms

During the eight days of the General Strike Michael's somewhat hectic existence was relieved only by the hours spent in a House of Commons so occupied in meditating on what it could do, that it could do nothing. He had formed his own opinion of how to settle the matter, but as no one else had formed it, the result was inconspicuous. He watched, however, with a very deep satisfaction the stock of British character daily quoted higher at home and abroad; and with a certain uneasiness the stock of British intelligence becoming almost unsaleable. Mr. Blythe's continual remark: "What the bee aitch are they all about?" met with no small response in his soul. What WERE they about? He had one conversation with his father-inlaw on the subject.

Over his egg Soames had said:

"Well, the Budget's dished."

Over his marmalade Michael answered:

"Used you to have this sort of thing in your young days, sir?"

"No," said Soames; "no Trade Unionism then, to speak of."

"People are saying this'll be the end of it. What's your opinion of the strike as a weapon, sir?"

"For the purposes of suicide, perfect. It's a wonder they haven't found that out long ago."

"I rather agree, but what's the alternative?"

"Well," said Soames, "they've got the vote."

"Yes, that's always said. But somehow Parliament seems to matter less and less; there's a directive sense in the country now, which really settles things before we get down to them in Parliament. Look at this strike, for instance; we can do nothing about it."

"There must be government," said Soames.

"Administration — of course. But all we seem able to do in Parliament is to discuss administration afterwards without much effect. The fact is, things swoop around too quick for us nowadays."

"Well," said Soames, "you know your own business best. Parliament always was a talking shop." And with that unconscious quotation from Carlyle — an extravagant writer whom he curiously connected with revolution — he looked up at the Goya, and added: "I shouldn't like to see Parliament done away with, though. Ever heard any more of that red-haired young woman?"

"Marjorie Ferrar? Oddly enough, I saw her yesterday in Whitehall. She told me she was driving for Downing Street."

"She spoke to you?"

"Oh, yes. No ill-feeling."

"H'm!" said Soames. "I don't understand this generation. Is she married?"

"No."

"That chap MacGown had a lucky escape — not that he deserved it. Fleur doesn't miss her evenings?"

Michael did not answer. He did not know. Fleur and he were on such perfect terms that they had no real knowledge of each other's thoughts. Then, feeling his father-inlaw's grey eye gimletting into him, he said hastily:

"Fleur's all right, sir."

Soames nodded. "Don't let her overdo this canteen."

"She's thoroughly enjoying it — gives her head a chance."

"Yes," said Soames, "she's got a good little head, when she doesn't lose it." He seemed again to consult the Goya, and added:

"By the way, that young Jon Forsyte is over here — they tell me — staying at Green Street, and stoking an engine or something. A boy-and-girl affair; but I thought you ought to know."

"Oh!" said Michael, "thanks. I hadn't heard he was back."

"I don't suppose she's heard, either," said Soames guardedly; "I told them not to tell her. D'you remember, in America, up at Mount Vernon, when I was taken ill?"

"Yes, sir; very well."

"Well, I wasn't. Fact is, I saw that young man and his wife talking to you on the stairs. Thought it better that Fleur shouldn't run up against them. These things are very silly, but you never can tell."

"No," said Michael, drily; "you never can tell. I remember liking the look of him a good deal."

"H'm!" muttered Soames: "He's the son of his father, I expect."

And, from the expression on his face, Michael formed the notion that this was a doubtful advantage.

No more was said, because of Soames' lifelong conviction that one did not say any more than one need say; and of Michael's prejudice against discussing Fleur seriously, even with her father. She had seemed to him quite happy lately. After five-and-a-half years of marriage, he was sure that mentally Fleur liked him, that physically she had no objection to him, and that a man was not sensible if he expected much more. She consistently declined, of course, to duplicate Kit, but only because she did not want to be put out of action again for months at a time. The more active, the happier she was — over this canteen for instance, she was in her glory. If, indeed, he had realised that Jon Forsyte was being fed there, Michael would have been troubled; as it was, the news of the young man's reappearance in England made no great impression. The Country held the field of one's attention those strenuous days. The multiple evidence of patriotism exhilarated him — undergraduates at the docks, young women driving cars, shopfolk walking cheerfully to their work, the swarm of 'specials,' the general 'carrying-on.' Even the strikers were good-humoured. A secret conviction of his own concerning England was being reinforced day by day, in refutation of the pessimists. And there was no place so unEnglish at the moment, he felt, as the House of Commons, where people had nothing to do but pull long faces and talk over 'the situation.'

The news of the General Strike's collapse caught him as he was going home after driving Fleur to the canteen. A fizz and bustle in the streets, and the words: "Strike Over" scrawled extempore at street corners, preceded the "End of the Strike — Official" of the hurrying news-vendors. Michael stopped his car against the curb and bought a news-sheet. There it was! For a minute he sat motionless with a choky feeling, such as he had felt when the news of the Armistice came through. A sword lifted from over the head of England! A source of pleasure to her enemies dried up! People passed and passed him, each with a news-sheet, or a look in the eye. They were taking it almost as soberly as they had taken the strike itself. 'Good old England! We're a great people when we're up against it!' he thought, driving his car slowly on into Trafalgar Square. A group of men, who had obviously been strikers, stood leaning against the parapet. He tried to read their faces. Glad, sorry, ashamed, resentful, relieved? For the life of him he could not tell. Some defensive joke seemed going the round of them.

'No wonder we're a puzzle to foreigners!' thought Michael: 'The least understood people in the world!'

He moved on slowly round the square, into Whitehall. Here were some slight evidences of feeling. The block was thick around the Cenotaph and the entrance to Downing Street; and little cheers kept breaking out. A 'special' was escorting a lame man across the street. As he came back, Michael saw his face. Why, it was Uncle Hilary! His mother's youngest brother, Hilary Charwell, Vicar of St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads.

"Hallo, Michael!"

"You a 'special,' Uncle Hilary? Where's your cloth?"

"My dear! Are you one of those who think the Church debarred from mundane pleasure? You're not getting old-fashioned, Michael?"

Michael grinned. He had a real affection for Uncle Hilary, based on admiration for his thin, long face, so creased and humorous, on boyish recollection of a jolly uncle, on a suspicion that in Hilary Charwell had been lost a Polar explorer, or other sort of first-rate adventurer.

"That reminds me, Michael; when are you coming round to see us? I've got a topping scheme for airing 'The Meads'."

"Ah!" said Michael; "overcrowding's at the bottom of everything, even this strike."

"Right you are, my son. Come along, then, as soon as you can. You fellows in Parliament ought always to see things at first hand. You suffer from auto-intoxication in that House. And now pass on, young man, you're impeding the traffic."

Michael passed on, grinning. Good old Uncle Hilary! Humanising religion, and living dangerously — had climbed all the worst peaks in Europe; no sense of his own importance and a real sense of humour. Quite the best type of Englishman! They had tried to make him a dignitary, but he had jibbed at the gaiters and hat-ropes. He was what they called a 'live wire' and often committed the most dreadful indiscretions; but everybody liked him, even his own wife. Michael dwelt for a moment on his Aunt May. Forty — he supposed — with three children and fourteen hundred things to attend to every day; shingled, and cheerful as a sandboy. Nice-looking woman, Aunt May!

Having garaged his car, he remembered that he had not lunched. It was three o'clock. Munching a biscuit, he drank a glass of sherry, and walked over to the House of Commons. He found it humming in anticipation of a statement. Sitting back, with his legs stretched out, he had qualms. What things had been done in here! The abolitions of Slavery and of Child Labour, the Married Woman's Property Act, Repeal of the Corn Laws; but could they be done nowadays? And if not — was it a life? He had said to Fleur that you couldn't change your vocation twice and survive. But did he want to survive? Failing Foggartism — and Foggartism hadn't failed only because it hadn't started — what did he really care about?

Leaving the world better than he found it? Sitting there, he couldn't help perceiving a certain vagueness about such an aspiration, even when confined to England. It was the aspiration of the House of Commons; but in the ebb and flow of Party, it didn't seem to make much progress. Better to fix on some definite bit of administrative work, stick to it, and get something done. Fleur wanted him to concentrate on Kenya for the Indians. Again rather remote, and having little to do with England. What definite work was most needed in connection with England? Education? Bunkered again! How tell what was the best direction into which to turn education? When they brought in State Education, for instance, they had thought the question settled. Now people were saying that State education had ruined the State. Emigration? Attractive, but negative. Revival of agriculture? Well, the two combined were Foggartism, and he knew by now that nothing but bitter hardship would teach those lessons; you might talk till you were blue in the face without convincing anyone but yourself.

What then?

"I've got a topping scheme for airing 'The Meads'." The Meads was one of the worst slum parishes in London. 'Clear the slums!' thought Michael; 'that's practical anyway!' You could smell the slums, and feel them. They stank and bit and bred corruption. And yet the dwellers therein loved them; or at least preferred them to slums they knew not of! And slum-dwellers were such good sorts! Too bad to play at shuttlecock with them! He must have a talk with Uncle Hilary. Lots of vitality in England still — numbers of red-haired children! But the vitality got sooted as it grew up — like plants in a back garden. Slum clearance, smoke abolition, industrial peace, emigration, agriculture, and safety in the air! 'Them's my sentiments!' thought Michael. 'And if that isn't a large enough policy for any man, I'm —!'

He turned his face towards the Statement, and thought of his uncle's words about this 'House.' Were they all really in a state of auto-intoxication here — continual slow poisoning of the tissues? All these chaps around him thought they were doing things. And he looked at the chaps. He knew most of them, and had great respect for many, but collectively he could not deny that they looked a bit dazed. His neighbour to the right was showing his front teeth in an asphyxiated smile. 'Really,' he thought; 'it's heroic how we all keep awake day after day!'

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CHAPTER VIII

SECRET

It would not have been natural that Fleur should rejoice in the collapse of the General Strike. A national outlook over such a matter was hardly in her character. Her canteen was completing the re-establishment in her of the social confidence which the Marjorie Ferrar affair had so severely shaken; and to be thoroughly busy with practical matters suited her. Recruited by Norah Curfew, by herself, Michael, and his Aunt Lady Alison Charwell, she had a first-rate crew of helpers of all ages, most of them in Society. They worked in the manner popularly attributed to negroes; they craned at nothing — not even beetles. They got up at, or stayed up to, all hours. They were never cross and always cheery. In a word, they seemed inspired. The difference they had made in the appearance of the railway's culinary premises was startling to the Company. Fleur herself was 'on the bridge' all the time. On her devolved the greasing of the official wheels, the snipping off of red tape in numberless telephonic duels, and the bearding of the managerial face. She had even opened her father's pocket to supplement the shortcomings she encountered. The volunteers were fed to repletion, and — on Michael's inspiration — she had undermined the pickets with surreptitious coffee dashed with rum, at odd hours of their wearisome vigils. Her provisioning car, entrusted to Holly, ran the blockade, by leaving and arriving, as though Harridge's, whence she drew her supplies, were the last place in its thoughts.

"Let us give the strikers," said Michael, "every possible excuse to wink the other eye."

The canteen, in fact, was an unqualified success. She had not seen Jon again, but she lived in that peculiar mixture of fear and hope which signifies a real interest in life. On the Friday Holly announced to her that Jon's wife had arrived — might she bring her down next morning?

"Oh! yes," said Fleur: "What is she like?"

"Attractive — with eyes like a water-nymph's or so Jon thinks; but it's quite the best type of water-nymph."

"M-m!" said Fleur.

She was checking a list on the telephone next day when Holly brought Anne. About Fleur's own height, straight and slim, darker in the hair, browner in complexion, browner in the eye (Fleur could see what Holly had meant by "water-nymph") her nose a little too sudden, her chin pointed and her teeth very white, her successor stood. Did she know that Jon and she —?

And stretching out her free hand, Fleur said:

"I think it's awfully sporting of you as an American. How's your brother Francis?"

The hand she squeezed was brown, dry, warm; the voice she heard only faintly American, as if Jon had been at it.

"You were just too good to Francis. He always talks of you. If it hadn't been for you —"

"That's nothing. Excuse me. . . . Ye-es? . . . No! If the Princess comes, ask her to be good enough to come when they're feeding. Yes — yes — thank you! To-morrow? Certainly. . . . Did you have a good crossing?"

"Frightful! I was glad Jon wasn't with me. I do so hate being green, don't you?"

"I never am," said Fleur.

That girl had Jon to bend above her when she was green! Pretty? Yes. The browned face was very alive — rather like Francis Wilmot's, but with those enticing eyes, much more eager. What was it about those eyes that made them so unusual and attractive? — surely the suspicion of a squint! She had a way of standing, too — a trick of the neck, the head was beautifully poised. Lovely clothes, of course! Fleur's glance swept swiftly down to calves and ankles. Not thick, not crooked! No luck!

"I think it's just wonderful of you to let me come and help."

"Not a bit. Holly will put you wise."

"That sounds nice and homey."

"Oh! We all use your expressions now. Will you take her provisioning, Holly?"

When the girl had gone, under Holly's wing, Fleur bit her lip. By the uncomplicated glance of Jon's wife she guessed that Jon had not told her. How awfully young! Fleur felt suddenly as if she herself had never had a youth. Ah! If Jon had not been caught away from her! Her bitten lip quivered, and she buried it in the mouthpiece of the telephone.

Whenever again — three or four times — before the canteen was closed, she saw the girl, she forced herself to be cordial. Instinctively she felt that she must shut no doors on life just now. What Jon's reappearance meant to her she could not tell; but no one should put a finger this time in whatever pie she chose to make. She was mistress of her face and movements now, as she had never been when she and Jon were babes in the wood. With a warped pleasure she heard Holly's: "Anne thinks you wonderful, Fleur!" No! Jon had not told his wife about her. It was like him, for the secret had not been his alone! But how long would that girl be left in ignorance? On the day the canteen closed she said to Holly:

"No one has told Jon's wife that he and I were once in love, I suppose?"

Holly shook her head.

"I'd rather they didn't, then."

"Of course not, my dear. I'll see to it. The child's nice, I think."

"Nice," said Fleur, "but not important."

"You've got to allow for the utter strangeness of everything. Americans are generally important, sooner or later."

"To themselves," said Fleur, and saw Holly smile. Feeling that she had revealed a corner of her feelings, she smiled too.

"Well, so long as they get on. They do, I suppose?"

"My dear, I've hardly seen Jon, but I should say it's perfectly successful. Now the strike's over they're coming down to us at Wansdon."

"Good! Well, this is the end of the old canteen. Let's powder our noses and get out; Father's waiting for me with the car. Can we drop you?"

"No, thanks; I'll walk."

"What? The old gene? Funny how hard things die!"

"Yes; when you're a Forsyte," murmured Holly: "You see, we don't show our feelings. It's airing them that kills feelings."

"Ah!" said Fleur: "Well, God bless you, as they say, and give Jon my love. I'd ask them to lunch, but you're off to Wansdon?"

"The day after tomorrow."

In the little round mirror Fleur saw her face mask itself more thoroughly, and turned to the door.

"I MAY look in at Aunt Winifred's, if I've time. So long!"

Going down the stairs she thought: 'So it's air that kills feelings!'

Soames, in the car, was gazing at Rigg's back. The fellow was as lean as a rail.

"Finished with that?" he said to her.

"Yes, dear."

"Good job, too. Wearing yourself to a shadow."

"Why? Do I look thin, Dad?"

"No," said Soames, "no. That's your mother. But you can't keep on at that rate. Would you like some air? Into the Park, Riggs."

Passing into that haven, he murmured:

"I remember when your grandmother drove here every day, regular as clockwork. People had habits, then. Shall we stop and have a look at that Memorial affair they made such a fuss about?"

"I've seen it, Dad."

"So have I," said Soames. "Stunt sculpture! Now, that St. Gaudens statue at Washington WAS something." And he looked at her sidelong. Thank goodness she didn't know of the way he had fended her off from young Jon Forsyte over there. She must have heard by now that the fellow was in London, and staying at her Aunt's too! And now the strike was off, and normal railway services beginning again, he would be at a loose end! But perhaps he would go back to Paris; his mother was there still, he understood. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask. Instinct, however, potent only in his dealings with Fleur, stopped him. If she had seen the young man, she wouldn't tell him of it. She was looking somehow secret — or was that just imagination?

No! He couldn't see her thoughts. Good thing, perhaps! Who could afford to have his thoughts seen? The recesses, ramifications, excesses of thought! Only when sieved and filtered was thought fit for exposure. And again Soames looked sidelong at his daughter.

She was thinking, indeed, to purposes that would have upset him. How was she going to see Jon alone before he left for Wansdon? She could call tomorrow, of course, openly at Green Street, and probably NOT see him. She could ask him to lunch in South Square, but hardly without his wife or her own husband. There was, in fact, no way of seeing him alone except by accident. And she began trying to plan one. On the point of perceiving that the essence of an accident was that it could not be planned, she planned it. She would go to Green Street at nine in the morning to consult Holly and Anne on the canteen accounts. After such strenuous days Holly and Anne might surely be breakfasting in bed. Val had gone back to Wansdon, Aunt Winifred never got up! Jon MIGHT be alone! And she turned to Soames:

"Awfully sweet of you, Dad, to be airing me; I AM enjoying it."

"Like to get out and have a look at the ducks? The swans have got a brood at Mapledurham again this year."

The swans! How well she remembered the six little grey destroyers following the old swans over the green-tinged water, that six-year-gone summer of her love! Crossing the grass down to the Serpentine, she felt a sort of creeping sweetness. But nobody — nobody should know of what went on inside her. Whatever happened — and, after all, most likely nothing would happen — she would save face this time — strongest motive in the world, as Michael said.

"Your grandfather used to bring me here when I was a shaver," said her father's voice beside her. It did not add: "And I used to bring that wife of mine when we were first married." Irene! She had liked water and trees. She had liked all beauty, and she hadn't liked him!

"Eton jackets. Sixty years ago and more. Who'd have thought it then?"

"Who'd have thought what, Dad? That Eton jackets would still be in?"

"That chap — Tennyson, wasn't it? —'The old order changeth, giving place to new.' I can't see you in high necks and skirts down to your feet, to saying nothing of bustles. Women then were defended up to the nines, but you knew just as much about them as you do now — and that's precious little."

"I wonder. Do you think people's passions are what they used to be, Dad?"

Soames brooded into his hand. Now, why had she said that? He had once told her that a grand passion was a thing of the past, and she had replied that she had one. And suddenly he was back in steamy heat, redolent of earth and potted pelargonium, kicking a hot water pipe in a greenhouse at Mapledurham. Perhaps she'd been right; there was always a lot of human nature about.

"Passions!" he said: "Well, you still read of people putting their heads under the gas. In old days they used to drown themselves. Let's go and have tea, at that kiosk place."

When they were seated, and the pigeons were enjoying his cake, he took a long look at her. She had her legs crossed — and very nice they were! — and just that difference in her body from the waist up, from so many young women he saw about. She didn't sit in a curve, but with a slight hollow in her back, giving the impression of backbone and a poise to her head and neck. She was shingled again — the custom had unexpected life — but, after all, her neck was remarkably white and round. Her face — short, with its firm rounded chin, very little powder and no rouge, with its dark-lashed white lids, clear-glancing hazel eyes, short, straight nose and broad low brow, with the chestnut hair over its ears, and its sensibly kissable mouth — really it was a credit!

"I should think," he said, "you'd be glad to have more time for Kit again. He's a rascal. What d'you think he asked me for yesterday — a hammer!"

"Yes; he's always breaking things up. I smack him as little as possible, but it's unavoidable at times — nobody else is allowed to. Mother got him used to it while we were away, so he looks on it as all in the day's work."

"Children," said Soames, "are funny things. We weren't made such a fuss of when I was young."

"Forgive me, Dad, but I think YOU make more fuss of him than anybody."

"What?" said Soames: "I?"

“You do exactly as he tells you. Did you give him the hammer?”

“Hadn’t one — what should I carry hammers about for?”

Fleur laughed. “No; but you take him so seriously. Michael takes him ironically.”

“The little chap’s got a twinkle,” said Soames.

“Mercifully. Didn’t you spoil ME, Dad?”

Soames gaped at a pigeon.

“Can’t tell,” he said. “Do you feel spoiled?”

“When I want things, I want things.”

He knew that; but so long as she wanted the right things!

“And when I don’t get them, I’m not safe.”

“Who says that?”

“No one ever says it, but I know it.”

H’m! What was she wanting now? Should he ask? And, as if attending to the crumbs on his lapel, he took ‘a lunar.’ That face of hers, whose eyes for a moment were off guard, was dark with some deep — he couldn’t tell! Secret! That’s what it was!

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Chapter IX

Rencounter

With the canteen accounts in her hand, Fleur stepped out between her tubbed bay-trees. A quarter to nine by Big Ben! Twenty odd minutes to walk across the Green Park! She had drunk her coffee in bed, to elude questions — and there, of course, was Dad with his nose glued to the dining-room window. She waved the accounts, and he withdrew his face as if they had flicked him. He was ever so good, but he shouldn't always be dusting her — she wasn't a piece of china!

She walked briskly. She had no honeysuckle sensations this morning, but felt hard and bright. If Jon had come back to England to stay, she must get him over. The sooner the better, without fuss! Passing the geraniums in front of Buckingham Palace, just out and highly scarlet, she felt her blood heating. Not walk so fast or she would arrive damp! The trees were far advanced; the Green Park, under breeze and sun, smelled of grass and leaves. Spring had not smelled so good for years. A longing for the country seized on Fleur. Grass and trees and water — her hours with Jon had been passed among them — one hour in this very Park, before he took her down to Robin Hill! Robin Hill had been sold to some peer or other, and she wished him joy of it — she knew its history as of some unlucky ship! That house had 'done in' her father, and Jon's father, yes — and his grandfather, she believed, to say nothing of herself. One would not be 'done in' again so easily! And, passing into Piccadilly, Fleur smiled at her green youth. In the early windows of the Club nicknamed by George Forsyte the 'Iseeum,' no one of his compeers sat as yet, above the moving humours of the street, sipping from glass or cup, and puffing his conclusions out in smoke. Fleur could just remember him, her old Cousin George Forsyte, who used to sit there, fleshy and sardonic behind the curving panes; Cousin George, who had owned the 'White Monkey' up in Michael's study. Uncle Montague Dartie, too, whom she remembered because the only time she had seen him he had pinched her in a curving place, saying: "What are little girls made of?" so that she had clapped her hands when she heard that he had broken his neck, soon after; a horrid man, with fat cheeks and a dark moustache, smelling of scent and cigars. Rounding the last corner, she felt breathless. Geraniums were in her Aunt's window boxes — but not the fuchsias yet. Was THEIR room the one she herself used to have? And, taking her hand from her heart, she rang the bell.

"Ah! Smither, anybody down?"

"Only Mr. Jon's down yet, Miss Fleur."

Why did hearts wobble? Sickening — when one was perfectly cool!

"He'll do for the moment, Smither. Where is he?"

"Having breakfast, Miss Fleur."

"All right; show me in. I don't mind having another cup myself."

Under her breath, she declined the creaking noun who was preceding her to the dining-room: "Smither: O Smither: Of a Smither: To a Smither: A Smither." Silly!

"Mrs. Michael Mont, Mr. Jon. Shall I get you some fresh coffee, Miss Fleur?"

"No, thank you, Smither." Stays creaked, the door was shut. Jon was standing up.

"Fleur!"

"Well, Jon?"

She could hold his hand and keep her pallor, though the blood was in HIS cheeks, no longer smudged.

"Did I feed you nicely?"

"Splendidly. How are you, Fleur? Not tired after all that?"

"Not a bit. How did you like stoking?"

"Fine! My engine-driver was a real brick. Anne will be so disappointed; she's having a lie-off."

"She was quite a help. Nearly six years, Jon; you haven't changed much."

"Nor you."

"Oh! *I* have. Out of knowledge."

"Well, I don't see it. Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes. Sit down and go on with yours. I came round to see Holly about some accounts. Is she in bed, too?"

"I expect so."

"Well, I'll go up directly. How does England feel, Jon?"

"Topping. Can't leave it again. Anne says she doesn't mind."

"Where are you going to settle?"

"Somewhere near Val and Holly, if we can get a place, to grow things."

"Still on growing things?"

"More than ever."

"How's the poetry?"

"Pretty dud."

Fleur quoted:

"'Voice in the night crying, down in the old sleeping Spanish city darkened under her white stars.'"

"Good Lord! Do you remember that?"

"Yes."

His eyes were as straight, his lashes as dark as ever.

"Would you like to meet Michael, Jon, and see my infant?"

"Rather!"

"When do you go down to Wansdon?"

"To-morrow or the day after."

"Then, won't you both come and lunch tomorrow?"

"We'd love to."

"Half-past one. Holly and Aunt Winifred, too. Is your mother still in Paris?"

"Yes. She thinks of settling there."

"Well, Jon — things fall on their feet, don't they?"

"They do."

"Shall I give you some more coffee? Aunt Winifred prides herself on her coffee."

"Fleur, you do look splendid."

"Thank you! Have you been down to see Robin Hill?"

"Not yet. Some potentate's got it now."

"Does your — does Anne find things amusing here?"

"She's terribly impressed — says we're a nation of gentlemen. Did you ever think that?"

"Positively — no; comparatively — perhaps."

"It all smells so good here."

"The poet's nose. D'you remember our walk at Wansdon?"

"I remember everything, Fleur."

"That's honest. So do I. It took me some time to remember that I'd forgotten. How long did it take you?"

"Still longer, I expect."

"Well, Michael's the best male I know."

"Anne's the best female."

"How fortunate — isn't it? How old is she?"

"Twenty-one."

"Just right for you. Even if we hadn't been star-crossed, I was always too old for you. God! Weren't we young fools?"

"I don't see that. It was natural — it was beautiful."

"Still got ideals? Marmalade? It's Oxford."

"Yes. They can't make marmalade out of Oxford."

"Jon, your hair grows exactly as it used to. Have you noticed mine?"

"I've been trying to."

"Don't you like it?"

"Not so much, quite; and yet —"

"You mean I shouldn't look well out of the fashion. Very acute! You don't mind HER being shingled, apparently."

"It suits Anne."

"Did her brother tell you much about me?"

"He said you had a lovely house; and nursed him like an angel."

"Not like an angel; like a young woman of fashion. There's still a difference."

"Anne was awfully grateful for that. She's told you?"

"Yes. But I'm afraid, between us, we sent Francis home rather cynical. Cynicism grows here; d'you notice it in me?"

"I think you put it on."

"My dear! I take it off when I talk to you. You were always an innocent. Don't smile — you were! That's why you were well rid of me. Well, I never thought I should see you again."

"Nor I. I'm sorry Anne's not down."

"You've never told her about me."

"How did you know that?"

"By the way she looks at me."

"Why should I tell her?"

"No reason in the world. Let the dead past — It's fun to see you again, though. Shake hands. I'm going up to Holly now."

Their hands joined over the marmalade on his plate.

"We're not children now, Jon. Till tomorrow, then! You'll like my house. A revederci!"

Going up the stairs she thought with resolution about nothing.

"Can I come in, Holly?"

"Fleur! My dear!"

That thin, rather sallow face, so charmingly intelligent, was propped against a pillow. Fleur had the feeling that, of all people, it was most difficult to keep one's thoughts from Holly.

"These accounts," she said. "I'm to see that official ass at ten. Did you order all these sides of bacon?"

The thin sallow hand took the accounts, and between the large grey eyes came a furrow.

"Nine? No — yes; that's right. Have you seen Jon?"

"Yes; he's the only early bird. Will you all come to lunch with us tomorrow?"

"If you think it'll be wise, Fleur."

"I think it'll be pleasant."

She met the search of the grey eyes steadily, and with secret anger. No one should see into her — no one should interfere!

"All right then, we'll expect you all four at one-thirty. I must run now."

She did run; but since she really had no appointment with any "official ass," she went back into the Green Park and sat down.

So that was Jon — now! Terribly like Jon — then! His eyes deeper, his chin more obstinate — that perhaps was all the difference. He still had his sunny look; he still believed in things. He still — admired her. Ye-es! A little wind talked above her in a tree. The day was surprisingly fine — the first really fine day since Easter! What should she give them for lunch? How should she deal with Dad? He must not be there! To have perfect command of oneself was all very well; to have perfect command of one’s father was not so easy. A pattern of leaves covered her short skirt, the sun warmed her knees; she crossed them and leaned back. Eve’s first costume — a pattern of leaves. . . . “Wise?” Holly had said, Who knew? Shrimp cocktails? No! English food. Pancakes — certainly! . . . To get rid of Dad, she must propose herself with Kit at Mapledurham for the day after; then he would go, to prepare for them. Her mother was still in France. The others would be gone to Wansdon. Nothing to wait for in town. A nice warm sun on her neck. A scent of grass — of honeysuckle! Oh! dear!

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CHAPTER X

AFTER LUNCH

That the most pregnant function of human life is the meal, will be admitted by all who take part in these recurrent crises. The impossibility of getting down from table renders it the most formidable of human activities among people civilised to the point of swallowing not only their food but their feelings.

Such a conclusion at least was present to Fleur during that lunch. That her room was Spanish, reminded her that it was not with Jon she had spent her honeymoon in Spain. There had been a curious moment, too, before lunch; for, the first words Jon had spoken on seeing Michael, had been:

“Hallo! This is queer! Was Fleur with you that day at Mount Vernon?”

What was this? Had she been kept in the dark?

Then Michael had said:

“You remember, Fleur? The young Englishman I met at Mount Vernon.”

“‘Ships that pass in the night!’” said Fleur.

Mount Vernon! So THEY had met there! And she had not!

“Mount Vernon is lovely. But you ought to see Richmond, Anne. We could go after lunch. You haven’t been to Richmond for ages, I expect, Aunt Winifred. We could take Robin Hill on the way home, Jon.”

“Your old home, Jon? Oh! Do let’s!”

At that moment she hated the girl’s eager face at which Jon was looking.

“There’s the potentate,” he said.

“Oh!” said Fleur, quickly, “He’s at Monte Carlo. I read it yesterday. Could you come, Michael?”

“Afraid I’ve got a Committee. And the car can only manage five.”

“It would be just too lovely!”

Oh! that American enthusiasm! It was comforting to hear her Aunt’s flat voice opining that it would be a nice little run — the chestnuts would be out in the Park.

Had Michael really a Committee? She often knew what Michael really had, she generally knew more or less what he was thinking, but now she did not seem to know. In telling him last night of this invitation to lunch, she had carefully obliterated the impression by an embrace warmer than usual — he must not get any nonsense into his head about Jon! When, too, to her father she had said:

“Couldn’t Kit and I come down to you the day after tomorrow; but you’ll want a day there first, I’m afraid, if Mother’s not there,” how carefully she had listened to the tone of his reply:

“H’m! Ye — es! I’ll go down tomorrow morning.”

Had he scented anything; had Michael scented anything? She turned to Jon.

“Well, Jon, what d’you think of my house?”

“It’s very like you.”

“Is that a compliment?”

“To the house? Of course.”

“Francis didn’t exaggerate then?”

“Not a bit.”

“You haven’t seen Kit yet. We’ll have him down. Coaker, please ask Nurse to bring Kit down, unless he’s asleep . . . . He’ll be three in July; quite a good walker already. It makes one frightfully old!”

The entrance of Kit and his silver dog caused a sort of cooing sound, speedily checked, for three of the women were of Forsyte stock, and the Forsytes did not coo. He stood there, blue and rather Dutch, with a slight frown and his hair bright, staring at the company.

"Come here, my son. This is Jon — your second cousin once removed."

Kit advanced.

"S'all I bwing my 'orse in?"

"Horse, Kit. No; shake hands."

The small hand went up; Jon's hand came down.

"You got dirty nails."

She saw Jon flush, heard Anne's: "Isn't he just too cunning?" and said:

"Kit, you're very rude. So would you have, if you'd been stoking an engine."

"Yes, old man, I've been washing them ever since, but I can't get them clean."

"Why?"

"It's got into the skin."

"Le' me see."

"Go and shake hands with your great-aunt, Kit."

"No."

"Dear little chap," said Winifred. "Such a bore, isn't it, Kit?"

"Very well, then, go out again, and get your manners, and bring them in."

"All wight."

His exit, closed in by the silver dog, was followed by a general laugh; Fleur said, softly:

"Little wretch — poor Jon!" And through her lashes she saw Jon give her a grateful look . . . .

In this mid-May fine weather the view from Richmond Hill had all the width and leafy charm which had drawn so many Forsytes in phaetons and barouches, in hansom cabs and motor cars from immemorial time, or at least from the days of George the Fourth. The winding river shone discreetly, far down there; and the trees of the encompassing landscape, though the oaks were still goldened, had just begun to have a brooding look; in July they would be heavy and blueish. Curiously, few houses showed among the trees and fields; very scanty evidence of man, within twelve miles of London! The spirit of an older England seemed to have fended jerry-builders from a prospect sacred to the ejaculations of four generations.

Of those five on the terrace Winifred best expressed that guarding spirit, with her:

"Really, it's a very pretty view!"

A view — a view! And yet a view was not what it had been when old Jolyon travelled the Alps with that knapsack of brown leather and square shape, still in his grandson Jon's possession; or Swithin above his greys, rolling his neck with consequence toward the lady by his side, had pointed with his whip down at the river and pouted: "A pooty little view!" Or James, crouched over his long knees in some gondola, had examined the Grand Canal at Venice with doubting eyes, and muttered: "They never told me the water was this colour!" Or Nicholas, taking his constitutional at Matlock, had opined that the gorge was the finest in England. No, a view was not what it had been! George Forsyte and Montague Dartie, with their backs to it, quizzically contemplating the Liberty ladies brought down to be fed, had started that rot; and now the young folk didn't use the expression, but just ejaculated: "Christ!" or words to that effect.

But there was Anne, of course, like an American, with clasped hands, and:

"Isn't it too lovely, Jon? It's sort of romantic!"

And so to the Park, where Winifred chanted automatically at sight of the chestnuts, and every path and patch of fern and fallen tree drew from Holly or Jon some riding recollection.

"Look, Anne, that's where I threw myself off my pony as a kid when I lost my stirrup and got so bored with being bumped."

Or: "Look, Jon! Val and I had a race down that avenue. Oh! and there's the log we used to jump. Still there!"

And Anne was in ecstasies over the deer and the grass, so different from the American varieties.

To Fleur the Park meant nothing.

"Jon," she said, suddenly, "what are you going to do to get in at Robin Hill?"

“Tell the lodge-keeper that I want to show my wife where I lived as a boy; and give him a couple of good reasons. I don’t want to see the house, all new furniture and that.”

“Couldn’t we go in at the bottom, through the coppice?” and her eyes added: “As we did that day.”

“We might come on someone, and get turned back.”

The couple of good reasons secured their top entrance to the grounds; the ‘family’ was not ‘in residence.’

Bosinney’s masterpiece wore its mellowest aspect. The sun-blinds were down, for the sun was streaming on its front, past the old oak tree, where was now no swing. In Irene’s rose-garden, which had replaced old Jolyon’s fernery, buds were forming, but only one rose was out.

“‘Rose, you Spaniard!’” Something clutched Fleur’s heart. What was Jon thinking — what remembering, with those words and that frown? Just here she had sat between his father and his mother, believing that she and Jon would live here some day; together watch the roses bloom, the old oak drop its leaves; together say to their guests: “Look! There’s the Grand Stand at Epsom — see? Just above those poplars!”

And now she could not even walk beside him, who was playing guide to that girl, his wife! Beside her aunt she walked instead. Winifred was extremely intrigued. She had never yet seen this house, which Soames had built with the brains of young Bosinney; which Irene, with ‘that unfortunate little affair of hers’ had wrecked; this house where Old Uncle Jolyon, and Cousin Jolyon had died; and Irene, so ironically, had lived and had this boy Jon — a nice boy, too; this house of Forsyte song and story. It was very distinguished and belonged to a peer now, which, since it had gone out of the family, seemed suitable. In the walled fruit-garden, she said to Fleur:

“Your grandfather came down here once, to see how it was getting on. I remember his saying: ‘It’ll cost a pretty penny to keep up.’ And I should think it does. But it was a pity to sell it. Irene’s doing, of course! She never cared for the family. Now, if only —” But she stopped short of the words: “you and Jon had made a match of it.”

“What on earth would Jon have done, Auntie, with a great place like this so near London? He’s a poet.”

“Yes,” murmured Winifred — not very quick, because in her youth quickness had not been fashionable. “There’s too much glass, perhaps.” And they went down through the meadow.

The coppice! Still there at the bottom of the field. But Fleur lingered now, stood by the fallen log, waited till she could say:

“Listen! The cuckoo, Jon!”

The cuckoo’s song, and the sight of bluebells under the larch trees! Beside her Jon stood still! Yes, and the Spring stood still. There went the song — over and over!

“It was HERE we came on your mother, Jon, and our stars were crossed. Oh, Jon!”

Could so short a sound mean so much, say so much, be so startling? His face! She jumped on to the log at once.

“No ghosts, my dear!”

And, with a start, Jon looked up at her.

She put her hands on his shoulders and jumped down. And among the bluebells they went on. And the bird sang after them.

“That bird repeats himself,” said Fleur.

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CHAPTER XI

PERAMBULATION

The instinct in regard to his daughter, which by now formed part of his protective covering against the machinations of Fate, had warned Soames, the day before, that Fleur was up to something when she went out while he was having breakfast. Seen through the window waving papers at him, she had an air of unreality, or at least an appearance of not telling him anything. As something not quite genuine in the voice warns a dog that he is about to be left, so was Soames warned by the ostentation of those papers. He finished his breakfast, therefore, too abruptly for one constitutionally given to marmalade, and set forth to Green Street. Since that young fellow Jon was staying there, this fashionable locality was the seat of any reasonable uneasiness. If, moreover, there was a place in the world where Soames could still unbutton his soul, it was his sister Winifred's drawing-room, on which in 1879 he himself had impressed so deeply the personality of Louis Quinze that, in spite of jazz and Winifred's desire to be in the heavier modern fashion, that monarch's incurable levity was still to be observed.

Taking a somewhat circuitous course and looking in at the Connoisseurs' Club on the way, Soames did not arrive until after Fleur's departure. The first remark from Smither confirmed the uneasiness which had taken him forth.

"Mr. Soames! Oh! What a pity — Miss Fleur's just gone! And nobody down yet but Mr. Jon."

"Oh!" said Soames. "Did she see him?"

"Yes, sir. He's in the dining-room, if you'd like to go in."

Soames shook his head.

"How long are they staying, Smither?"

"Well, I did hear Mrs. Val say they were all going back to Wansdon the day after tomorrow. We shall be all alone again in case you were thinking of coming to us, Mr. Soames."

Again Soames shook his head. "Too busy," he said.

"What a beautiful young lady Miss Fleur 'as grown, to be sure; such a colour she 'ad this morning!"

Soames gave vent to an indeterminate sound. The news was not to his liking, but he could hardly say so in front of an institution. One could never tell how much Smither knew. She had creaked her way through pretty well every family secret in her time, from the days which his own matrimonial relations supplied Timothy's with more than all the gossip it required. Yes, and were not his matrimonial relations, twice-laid, still supplying the raw material? Curiously sinister it seemed to him just then, that the son of his supplanter Jolyon should be here in this house, the nearest counterfeit of that old homing centre of the Forsytes, Timothy's in the Bayswater Road. What a perversity there was in things! And, repeating the indeterminate sound, he said:

"By the way, I suppose that Mr. Stainford never came here again?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Soames; he called yesterday to see Mr. Val; but Mr. Val was gone."

"He did — did he?" said Soames, round-eyed. "What did he take this time?"

"Oh! Of course I knew better than to let him in."

"You didn't give him Mr. Val's address in the country?"

"Oh, no, sir; he knew it."

"Deuce he did!"

"Shall I tell the mistress you're here, Mr. Soames? She must be nearly down by now."

"No; don't disturb her."

"I am that sorry, sir; it's always such a pleasure to her to see you."

Old Smither bridling! A good soul! No such domestics nowadays! And, putting on his hat, Soames touched its brim, murmuring:

"Well, good-bye, Smither. Give her my love!" and went out.

‘So!’ he thought, ‘Fleur’s seen that boy!’ The whole thing would begin over again! He had known it! And, very slowly, with his hat rather over his eyes, he made for Hyde Park Corner. This was for him a moment in deep waters, when the heart must be hardened to this dangerous decision or to that. With the tendency for riding past the hounds inherited from his father James in all matters which threatened the main securities of life, Soames rushed on in thought to the ruin of his daughter’s future, wherein so sacredly was embalmed his own.

“Such a colour she ‘ad this morning!” When she waved those papers at him, she was pale enough — too pale! A confounded chance! Breakfast time, too — worst time in the day — most intimate! His naturally realistic nature apprehended all the suggestions that lay in breakfast. Those who breakfasted alone together, slept together as often as not. Putting things into her head! Yes; and they were not boy and girl now! Well, it all depended on what their feelings were, if they still had any. And who was to know? Who, in heaven’s name, was to know? Automatically he had begun to encompass the Artillery Memorial. A great white thing which he had never yet taken in properly, and didn’t know that he wanted to. Yet somehow it was very real, and suited to his mood — faced things; nothing high-flown about that gun — short, barking brute of a thing; or those dark men — drawn and devoted under their steel hats! Nothing pretty-pretty about that memorial — no angels’ wings there! No Georges and no dragons, nor horses on the prance; no panoply, and no panache! There it ‘sot’— as they used to say — squatted like a great white toad on the nation’s life. Concreted thunder. Not an illusion about it! Good thing to look at once a day, and see what you’d got to avoid. ‘I’d like to rub the noses of those Crown Princes and military cocks-o’-the-walk on it,’ thought Soames, ‘with their — what was it? —“fresh and merry wars!”’ And, crossing the road in the sunshine, he passed into the Park, moving towards Knightsbridge.

But about Fleur? Was he going to take the bull by the horns, or to lie low? Must be one thing or the other. He walked rapidly now, concentrated in face and movement, stalking as it were his own thoughts with a view to finality. He passed out at Knightsbridge, and after unseeing scrutiny of two or three small shops where in his time he had picked up many a bargain, for himself or shopman, he edged past Tattersall’s. That hung on — they still sold horses there, he believed! Horses had never been in his line, but he had not lived in Montpellier Square without knowing the habitues of Tattersall’s by sight. Like everything else that was crusted, they’d be pulling it down before long, he shouldn’t wonder, and putting up some motor place or cinema!

Suppose he talked to Michael? No! Worse than useless. Besides, he couldn’t talk about Fleur and that boy to anyone — thereby hung too long a tale; and the tale was his own. Montpellier Square! He had turned into the very place, whether by design he hardly knew. It hadn’t changed — but was all slicked up since he was last there, soon after the war. Builders and decorators must have done well lately — about the only people who had. He walked along the right side of the narrow square, where he had known turbulence and tragedy. There the house was, looking much as it used to, not quite so neat, and a little more florid. Why had he ever married that woman? What had made him so set on it? Well! She had done her best to deter him. But — God! — how he had wanted her! To this day he could recognise that. And at first — at first, he had thought, and perhaps she had thought — but who could tell? — HE never could! And then slowly — or was it quickly? — the end; a ghastly business! He stood still by the square railings, and stared at the doorway that had been his own, as if from its green paint and its brass number he might receive inspiration how to choke love in his own daughter for the son of his own wife — yes, how to choke it before it spread and choked her?

And as, on those days and nights of his first married life, returning home, he had sought in vain for inspiration how to awaken love, so now no inspiration came to tell him how to strangle love. And, doggedly, he turned out of the little square.

In a way it was ridiculous to be fussing about the matter; for, after all, Michael was a good young fellow, and her marriage far from unhappy, so far as he could see. As for young Jon, presumably he had married for love; there hadn’t been anything else to marry for, he believed — unless he had been misinformed, the girl and her brother had been museum pieces, two Americans without money to speak of. And yet — there was the moon, and he could not forget how Fleur had always wanted it. A desire to have what she hadn’t yet got was her leading characteristic. Impossible, too, to blink his memory of her, six years ago — to forget her body crumpled and crushed into the sofa in the dark that night when he came back from Robin Hill and broke the news to her. Perusing with his mind the record since, Soames had an acute and comfortless feeling that she had, as it were, been marking time, that all her fluttering activities, even the production of Kit, had been in the nature of a makeshift. Like the age to which she belonged, she had been lifting her feet up and down without getting anywhere, because she didn’t know where she wanted to get. And yet, of late, since she had been round the world, he had seemed to notice something quieter and more solid in her conduct, as if settled purposes were pushing up, and she were coming to terms at last with her daily life. Look, for instance, at the way she had tackled this canteen! And, turning his face homeward, Soames had a vision of a common not far from Mapledurham, where some fool had started a fire which had burned the gorse, and of the grass pushing up, almost impudently green and young, through the charred embers of that conflagration. Rather like things generally, when you thought of it! The war had burned them all out, but things, yes, and people, too — one noticed — were beginning to sprout a bit, as if they felt again it might be worth while. Why, even he himself had regained some of his old connoisseur's desire to have nice things! It all depended on what you saw ahead, on whether you could eat and drink because tomorrow you didn't die. With this Dawes Settlement and Locarno business, and the General Strike broken, there might even be another long calm, like the Victorian, which would make things possible. He was seventy-one, but one could always dwell on Timothy, who had lived to be a hundred, fixed star in shifting skies. And Fleur — only twenty-four — might almost outlive the century if she, or, rather the century, took care and bottled up its unruly passions, its disordered longings, and all that silly rushing along to nowhere in particular. If they steadied down, the age might yet become a golden, or a platinum, age at any rate. Even he might live to see the income tax at half-a-crown. 'No,' he thought, confused between his daughter and the age; 'she mustn't go throwing her cap over the windmill. It's short-sighted!' And, his blood warmed by perambulation, he became convinced that he would not speak to her, but lie low, and trust to that common-sense, of which she surely had her share — oh, yes! 'Just keep my eyes open, and speak to no one,' he thought; 'least said, soonest mended.'

He had come again to the Artillery Memorial; and for the second time he moved around it. No! A bit of a blot — it seemed to him, now — so literal and heavy! Would that great white thing help Consols to rise? Some thing with wings might, after all, have been preferable. Some encouragement to people to take shares or go into domestic service; help, in fact, to make life liveable, instead of reminding them all the time that they had already once been blown to perdition and might again be. Those Artillery fellows — he had read somewhere — loved their guns, and wanted to be reminded of them. But did anybody else love their guns, or want reminder? Not those Artillery fellows would look at this every day outside St. George's Hospital, but Tom, Dick, Harry, Peter, Gladys, Joan and Marjorie. 'Mistake!' thought Soames; 'and a pretty heavy one. Something sedative, statue of Vulcan, or somebody on a horse; that's what's wanted!' And remembering George III on a horse, he smiled grimly. Anyway, there the thing was, and would have to stay! But it was high time artists went back to nymphs and dolphins, and other evidences of a settled life.

When at lunch Fleur suggested that he would want a day's law at Mapledurham before she and Kit came down, he again felt there was something behind; but, relieved enough at getting her, he let 'the sleeping dog' lie; nor did he mention his visit to Green Street.

"The weather looks settled," he said. "You want some sun after that canteen. They talk about these ultra-violet rays. Plain sunshine used to be good enough. The doctors'll be finding something extra-pink before long. If they'd only let things alone!"

"Darling, it amuses them."

"Re-discovering what our grandmothers knew so well that we've forgotten 'em, and calling 'em by fresh names! A thing isn't any more wholesome to eat, for instance, because they've invented the word 'vitamin.' Why, your grandfather ate an orange every day of his life, because his old doctor told him to, at the beginning of the last century. Vitamins! Don't you let Kit get faddy about his food. It's a long time before he'll go to school — that's one comfort. School feeding!"

"Did they feed you so badly, Dad?"

"Badly! How we grow up, I don't know. We ate out principal meal in twenty minutes, and were playing football ten minutes after. But nobody thought about digestion, then."

"Isn't that an argument for thinking of it now?"

"A good digestion," said Soames, "is the whole secret of life." And he looked at his daughter. Thank God! SHE wasn't peaky. So far as he knew, her digestion was excellent. She might fancy herself in love, or out of it; but so long as she was unconscious of her digestion, she would come through. "The thing is to walk as much as you can, in these days of cars," he added.

"Yes," said Fleur, "I had a nice walk this morning."

Was she challenging him over her apple charlotte? If so, he wasn't going to rise.

"So did I," he said. "I went all about. We'll have some golf down there."

She looked at him for a second, then said a surprising thing:

“Yes, I believe I’m getting middle-aged enough for golf.”

Now what did she mean by that?

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Chapter XII

Private Feelings

On the day of the lunch party and the drive to Robin Hill, Michael really had a Committee, but he also had his private feelings and wanted to get on terms with them. There are natures in which discovery of what threatens happiness perverts to prejudice all judgment of the disturbing object. Michael's was not such. He had taken a fancy to the young Englishman met at the home of that old American George Washington, partly, indeed, because he WAS English; and, seeing him now seated next to Fleur — second cousin and first love — he was unable to revise the verdict. The boy had a nice face, and was better-looking than himself; he had attractive hair, a strong chin, straight eyes, and a modest bearing; there was no sense in blinking facts like those. The Free Trade in love, which obtained amongst pleasant people, forbade Michael to apply the cruder principles of Protection even in thoughts. Fortunately, the boy was married to this slim and attractive girl, who looked at one — as Mrs. Val had put it to him — like a guaranteed-pure water-nymph! Michael's private feelings were therefore more concerned with Fleur than with the young man himself. But hers was a difficult face to read, a twisting brain to follow, a heart hard to get at; and — was Jon Forsyte the reason why? He remembered how in Cork Street this boy's elderly half-sister — that fly-away little lady, June Forsyte — had blurted out to him that Fleur ought to have married her younger brother — first he had ever heard of it. How painfully it had affected him with its intimation that he played but second fiddle in the life of his beloved! He remembered, too, some cautious and cautionary allusions by "old Forsyte." Coming from that model of secrecy and suppressed feelings, they, too, had made on Michael a deep and lasting impression, reinforced by his own failure to get at the bottom of Fleur's heart. He went to his Committee with but half his mind on public matters. What had nipped that early love affair in the bud and given him his chance? Not sudden dislike, lack of health, or lack of money — not relationship, for Mrs. Val Dartie had married her second cousin apparently with everyone's consent. Michael, it will be seen, had remained quite ignorant of the skeleton in Soames' cupboard. Such Forsytes as he had met, reticent about family affairs, had never mentioned it; and Fleur had never even spoken of her first love, much less of the reason why it had come to naught. Yet, there must have been some reason; and it was idle to try and understand her present feelings without knowing what it was!

His Committee was on birth control in connection with the Ministry of Health; and, while listening to arguments why he should not support for other people what he practised himself, he was visited by an idea. Why not go and ask Jane Forsyte? He could find her in the telephone book — there could be but one with such a name.

"What do YOU say, Mont?"

"Well, sir, if we won't export children to the Colonies or speed up emigration somehow, there's nothing for it but birth control. In the upper and middle classes we're doing it all the time, and blinking the moral side, if there is one; and I really don't see how we can insist on a moral side for those who haven't a quarter of our excuse for having lots of children."

"My dear Mont," said the chairman, with a grin, "aren't you cutting there at the basis of all privilege?"

"Very probably," said Michael, with an answering grin. "I think, of course, that child emigration is much better, but nobody else does, apparently."

Everybody knew that 'young Mont' had a 'bee in his bonnet' about child emigration, and there was little disposition to encourage it to buzz. And, since no one was more aware than Michael of being that crank in politics, one who thought you could not eat your cake and have it, he said no more. Presently, feeling that they would go round and round the mulberry bush for some time yet, and sit on the fence after, he excused himself and went away.

He found the address he wanted: "Miss June Forsyte, Poplar House, Chiswick," and mounted a Hammersmith 'bus.

How fast things seemed coming back to the normal! Extraordinarily difficult to upset anything so vast, intricate, and elastic as a nation's life. The 'bus swung along among countless vehicles and pedestrian myriads, and Michael realised how firm were those two elements of stability in the modern state, the common need for eating, drinking, and getting about; and the fact that so many people could drive cars. 'Revolution?' he thought: 'There never was a time when it had less chance. Machinery's dead agin it.' Machinery belonged to the settled state of things, and every day saw its reinforcement. The unskilled multitude and the Communistic visionaries, their leaders, only had a chance now where machinery and means of communication were still undeveloped, as in Russia. Brains, ability, and technical skill were by nature on the side of capital and individual enterprise, and were gaining ever more power.

"Poplar House" took some finding, and, when found, was a little house supporting a large studio with a north light. It stood, behind two poplar trees, tall, thin, white, like a ghost. A foreign woman opened to him. Yes. Miss Forsyte was in the studio with Mr. Blade! Michael sent up his card, and waited in a draught, extremely ill at ease; for now that he was here he could not imagine why he had come. How to get the information he wanted without seeming to have come for it, passed his comprehension; for it was the sort of knowledge that could only be arrived at by crude questioning.

Finding that he was to go up, he went, perfecting his first lie. On entering the studio, a large room with green-canvassed walls, pictures hung or stacked, the usual dais, a top light half curtained, and some cats, he was conscious of a fluttering movement. A little light lady in flowing green, with short silver hair, had risen from a footstool, and was coming towards him.

"How do you do? You know Harold Blade, of course?"

The young man, at whose feet she had been sitting, rose and stood before Michael, square, somewhat lowering, with a dun-coloured complexion and heavily charged eyes.

"You must know his wonderful Rafaelite work."

"Oh, yes!" said Michael, whose conscience was saying: "Oh, no!"

The young man said, grimly: "He doesn't know me from Adam."

"No, really," muttered Michael. "But do tell me, why Rafaelite? I've always wanted to know."

"Why?" exclaimed June. "Because he's the only man who's giving us the old values; he's rediscovered them."

"Forgive me, I'm such a dud in art matters — I thought the academicians were still in perspective!"

"THEY!" cried June, and Michael winced at the passion in the word. "Oh, well — if you still believe in them —"

"But I don't," said Michael.

"Harold is the only Rafaelite; people are grouping round him, of course, but he'll be the last, too. It's always like that. A great painter makes a school, but the schools never amount to anything."

Michael looked with added interest at the first and last Rafaelite. He did not like the face, but it had a certain epileptic quality.

"Might I look round? Does my father-inlaw know your work, I wonder? He's a great collector, and always on the look-out."

"Soames!" said June, and again Michael winced. "He'll be collecting Harold when we're all dead. Look at that!"

Michael turned from the Rafaelite, who was shrugging his thick shoulders. He saw what was clearly a portrait of June. It was entirely recognisable, very smooth, all green and silver, with a suggestion of halo round the head.

"Pure primary line and colour — d'you think they'd hang THAT in the Academy?"

'Seems to me exactly what they would hang,' thought Michael, careful to keep the conclusion out of his face.

"I like the suggestion of a halo," he murmured.

The Rafaelite uttered a short, sharp laugh.

"I'm going for a walk," he said; "I'll be in to supper. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Michael, with a certain relief.

"Of course," said June when they were alone, "he's the ONLY person who could paint Fleur. He'd get her modern look so perfectly. Would she sit to him? With everybody against him, you know, he has SUCH a struggle."

"I'll ask her. But do tell me — why is everybody against him?"

"Because he's been through all these empty modern crazes, and come back to pure form and colour. They think he's a traitor, and call him academic. It's always the way when a man has the grit to fly against fashion and follow his own genius. I can see exactly what he'd do with Fleur. It would be a great chance for him, because he's very proud, and this would be a proper commission from Soames. Splendid for her, too, of course. She ought to jump at it — in ten years' time he'll be THE man."

Michael, who doubted if Fleur would "jump at it," or Soames give the commission, replied cautiously: "I'll sound her.

. . . By the way, your sister Holly and your young brother and his wife were lunching with us today."

"Oh!" said June, "I haven't seen Jon yet." And, looking at Michael with her straight blue eyes, she added:

"Why did you come to see me?"

Under that challenging stare Michael's diplomacy wilted.

"Well," he said, "frankly, I want you to tell me why Fleur and your young brother came to an end with each other."

"Sit down," said June, and resting her pointed chin on her hand, she looked at him with eyes moving a little from side to side, as might a cat's.

"I'm glad you asked me straight out; I hate people who beat about the bush. Don't you know about Jon's mother? She was Soames' first wife, of course."

"Oh!" said Michael.

"Irene," and, as she spoke the name, Michael was aware of something deep and primitive stirring in that little figure. "Very beautiful — they didn't get on; she left him — and years later she married my father, and Soames divorced her. I mean Soames divorced her and she married my father. They had Jon. And then, when Jon and Fleur fell in love, Irene and my father were terribly upset, and so was Soames — at least, he ought to have been."

"And then?" asked Michael, for she was silent.

"The children were told; and my father died in the middle of it all; and Jon sacrificed himself and took his mother away, and Fleur married you."

So that was it! In spite of the short, sharp method of the telling, he could feel tragic human emotion heavy in the tale. Poor little devils!

"I always thought it was too bad," said June, suddenly. "Irene ought to have put up with it. Only — only —" and she stared at Michael, "they wouldn't have been happy. Fleur's too selfish. I expect she saw that."

Michael raised an indignant voice.

"Yes," said June; "you're a good sort, I know — too good for her."

"I'm not," said Michael, sharply.

"Oh, yes, you are. She isn't bad, but she's a selfish little creature."

"I wish you'd remember —"

"Sit down! Don't mind what I say. I only speak the truth, you know. Of course, it was all horrible; Soames and my father were first cousins. And those children were awfully in love."

Again Michael was conscious of the deep and private feeling within the little figure; conscious, too, of something deep and private stirring within himself.

"Painful!" he said.

"I don't know," June went on, abruptly, "I don't know; perhaps it was all for the best. You're happy, aren't you?"

With that pistol to his head, he stood and delivered.

"I am. But is she?"

The little green-and-silver figure straightened up. She caught his hand and gave it a squeeze. There was something almost terribly warmhearted about the action, and Michael was touched. He had only seen her twice before!

"After all, Jon's married. What's his wife like?"

"Looks charming — nice, I think."

"An American!" said June, deeply. "Well, Fleur's half French. I'm glad you've got a boy."

Never had Michael known anyone whose words conveyed so much unintended potency of discomfort! Why was she glad he had a boy? Because it was an insurance — against what?

"Well," he mumbled, "I'm very glad to know at last what it was all about."

"You ought to have been told before; but you don't know still. Nobody can know what family feuds and feelings are like, who hasn't had them. Though I was angry about those children, I admit that. You see, I was the first to back Irene against Soames in the old days. I wanted her to leave him at the beginning of everything. She had a beastly time; he was such a — such a slug about his precious rights, and no proper pride either. Fancy forcing yourself on a woman who didn't want you!”

“Ah!” Michael muttered. “Fancy!”

“People in the ‘eighties and ‘nineties didn’t understand how disgusting it was. Thank goodness, they do now!”

“Do they?” murmured Michael. “I wonder!”

“Of course they do.”

Michael sat corrected.

“Things are much better in that way than they were — not nearly so stuffy and farmyardy. I wonder Fleur hasn’t told you all about it.”

“She’s never said a word.”

“Oh!”

That sound was as discomforting as any of her more elaborate remarks. Clearly she was thinking what he himself was thinking: that it had gone too deep with Fleur to be spoken of. He was not even sure that Fleur knew whether he had ever heard of her affair with Jon.

And, with a sudden shrinking from any more discomforting sounds, he rose.

“Thanks awfully for telling me. I must buzz off now, I’m afraid.”

“I shall come and see Fleur about sitting to Harold. It’s too good a chance for him to miss. He simply must get commissions.”

“Of course!” said Michael; he could trust Fleur’s powers of refusal better than his own.

“Good-bye, then!”

But when he got to the door and looked back at her standing alone in that large room, he felt a pang — she seemed so light, so small, so flyaway, with her silver hair and her little intent face — still young from misjudged enthusiasm. He had got something out of her, too, left nothing with her; and he had stirred up some private feeling of her past, some feeling as strong, perhaps stronger, than his own.

She looked dashed lonely! He waved his hand to her.

Fleur had returned when he got home, and Michael realised suddenly, that in calling on June Forsyte he had done a thing inexplicable, save in relation to her and Jon!

‘I must write and ask that little lady not to mention it,’ he thought. To let Fleur know that he had been fussing about her past would never do.

“Had a good time?” he said.

“Very. Young Anne reminds me of Francis, except for her eyes.”

“Yes; I liked the looks of those two when I saw them at Mount Vernon. That was a queer meeting, wasn’t it?”

“The day father was unwell?”

He felt that she knew the meeting had been kept from her. If only he could talk to her freely; if only she would blurt out everything!

But all she said was: “I feel at a bad loose end, Michael, without the canteen.”

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CHAPTER XIII

SOAMES IN WAITING

To say that Soames preferred his house by the river when his wife was not there, would be a crude way of expressing a far from simple equation. He was glad to be still married to a handsome woman and very good housekeeper, who really could not help being French and twenty-five years younger than himself. But the fact was, that when she was away from him, he could see her good points so much better than when she was not. Though fond of mocking him in her French way, she had, he knew, lived into a certain regard for his comfort, and her own position as his wife. Affection? No, he did not suppose she had affection for him, but she liked her home, her bridge, her importance in the neighbourhood, and doing things about the house and garden. She was like a cat. And with money she was admirable — making it go further and buy more than most people. She was getting older, too, all the time, so that he had lost serious fear that she would overdo some friendship or other, and let him know it. That Prosper Profund business of six years ago, which had been such a squeak, had taught her discretion.

It had been quite unnecessary really for him to go down a day before Fleur's arrival; his household ran on wheels too well geared and greased. On his fifteen acres, with the new dairy and cows across the river, he grew everything now except flour, fish, and meat of which he was but a sparing eater. Fifteen acres, if hardly "land," represented a deal of produce. The establishment was, in fact, typical of countless residences of the unlanded well-to-do.

Soames had taste, and Annette, if anything, had more, especially in food, so that a better fed household could scarcely have been found.

In this bright weather, the leaves just full, the mayflower in bloom, bulbs not yet quite over, and the river relearning its summer smile, the beauty of the prospect was not to be sneezed at. And Soames on his green lawn walked a little and thought of why gardeners seemed always on the move from one place to another. He couldn't seem to remember ever having seen an English gardener otherwise than about to work. That was, he supposed, why people so often had Scotch gardeners. Fleur's dog came out and joined him. The fellow was getting old, and did little but attack imaginary fleas. Soames was very particular about real fleas, and the animal was washed so often that his skin had become very thin — a golden brown retriever, so rare that he was always taken for a mongrel. The head gardener came by with a spud in his hand.

"Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon," replied Soames. "So the strike's over!"

"Yes, sir. If they'd attend to their business, it'd be better."

"It would. How's your asparagus?"

"Well, I'm trying to make a third bed, but I can't get the extra labour."

Soames gazed at his gardener, who had a narrow face, rather on one side, owing to the growth of flowers. "What?" he said. "When there are about a million and a half people out of employment?"

"And where they get to, I can't think," said the gardener.

"Most of them," said Soames, "are playing instruments in the streets."

"That's right, sir — my sister lives in London. I could get a boy, but I can't trust him."

"Why don't you do it yourself?"

"Well, sir, I expect it'll come to that; but I don't want to let the garden down, you know." And he moved the spud uneasily.

"What have you got that thing for? There isn't a weed about the place."

The gardener smiled. "It's something cruel," he said, "the way they spring up when you're not about."

"Mrs. Mont will be down tomorrow," muttered Soames; "I shall want some good flowers in the house."

"Very little at this time of year, sir."

"I never knew a time of year when there was much. You must stir your stumps and find something."

“Very good, sir,” said the gardener, and walked away.

‘Where’s he going now?’ thought Soames. ‘I never knew such a chap. But they’re all the same.’ He supposed they did work some time or other; in the small hours, perhaps — precious small hours! Anyway, he had to pay ’em a pretty penny for it! And, noticing the dog’s head on one side, he said: “Want a walk?”

They went out of the gate together, away from the river. The birds were in varied song, and the cuckoos obstreperous.

They walked up to a bit of common land where there had been a conflagration in the exceptionally fine Easter weather. From there one could look down at the river winding among poplars and willows. The prospect was something like that in a long river landscape by Daubigny which he had seen in an American’s private collection — a very fine landscape, he never remembered seeing a finer. He could mark the smoke from his own kitchen chimney, and was more pleased than he would have been marking the smoke from any other. He had missed it a lot last year — all those months, mostly hot — touring the world with Fleur from one unhomelike place to another. Young Michael’s craze for emigration! Soames was Imperialist enough to see the point of it in theory; but in practice every place out of England seemed to him so raw, or so extravagant. An Englishman was entitled to the smoke of his own kitchen chimney. Look at the Ganges — monstrous great thing, compared with that winding silvery thread down there! The St. Lawrence, the Hudson, the PO-tomac — as he still called it in thought — had all pleased him, but, comparatively, they were sprawling pieces of water. And the people out there were a sprawling lot. They had to be, in those big places. He moved down from the common through a narrow bit of wood where rooks were in a state of some excitement. He knew little about the habits of birds, not detached enough from self for the study of creatures quite unconnected with him; but he supposed they would be holding a palaver about food — worm-currency would be depressed, or there had been some inflation or other — fussy as the French over their wretched franc. Emerging, he came down opposite the lock-keeper’s cottage. There, with the scent of the wood-smoke threading from its low and humble chimney, the weir murmuring, the blackbirds and the cuckoos calling, Soames experienced something like asphyxiation of the proprietary instincts. Opening the handle of his shooting-stick, he sat down on it, to contemplate the oozy green on the sides of the emptied lock and dabble one hand in the air. Ingenious things — locks! Why not locks in the insides of men and women, so that their passions could be damned to the proper moment, then used, under control, for the main traffic of life, instead of pouring to waste over weirs and down rapids? The tongue of Fleur’s dog licking his dabbled hand interrupted this somewhat philosophic reflection. Animals were too human nowadays, always wanting to have notice taken of them; only that afternoon he had seen Annette’s black cat look up into the plaster face of his Naples Psyche, and mew faintly — wanting to be taken up into its lap, he supposed — only the thing hadn’t one.

The lock-keeper’s daughter came out to take some garments off a line. Women in the country seemed to do nothing but hang clothes on lines and take them off again! Soames watched her, neat-handed, neat-ankled, in neat light-blue print, with a face like a Botticelli — lots of faces like that in England! She would have a young man, or perhaps two — and they would walk in that wood, and sit in damp places and all the rest of it, and imagine themselves happy, he shouldn’t wonder; or she would get up behind him on one of those cycle things and go tearing about the country with her dress up to her knees. And her name would be Gladys or Doris, or what not! She saw him, and smiled. She had a full mouth that looked pretty when it smiled. Soames raised his hat slightly.

“Nice evening!” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

Very respectful!

“River’s still high.”

“Yes, sir.”

Rather a pretty girl! Suppose he had been a lock-keeper, and Fleur had been a lock-keeper’s daughter — hanging clothes on a line, and saying “Yes, sir!” Well, he would as soon be a lock-keeper as anything else in a humble walk of life — watching water go up and down, and living in that pretty cottage, with nothing to worry about, except — except his daughter! And he checked an impulse to say to the girl: “Are you a good daughter?” Was there such a thing nowadays — a daughter that thought of you first, and herself after?

“These cuckoos!” he said, heavily.

“Yes, sir.”

She was taking a somewhat suggestive garment off the line now, and Soames lowered his eyes, he did not want to embarrass the girl — not that he saw any signs. Probably you couldn’t embarrass a girl nowadays! And, rising, he closed the handle of his shooting-stick.

“Well, it’ll keep fine, I shouldn’t wonder.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good evening.”

“Good evening, sir.”

Followed by the dog, he moved along towards home. Butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth; but how would she talk to her young man? Humiliating to be old! On an evening like this, one should be young again, and walk in a wood with a girl like that; and all that had been faun-like in his nature pricked ears for a moment, licked lips, and with a shrug and a slight sense of shame, died down.

It had always been characteristic of Soames, who had his full share of the faun, to keep the fact carefully hidden. Like all his family, except, perhaps, his cousin George and his uncle Swithin, he was secretive in matters of sex; no Forsyte talked sex, or liked to hear others talk it; and when they felt its call, they gave no outward sign. Not the Puritan spirit, but a certain refinement in them forbade the subject, and where they got it from they did not know!

After his lonely dinner he lit his cigar and strolled out again. It was really warm for May, and still light enough for him to see his cows in the meadow beyond the river. They would soon be sheltering for the night, under that hawthorn hedge. And here came the swans, with their grey brood in tow; handsome birds, going to bed on the island!

The river was whitening; the dusk seemed held in the trees, waiting to spread and fly up into a sky just drained of sunset. Very peaceful, and a little eerie — the hour between! Those starlings made a racket — disagreeable beggars; there could be no real self-respect with such short tails! The swallows went by, taking ‘night-caps’ of gnats and early moths; and the poplars stood so still — just as if listening — that Soames put up his hand to feel for breeze. Not a breath! And then, all at once — no swallows flying, no starlings; a chalky hue over river, over sky! The lights sprang up in the house. A night-flying beetle passed him, booming. The dew was falling — he felt it; must go in. And, as he turned, quickly, dusk softened the trees, the sky, the river. And Soames thought: ‘Hope to goodness there’ll be no mysteries when she comes down tomorrow. I don’t want to be worried!’ Just she and the little chap; it might be so pleasant, if that old love trouble with its gnarled roots in the past and its bitter fruits in the future were not present, to cast a gloom . . . .

He slept well, and next morning could settle to nothing but the arrangement of things already arranged. Several times he stopped dead in the middle of this task to listen for the car and remind himself that he must not fuss, or go asking things. No doubt she had seen young Jon again yesterday, but he must not ask.

He went up to his picture gallery and unhooked from the wall a little Watteau, which he had once heard her admire. He took it downstairs and stood it on an easel in her bedroom — a young man in full plum-coloured skirts and lace ruffles, playing a tambourine to a young lady in blue, with a bare bosom, behind a pet lamb. Charming thing! She could take it away when she went, and hang it with the Fragonards and Chardin in her drawing-room. Standing by the double-poster, he bent down and sniffed at the bed linen. Not quite as fragrant as it ought to be. That woman, Mrs. Edger — his housekeeper — had forgotten the potpourri bags; he knew there would be something! And, going to a store closet, he took four little bags with tiny mauve ribbons from a shelf, and put them into the bed. He wandered thence into the bathroom. He didn’t know whether she would like those salts — they were Annette’s new speciality, and smelt too strong for HIS taste. Otherwise it seemed all right; the soap was “Roger and Gallet,” and the waste worked. All these new gadgets — half of them didn’t; there was nothing like the old-fashioned thing that pulled up with a chain! Great change in washing during his lifetime. He couldn’t quite remember pre-bathroom days; but he could well recall how his father used to say regularly: “They never gave me a bath when I was a boy. First house of my own, I had one put in-people used to come and stare at it — in 1840. They tell me the doctors are against washing now; but I don’t know.” James had been dead a quarter of a century, and the doctors had turned their coats several times since. Fact was, people enjoyed baths; so it didn’t really matter what view the doctors took! Kit enjoyed them — some children didn’t. And, leaving the bathroom, Soames stood in front of the flowers the gardener had brought in-among them, three special early roses. Roses were the fellow’s forte, or rather his weak point — he cared for nothing else; that was the worst of people nowadays, they specialized so that there was no relativity between things, in spite of its being the fashionable philosophy, or so they told him. He took up a rose and sniffed at it deeply. So many different kinds now — he had lost track! In his young days one could tell them — La France, Marechal Niel, and Gloire de Dijon — nothing else to speak of; you never heard of THEM now. And at this reminder of the mutability of flowers and the ingenuity of human beings, Soames felt slightly exhausted. There was no end to things!

She was late, too! That fellow Riggs — for he had left the car to bring her down, and had come by train himself — would have got punctured, of course; he was always getting punctured if there was any reason why he shouldn't. And for the next half-hour Soames fidgeted about so that he was deep in nothing in his picture gallery at the very top of the house and did not hear the car arrive. Fleur's voice roused him from thoughts of her.

"Hallo!" he said, peering down the stairs, "where have YOU sprung from? I expected you an hour ago."

"Yes, dear, we had to get some things on the way. How lovely it all looks! Kit's in the garden."

"Ah!" said Soames, descending. "Did you get a rest yester —" and he pulled up in front of her.

She bent her face forward for a kiss, and her eyes looked beyond him. Soames put his lips on the edge of her cheekbone. She was away, somewhere! And, as his lips mumbled her soft skin slightly, he thought: 'She's not thinking of me — why should she? She's young.'

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PART II

CHAPTER I

SON OF SLEEPING DOVE

Whether or not the character of Englishmen in general is based on chalk, it is undeniably present in the systems of our jockeys and trainers. Living for the most part on Downs, drinking a good deal of water, and concerned with the joints of horses, they are almost professionally calcareous, and at times distinguished by bony noses and chins.

The chin of Greenwater, the retired jockey in charge of Val Dartie's stable, projected, as if in years of race-riding it had been bent on prolonging the efforts of his mounts and catching the judge's eye. His thin, commanding nose dominated a mask of brown skin and bone, his narrow brown eyes glowed slightly, his dark hair was smooth and brushed back; he was five feet seven inches in height, and long seasons, during which he had been afraid to eat, had laid a look of austerity over such natural liveliness, as may be observed in-say — a water-wagtail. A married man with two children, he was endeared to his family by the taciturnity of one who had been intimate with horses for thirty-five years. In his leisure hours he played the piccolo. No one in England was more reliable.

Val, who had picked him up on his retirement from the pig-skin in 1921, thought him an even better judge of men than of horses, incapable of trusting them further than he could see them, and that not very far. Just now it was particularly necessary to trust no one, for there was in the stable a two-year-old colt, Rondavel, by Kaffir out of Sleeping Dove, of whom so much was expected, that nothing whatever had been said about him. On the Monday of Ascot week Val was the more surprised, then, to hear his trainer remark:

"Mr. Dartie, there was a son of a gun watching the gallop this morning."

"The deuce there was!"

"Someone's been talking. When they come watching a little stable like this — something's up. If you take my advice, you'll send the colt to Ascot and let him run his chance on Thursday — won't do him any harm to smell a racecourse. We can ease him after, and bring him again for Goodwood."

Aware of his trainer's conviction that the English race-horse, no less than the English man, liked a light preparation nowadays, Val answered:

"Afraid of overdoing him?"

"Well, he's fit now, and that's a fact. I had Sinnet shake him up this morning, and he just left 'em all standing. Fit to run for his life, he is; wish you'd been there."

"Oho!" said Val, unlatching the door of the box. "Well, my beauty?"

The Sleeping Dove colt turned his head, regarding his owner with a certain lustrous philosophy. A dark grey, with one white heel and a star, he stood glistening from his morning toilet. A good one! The straight hocks and ranginess of St. Simon crosses in his background! Scope, and a rare shoulder for coming down a hill. Not exactly what you'd call a 'picture'— his lines didn't quite 'flow,' but great character. Intelligent as a dog, and game as an otter! Val looked back at his trainer's intent face.

"All right, Greenwater. I'll tell the missus — we'll go in force. Who can you get to ride at such short notice?"

"Young Lamb."

"Ah!" said Val, with a grin; "you've got it all cut and dried, I see."

Only on his way back to the house did he recollect a possible 'hole in the ballot' of secrecy. . . . Three days after the General Strike collapsed, before Holly and young Jon and his wife had returned, he had been smoking a second pipe over his accounts, when the maid had announced:

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"What name?"

"Stainford, sir."

Checking the impulse to say, "And you left him in the hall!" Val passed hurriedly into that part of the house.

His old college pal was contemplating a piece of plate over the stone hearth.

"Hallo!" said Val.

His unemotional visitor turned round.

Less threadbare than in Green Street, as if something had restored his credit, his face had the same crow's-footed, contemptuous calm.

"Ah, Dartie!" he said. "Joe Lightson, the bookie, told me you had a stable down here. I thought I'd look you up on my way to Brighton. How has your Sleeping Dove yearling turned out?"

"So-so," said Val.

"When are you going to run him? I thought, perhaps, you'd like me to work your commission. I could do it much better than the professionals."

Really, the fellow's impudence was sublime!

"Thanks very much; but I hardly bet at all."

"Is that possible? I say, Dartie, I didn't mean to bother you again, but if you could let me have a 'pony,' it would be a great boon."

"Sorry, but I don't keep 'ponies' about me down here."

"A cheque —"

Cheque — not if he knew it!

"No," said Val firmly. "Have a drink?"

"Thanks very much!"

Pouring out the drink at the sideboard in the dining-room, with one eye on the stilly figure of his guest, Val took a resolution.

"Look here, Stainford —" he began, then his heart failed him. "How did you get here?"

"By car, from Horsham. And that reminds me. I haven't a sou with me to pay for it."

Val winced. There was something ineffably wretched about the whole thing.

"Well," he said, "here's a fiver, if that's any use to you; but really I'm not game for any more." And, with a sudden outburst, he added: "I've never forgotten, you know, that I once lent you all I had at Oxford when I was deuced hard pressed myself, and you never paid it back, though you came into shekels that very term."

The well-shaped hand closed on the fiver; a bitter smile opened the thin lips.

"Oxford! Another life! Well, good-bye, Dartie — I'll get on; and thanks! Hope you'll have a good season."

He did not hold out his hand. Val watched his back, languid and slim, till it was out of sight . . . .

Yes! That memory explained it! Stainford must have picked up some gossip in the village — not likely that they would let a 'Sleeping Dove' lie! It didn't much matter; since Holly would hardly let him bet at all. But Greenwater must look sharp after the colt. Plenty of straight men racing; but a lot of blackguards hanging about the sport. Queer how horses collected blackguards — most beautiful creatures God ever made! But beauty was like that — look at the blackguards hanging round pretty women! Well, he must let Holly know. They could stay, as usual, at old Warmson's Inn, on the river; from there it was only a fifteen-mile drive to the course . . . .

The 'Pouter Pigeon' stood back a little from the river Thames, on the Berkshire side, above an old-fashioned garden of roses, stocks, gillyflowers, poppies, phlox drummondi, and sweet-williams. In the warm June weather the scents from that garden and from sweetbriar round the windows drifted into an old brick house painted cream-colour. Late Victorian service in Park Lane under James Forsyte, confirmed by a later marriage with Emily's maid Fifine, had induced in Warmson, indeed, such complete knowledge of what was what, that no river inn had greater attractions for those whose taste had survived modernity. Spotless linen, double beds warmed with copper pans, even in summer; cider, homemade from a large orchard, and matured in rum casks — the inn was a veritable feather-bed to all the senses. Prints of "Mariage a la Mode," "Rake's Progress," "The Nightshirt Steeplechase," "Run with the Quorn," and large functional groupings of

Victorian celebrities with their names attached to blank faces on a key chart, decorated the walls. Its sanitation and its port were excellent. Pot-pourri lay in every bedroom, old pewter round the coffee room, clean napkins at every meal. And a poor welcome was assured to earwigs, spiders, and the wrong sort of guest . . . Warmson, one of those self-contained men who spread when they take inns, pervaded the house, with a red face set in small, grey whiskers, like a sun of just sufficient warmth.

To young Anne Forsyte all was "just too lovely." Never in her short life, confined to a large country, had she come across such defiant cosiness — the lush peace of the river, the songs of birds, the scents of flowers, the rustic arbour, the drifting lazy sky, now blue, now white, the friendly fat spaniel, and the feeling that tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow would for ever be the same as yesterday.

"It's a poem, Jon."

"Slightly comic. When everything's slightly comic, you don't tire."

"I'd certainly never tire of this."

"We don't grow tragedy in England, Anne."

"Why?"

"Well, tragedy's extreme; and we don't like extremes. Tragedy's dry and England's damp."

She was leaning her elbows on the wall at the bottom of the garden, and, turning her chin a little in her hand, she looked round and up at him.

"Fleur Mont's father lives on the river, doesn't he? Is that far from here?"

"Mapledurham? I should think about ten miles."

"I wonder if we shall see her at Ascot. I think she's lovely."

"Yes," said Jon.

"I wonder you didn't fall in love with her, Jon."

"We were kids when I knew her."

"I think she fell in love with you."

"Why?"

"By the way she looks at you. . . . She isn't in love with Mr. Mont; she just likes him."

"Oh!" said Jon.

Since in the coppice at Robin Hill Fleur had said "Jon!" in so strange a voice, he had known queer moments. There was that in him which could have caught her, balanced there on the log with her hands on his shoulders, and gone straight back into the past with her. There was that in him which abhorred the notion. There was that in him which sat apart and made a song about them both, and that in him which said: Get to work and drop all these silly feelings! He was, in fact, confused. The past, it seemed, did not die, as he had thought, but lived on beside the present, and sometimes, perhaps, became the future. Did one live for what one had not got? There was a wrinkling in his soul, and feverish draughts crept about within him. The whole thing was on his conscience — for if Jon had anything, he had a conscience.

"When we get our place," he said, "we'll have all these old-fashioned flowers. They're much the sweetest!"

"Ah! Yes, do let's get a home, Jon. Only are you sure you want one? Wouldn't you like to travel and write poetry?"

"It's not a job. Besides, my verse isn't good enough. You want the mood of Hatteras J. Hopkins:

> "'Now, severed from my kind by my contempt,
> I live apart and beat my lonely drum.'"

"I wish you weren't modest, Jon."

"It's not modesty, Anne; it's a sense of the comic."

"Couldn't we get a swim before dinner? It would be fine."

"I don't know what the regulations are here."

"Let's bathe first and find out afterwards."

"All right. You go and change. I'll get this gate open."

A fish splashed, a long white cloud brushed the poplar tops beyond the water. Just such an evening, six years ago, he had walked the towing-path with Fleur, had separated from her, waited to see her look back and wave her hand. He could see her still — that special grace, which gave her movements a lingering solidity within the memory. And now — it was Anne! And Anne in water was a dream! . . .

Above the 'Pouter Pigeon' the sky was darkening; cars in their garages were still; no boats passed, only the water moved, and the river wind talked vaguely in the rushes and among the leaves. All within was cosy. On their backs lay Warmson and his Fifine, singing a little through their noses. By a bedside light Holly read 'The Worst Journey in the World,' and beside her Val dreamed that he was trying to stroke a horse's nose, shortening under his hand to the size of a leopard's. And Anne slept with her eyes hidden against Jon's shoulder, and Jon lay staring at the crannies through which the moonlight eddied.

And in his stable at Ascot the son of Sleeping Dove, from home for the first time, pondered on the mutability of equine affairs, closing and opening his eyes, and breathing without sound in the strawy dark, above the black cat he had brought to bear him company.

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CHAPTER II

SOAMES GOES RACING

To Winifred Dartie the debut of her son's Sleeping Dove colt on Ascot Cup Day seemed an occasion for the gathering of such members of her family as were permitted to go racing by the primary caution in their blood; but it was almost a shock to her when Fleur telephoned: "Father's coming; he's never been to Ascot, and doesn't know that he wants to go."

"Oh!" she said, "then you'll have to have two of my Enclosure tickets. Jack can fend for himself. But what about Michael?"

"Michael can't come; he's deep in slums — got a new slogan: 'Broader gutters!'"

"He's so good," said Winifred. "Let's go down early enough to lunch before racing, dear. I think we'd better drive."

"Father's car is up — we'll call for you."

"Delightful!" said Winifred. "Has your father got a grey top hat? No? Oh! But he simply must wear one; they're all the go this year. Don't say anything, just get him one. He wears seven-and-three-quarters; and dear, tell them to heat the hat and squash it in at the sides — otherwise they're always too round for him. And he needn't bring any money to speak of; Jack will do all our betting for us."

Fleur thought that it was not likely father would have a bet; he had said he just wanted to see what the thing was like.

"He's so funny about betting," said Winifred, "like your grandfather."

Not that it had been altogether funny in the case of James, who had been called on to pay the racing debts of Montague Dartie three times over.

With Soames and Winifred on the back seats, Fleur and Imogen on the front seats, and Jack Cardigan alongside Riggs, they took a circuitous road by way of Harrow to avoid the traffic, and emerged into it just at the point where for the first time it became thick. Soames, who had placed his grey top hat on his knee, put it on, and said:

"Just like Riggs!"

"Oh, no, Uncle!" said Imogen. "It's Jack's doing. When he's got to go through Eton, he always like to go through Harrow first."

"Oh! Ah!" said Soames. "He was there. I should like Kit's name put down."

"How nice!" said Imogen: "Our boys would still be there when he goes. You look so well in that hat, Uncle."

Soames took it off again.

"White elephant," he said. "Can't think what made Fleur get me the thing!"

"My dear," said Winifred, "it'll last you for years. Jack's had his ever since the war. The great thing is to prevent the moth getting into it, between seasons. What a lot of cars! I do think it's wonderful that so many people should have the money in these days."

The sight of so much money flowing down from town would have been more exhilarating to Soames if he had not been wondering where on earth they all got it. With the coal trade at a standstill, and factories closing down all over the place, this display of wealth and fashion, however reassuring, seemed to him almost indecent.

Jack Cardigan, from his front seat, had begun explaining a thing he called the 'tote.' It seemed to be a machine that did your betting for you. Jack Cardigan was a funny fellow; he made a life's business of sport; there wasn't another country that could have produced him! And, leaning forward, Soames said to Fleur: "You've not got a draught there?" She had been very silent all the way, and he knew why. Ten to one if young Jon Forsyte wouldn't be at Ascot! Twice over at Mapledurham he had noticed letters addressed by her to:

"Mrs. Val Dartie, Wansdon, Sussex."

She had seemed to him very fidgety or very listless all that fortnight. Once, when he had been talking to her about Kit's future, she had said: "I don't think it matters, Dad, whatever one proposes — he'll dispose; parents don't count now: look at me!"

And he had looked at her, and left it at that.

He was still contemplating the back of her head when they drew into an enclosure and he was forced to expose his hat to the public gaze. What a crowd! Here, on the far side of the course, were rows of people all jammed together, who, so far as he could tell, would see nothing, and be damp one way or another throughout the afternoon. If that was pleasure! He followed the others across the course, in front of the Grand Stand. So those were 'the bookies'! Funny lot, with 'their names painted clearly on each,' so that people could tell them apart; just as well, for they all seemed to him the same, with large necks and red faces, or scraggy necks and lean faces, one of each kind in every firm, like a couple of music-hall comedians. And, every now and then, in the pre-racing hush, one of them gave a sort of circular howl and looked hungrily at space. Funny fellows! Soames was glad to pass into the Royal Enclosure where bookmakers did not seem to be admitted. Numbers of grey top hats here! This was the place — he had heard — to see pretty women. He was looking for them when Winifred pressed his arm.

"Look, Soames — the Royal Procession!"

Thus required to gape at those horse-drawn carriages at which everybody else would be gaping, Soames averted his eyes, and became conscious that Winifred and he were alone!

"What's become of the others?" he said.

"Gone to the paddock, I expect."

"What for?"

"To look at the horses, dear."

Soames had forgotten the horses.

"Fancy driving up like that, at this time of day!" he muttered.

"I think it's so amusing!" said Winifred. "Shall we go to the paddock, too?"

Soames, who had not intended to lose sight of his daughter, followed her towards whatever the paddock might be.

It was one of those days when nobody could tell whether it was going to rain, so that he was disappointed by the dresses, and the women's looks. He saw nothing to equal his daughter, and was about to make a disparaging remark, when a voice behind him said:

"Look, Jon! There's Fleur Mont!"

Placing his foot on Winifred's, Soames stood still. There, and wearing a grey top hat, too, was that young chap between his wife and his sister. A memory of tea at Robin Hill, with his cousin Jolyon, that boy's father, twenty-seven years ago, assailed Soames — and of how Holly and Val had come in and sat looking at him as if he were a new kind of bird. There they went, those three, into a ring of people who were staring at nothing so far as he could see. And there, close to them, were those other three, Jack Cardigan, Fleur, and Imogen.

"My dear," said Winifred, "you DID tread on my toe."

"I didn't mean to," muttered Soames. "Come over to the other side — there's more room."

It seemed horses were being led round; but it was at his daughter that Soames wanted to gaze from behind Winifred's shoulder. She had not yet seen the young man, but was evidently looking for him — her eyes were hardly ever on the horses — no great wonder in that, perhaps, for they all seemed alike to Soames, shining and snakey, quiet as sheep, with boys holding on to their heads. Ah! A stab went through his chest, for she had suddenly come to life; and, as suddenly, seemed to hide her resurrection even from herself! How still she stood — ever so still, gazing at that young fellow talking to his wife.

"That's the favourite, Soames. At least, Jack said he would be. What do you think of him?"

"Much like the others — got four legs."

Winifred laughed. Soames was so amusing!

"Jack's moving; if we're going to have a bet, I think we'd better go back, dear. I know what I fancy."

"I don't fancy anything," said Soames. "Weak-minded, I call it; as if they could tell one horse from another!"

"Oh! but you'd be surprised," said Winifred; "you must get Jack to —"

"No, thank you."

He had seen Fleur move and join those three. But faithful to his resolve to show no sign, he walked glumly back into the Enclosure. What a monstrous noise they were making now in the ring next door! And what a pack of people in that great Stand! Up there, on the top of it, he could see what looked like half-a-dozen lunatics frantically gesticulating — some kind of signalling, he supposed. Suddenly, beyond the railings at the bottom of the lawn, a flash of colour passed. Horses — one, two, three; a dozen or more — all labelled with numbers, and with little bright men sitting on their necks like monkeys. Down they went — and soon they'd come back, he supposed; and a lot of money would change hands. And then they'd do it again, and the money would change back. And what satisfaction they all got out of it, he didn't know! There were men who went on like that all their lives he believed — thousands of them: must be lots of time and money to waste in the country! What was it Timothy had said: "Consols are going up!" They hadn't; on the contrary, they were down a point, at least, and would go lower before the Coal Strike was over. Jack Cardigan's voice said in his ear:

"What are you going to back, Uncle Soames?"

"How should I know?"

"You must back something, to give you an interest."

"Put something on for Fleur, and leave me alone," said Soames; "I'm too old to begin."

And, opening the handle of his racing stick, he sat down on it. "Going to rain," he added, gloomily. He sat there alone; Winifred and Imogen had joined Fleur down by the rails with Holly and her party — Fleur and that young man side by side. And he remembered how, when Bosinney had been hanging round Irene, he, as now, had made no sign, hoping against hope that by ignoring the depths beneath him he could walk upon the waters. Treacherously they had given way then and engulfed him; would they again — would they again? His lip twitched; and he put out his hand. A little drizzle fell on the back of it.

"They're off!"

Thank goodness — the racket had ceased! Funny change from din to hush. The whole thing funny — a lot of grown-up children! Somebody called out shrilly at the top of his voice — there was a laugh — then noise began swelling from the stand; heads were craning round him. "The favourite wins!" "Not he!" More noise; a thudding — a flashing past of colour! And Soames thought: 'Well, that's over!' Perhaps everything was like that really. A hush — a din — a flashing past — a hush! All like a race, a spectacle — only you couldn't see it! A venture and a paying-up! And beneath his new hat he passed his hand down over one flat cheek, and then the other. A paying-up! He didn't care who paid up, so long as it wasn't Fleur! But there it was — some debts could not be paid by proxy! What on earth was Nature about when she made the human heart!

The afternoon wore on, and he saw nothing of his daughter. It was as if she suspected his design of watching over her. There was the "horse of the century" running in the Gold Cup, and he positively mustn't miss that — they said. So again Soames was led to the ring where the horses were moving round.

"That the animal?" he said, pointing to a tall mare, whom, by reason of two white ankles, he was able to distinguish from the others. Nobody answered him, and he perceived that he was separated from Winifred and the Cardigans by three persons, all looking at him with a certain curiosity.

"Here he comes!" said one of them. Soames turned his head. Oh! So THIS was the horse of the century, was it? — this bay fellow — same colour as the pair they used to drive in the Park Lane barouche. His father always had bays, because old Jolyon had browns, and Nicholas blacks, and Swithin greys, and Roger — he didn't remember what Roger used to have — something a bit eccentric — piebalds, he shouldn't wonder. Sometimes they would talk about horses, or, rather, about what they had given for them; Swithin had been a judge, or so he said — Soames had never believed it, he had never believed in Swithin at all. But he could perfectly well remember George being run away with by his pony in the Row, and pitched into a flowerbed — no one had ever been able to explain how; just like George, with his taste for the grotesque! He himself had never taken any interest in horses! Irene, of course, had loved riding — she would! She had never had any after she married him. . . . A voice said:

"Well, what do you think of him, Uncle Soames?"

Val, with his confounded grin; Jack Cardigan, too, and a thin, brown-faced man with a nose and chin. Soames said guardedly:

"Nice enough nag."

If they thought they were going to get a rise out of him!

“Think he’ll stay, Val? It’s the deuce of a journey.”

“He’ll stay all right.”

“Got nothing to beat,” said the thin brown man.

“The Frenchman, Greenwater.”

“No class, Captain Cardigan. He’s not all the horse they think him, but he can’t lose today.”

“Well, I hope to God he beats the Frenchman; we want a Cup or two left in the country.”

Something responded within Soames’ breast. If it was against a Frenchman, he would do his best to help.

“Put me five pounds on him,” he said, suddenly, to Jack Cardigan.

“Good for you, Uncle Soames. He’ll start about evens. See his head and his forehand and the way he’s let down — lots of heart room. Not quite so good behind the saddle, but a great horse, I think.”

“Which is the Frenchman?” asked Soames. “That! Oh! Ah! I don’t like HIM. I want to see this race.”

Jack Cardigan gripped his arm — the fellow’s fingers were like iron.

“You come along with me!” he said. Soames went, was put up higher than he had been yet, given Imogen’s glasses — a present from himself — and left there. He was surprised to find how well and far he could see. What a lot of cars, and what a lot of people! ‘The national pastime’— didn’t they call it! Here came the horses walking past, each led by a man. Well! they were pretty creatures, no doubt! An English horse against a French horse — that gave the thing some meaning. He was glad Annette was still with her mother in France, otherwise she’d have been here with him. Now they were cantering past. Soames made a real effort to tell one from the other, but except for their numbers, they were so confoundedly alike. “No,” he said to himself, “I’ll just watch those two, and that tall horse”— its name had appealed to him, Pons Asinorum. Rather painfully he got the colours of the three by heart and fixed his glasses on the wheeling group out there at the starting point. As soon as they were off, however, all he could see was that one horse was in front of the others. Why had he gone to the trouble of learning the colours? On and on and on he watched them, worried because he could make nothing of it, and everybody else seemed making a good deal. Now they were rounding into the straight. “The favourite’s coming up!” “Look at the Frenchman!” Soames could see the colours now. Those two! His hand shook a little and he dropped his glasses. Here they came — a regular ding-dong! Dash it — he wasn’t — England wasn’t! Yes, by George! No! Yes! Entirely without approval his heart was beating painfully. ‘Absurd!’ he thought. ‘The Frenchman!’ “No! the favourite wins! He wins!” Almost opposite, the horse was shooting out. Good horse! Hooray! England for ever! Soames covered his mouth just in time to prevent the words escaping. Somebody said something to him. He paid no attention; and, carefully putting Imogen’s glasses into their case, took off his grey hat and looked into it. There was nothing there except a faint discoloration of the buff leather where he had perspired.

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Chapter III

The Two-Year-Olds

The toilet of the two-year-olds was proceeding in the more unfrequented portions of the paddock. “Come and see Rondavel saddled, Jon,” said Fleur.

And, when he looked back, she laughed.

“No, you’ve got Anne all day and all night. Come with me for a change.”

On the far side of the paddock the son of Sleeping Dove was holding high his intelligent head, and his bit was being gently jiggled, while Greenwater with his own hands adjusted the saddle.

“A race-horse has about the best time of anything on earth,” she heard Jon say. “Look at his eyes — wise, bright, not bored. Draft horses have a cynical, long-suffering look — racehorses never. He likes his job; that keeps him spirity.”

“Don’t talk like a pamphlet, Jon. Did you expect to see me here?”

“Yes.”

“And it didn’t keep you away? How brave!”

“Must you say that sort of thing?”

“What then? You notice, Jon, that a racehorse never stands over at the knee; the reason is, of course, that he isn’t old enough. By the way, there’s one thing that spoils your raptures about them. They’re not free agents.”

“Is anyone?”

How set and obstinate his face!

“Let’s see him walk round.”

They joined Val, who said gloomily:

“D’you want to have anything on?”

“Do YOU, Jon?” said Fleur.

“Yes; a tenner.”

“So will I then. Twenty pounds between us, Val.”

Val signed.

“Look at him! Ever see a two-year-old more self-contained? I tell you that youngster’s going far. And I’m confined to a miserable ‘pony’! Damn!”

He left them and spoke to Greenwater.

“More self-contained,” said Fleur. “Not a modern quality, is it, Jon?”

“Perhaps, underneath.”

“Oh! You’ve been in the backwoods too long. Francis, too, was wonderfully primitive; so, I suppose, is Anne. You should have tried New York, judging by their literature.”

“I don’t judge by literature; I don’t believe there’s any relation between it and life.”

“Let’s hope not, anyway. Where shall we see the race from?”

“The enclosure rails. It’s the finish I care about. I don’t see Anne.”

Fleur closed her lips suddenly on the words: “Damn Anne.”

“We can’t wait for them,” she said. “The rails soon fill up.”

On the rails they were almost opposite the winning post, and they stood there silent, in a queer sort of enmity — it seemed to Fleur.

“Here they come!”

Too quickly and too close to be properly taken in, the two-year-olds came cantering past.

“Rondavel goes well,” said Jon. “And I like that brown.”

Fleur noted them languidly, too conscious of being alone with him — really alone, blocked off by strangers from any knowing eye. To savour that loneliness of so few minutes was tasking all her faculties. She slipped her hand through his arm, and forced her voice.

"I'm awfully worked up, Jon. He simply must win."

Did he know that in focussing his glasses he left her hand uncaged?

"I can't make them out from here." Then his arm recaged her hand against his side. Did he know? What did he know?

"They're off!"

Fleur pressed closer.

Silence — din — shouting of this name — that name! But pressure against him was all it meant to Fleur. Past they came, a flourishing flash of colour; but she saw nothing of it, for her eyes were closed.

"By Gosh!" she heard him say: "He's won."

"Oh, Jon!"

"I wonder what price we got?"

Fleur looked at him, a spot of red in each pale cheek, and her eyes very clear.

"Price? Did you really mean that, Jon?"

And, though he was behind her, following to the paddock she knew from the way his eyes were fixed on her, that he had not meant it.

They found their party reunited all but Soames. Jack Cardigan was explaining that the price obtained was unaccountably short, since there was no stable money on to speak of; somebody must have known something; he seemed to think that this was extremely reprehensible.

"I suppose Uncle Soames hasn't been going for the gloves," he said. "Nobody's seen him since the Gold Cup. Wouldn't it be ripping if we found he's kicked over and had a 'monkey' on?"

Fleur said uneasily:

"I expect Father got tired and went to the car. We'd better go too, Auntie, and get away before the crowd."

She turned to Anne. "When shall we see you again?" She saw the girl look at Jon, and heard him say glumly:

"Oh! sometime."

"Yes, we'll fix something up. Good-bye, my dear! Good-bye, Jon! Tell Val I'm very glad." And, with a farewell nod, she led the way. Of a sort of rage in her heart she gave no sign, preparing normality for her father's eyes.

Soames, indeed, was in the car. Excitement over the Gold Cup — so contrary to his principles — had caused him to sit down in the Stand. And there he had remained during the next two races, idly watching the throng below, and the horses going down fast and coming back faster. There, quietly, in the isolation suited to his spirit, he could, if not enjoy, at least browse on a scene strikingly unfamiliar to him. The national pastime — he knew that everybody had 'a bit on' something now-a-days. For one person who ever went racing there were twenty — it seemed — who didn't, and yet knew at least enough to lose their money. You couldn't buy a paper, or have your hair cut, without being conscious of that. All over London, and the South, the Midlands and the North, in all classes, they were at it, supporting horses with their bobs and dollars and sovereigns. Most of them — he believed — had never seen a race horse in their lives — hardly a horse of any sort; racing was a sort of religion, he supposed, and now that they were going to tax it, an orthodox religion. Some primeval nonconformity in the blood of Soames shuddered a little. He had no sympathy, of course, with those leather-lunged chaps down there under their queer hats and their umbrellas, but the feeling that they were now made free of heaven — or at least of that synonym of heaven the modern State — ruffled him. It was almost as if England were facing realities at last — Very dangerous! They would be licensing prostitution next! To tax what were called vices was to admit that they were part of human nature. And though, like a Forsyte, he had long known them to be so, to admit it was, he felt, too French. To acknowledge the limitations of human nature was a sort of defeatism; when you once began that, you didn't know where you'd stop. Still, from all he could see, the tax would bring in a pretty penny — and pennies were badly needed; so, he didn't know, he wasn't sure. He wouldn't have done it himself, but he wasn't prepared to turn out the Government for having done it. They had recognised, too, no doubt, as he did, that gambling was the greatest make-weight there was against revolution; so long as a man could bet he had always a chance of getting something for nothing, and that desire was the real driving force behind any attempt to turn things upside down. Besides you had to move with the times uphill or downhill, and it was difficult to tell one from the other. The great thing was to avoid extremes.

From this measured reflection he was abruptly transferred to feelings unmeasured. Fleur and that young fellow were walking across the lawn of the Enclosure! From under the brim of his grey hat he watched them painfully, reluctantly admitting that they made as pretty a couple as any there. They came to a stand on the rails — not talking; and to Soames, who, when moved, was exceptionally taciturn, this seemed a bad sign. Were things really going wrong, then — was passion forming within its still cocoon to fly on butterfly wings for its brief hour? What was going on within the silence of those two? The horses were passing now; and the grey, they said, was his own nephew's? Why did the fellow have horses? He had known how it would be when Fleur said she was going to Ascot. He regretted now having come. No, he didn't! Better to know what there was to be known. In the press of people to the rails he could no longer see more than the young man's grey hat, and the black-and-white covering of his daughter's head. For a minute the race diverted him: might as well see Val's horse well beaten. They said he thought a lot of it; and Soames thought the less of its chance for that. Here they came, all in a bunch — thundering great troop, and that grey — a handy colour, you couldn't miss it. — Why, he was winning! Hang it — he had won!

"H'm!" he said, aloud: "that's my nephew's horse!"

Since nobody replied, he hoped they hadn't heard; and back went his eyes to the Enclosure rails. Those two were coming away silently — Fleur a little in front. Perhaps — perhaps, after all, they didn't get on, now! Must hope for the best. By George, but he felt tired! He would go to the car, and wait.

And there in the dusk of it he was sitting when they came, full of bubble and squeak — something very little-headed about people when they'd won money. For they had all won money, it seemed!

"And you didn't back him, Uncle Soames?"

"I was thinking of other things," said Soames, gazing at his daughter.

"We thought you were responsible for the shockin' bad price."

"Why!" said Soames, gloomily. "Did you expect me to bet against him?"

Jack Cardigan threw back his head and laughed.

"I don't see anything funny," muttered Soames.

"Nor do I, Jack," said Fleur. "Why should Father know anything about racing?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I'll tell you all about it."

"God forbid!" said Soames. "No, but it's rather queer. D'you remember that chap Stainford, who sneaked the Mater's snuff-box?"

"I do."

"Well it seems he paid Val a visit at Wansdon, and Val thinks he picked up the idea that Rondavel was a real good one. There was a chap watching the gallop last Monday. That's what decided them to run the colt today. They were going to wait for Goodwood. Too late, though; somebody's made a pot over him. We only got fours."

It was all Greek to Soames, except that the languid ruffian Stainford had somehow been responsible a SECOND time for bringing about a meeting between Fleur and Jon; for he knew from Winifred that Val and his menage had gone to stay at Green Street during the Strike on purpose to see Stainford. He wished to goodness he had called a policeman that day, and had the fellow shut up.

They were a long time getting out of the traffic — owing to the perversity of "that chap Riggs," and did not reach South Square till seven o'clock. They were greeted by the news that Kit had a temperature. Mr. Mont was with him. Fleur flew up. Having washed off his day, Soames settled himself in the 'parlour' to wait uneasily for their report. Fleur used to have temperatures, and not infrequently they led to something. If Kit's didn't lead to anything serious, it might be good for her — keeping her thoughts at home. He lay back in his chair opposite the Fragonard — a delicate thing, but with no soul in it, like all the works of that period — wondering why Fleur had changed the style of this room from Chinese to Louis Quinze. Just for the sake of change, he supposed. These young people had no continuity; some microbe in the blood — of the 'idle rich,' and the 'idle poor,' and everybody else, so far as he could see. Nobody could be got to stay anywhere — not even in their graves, judging by all those seances. If only people would attend quietly to their business, even to that of being dead!

They had such an appetite for living, that they had no life. A beam of sunlight, smoky with dust-motes, came slanting in on to the wall before him — pretty thing, a beam of sunlight, but a terrible lot of dust, even in a room spick-and-spandy as this. And to think that a thing smaller than one of those dust-motes could give a child a temperature. He hoped to goodness Kit had nothing catching. And his mind went over the illnesses of childhood — mumps, measles, chicken-pox, whooping-cough. Fleur had caught them all, but never scarlet fever. And Soames began to fidget. Surely Kit was too young to have got scarlet fever. But nurses were so careless — you never knew! And suddenly he began to wish for Annette. What was she doing out in France all this time? She was useful in illness; had some very good prescriptions. He WOULD say that for the French — their doctors were clever when you could get them to take an interest. The stuff they had given him for his lumbago at Deauville had been first-rate. And after his visit the little doctor chap had said: "I come for the money tomorrow!" or so it had sounded. It seemed he had meant: "I come in the morning tomorrow." They never could speak anything but their own confounded language, and looked aggrieved when you couldn't speak it yourself.

They had kept him a long time there without news before Michael came in.

"Well?"

"Well, sir, it looks uncommonly like measles."

"H'm! Now, how on earth did he get that?"

"Nurse has no idea; but Kit's awfully sociable. If there's another child in sight, he goes for him."

"That's bad," said Soames. "You've got slums at the back here."

"Ah!" said Michael: "Slums to the right of us, slums to the left of us, slums to the front of us — how can you wonder?"

Soames stared. "They're not notifiable," he said, "thank goodness!"

"Slums?"

"No. Measles." If he had a dread, it was a notifiable disease, with the authorities poking their noses in, and having up the drains as likely as not. "How's the little chap feeling?"

"Very sorry for himself."

"In my opinion," said Soames, "there's a great deal more in fleas than they think. That dog of his may have picked up a measley flea. I wonder the doctor's don't turn their attention to fleas."

"I wonder they don't turn their attention to slums," said Michael; "that's where the fleas come from."

Again Soames stared. Had his son-inlaw got slums in his bonnet now? His manifestations of public spirit were very disturbing. Perhaps he'd been going round those places, and brought the flea in himself, or some infection or other.

"Have you sent for the doctor?"

"Yes; he'll be here any minute."

"Is he any good, or just the ordinary cock-and-bull type?"

"The same man we had for Fleur."

"Oh! Ah! I remember — too much manner, but shrewd. Doctors!"

There was silence in the polished room, while they waited for the bell to ring; and Soames brooded. Should he tell Michael about the afternoon? His mouth opened once, but nothing came out. Over and over again his son-inlaw had surprised him by the view he took of things. And he only stared at Michael, who was gazing out of the window — queer face the young fellow had; plain, and yet attractive, with those pointed ears and eyebrows running up on the outside — wasn't always thinking of himself like good-looking young men seemed to be. Good-looking men were always selfish; got spoiled, he supposed. He would give a penny for the young fellow's thoughts.

"Here he is!" said Michael, jumping up.

Soames was alone again. How long alone, he didn't know, for he was tired, and, in spite of his concern, he dozed. The opening of the door roused him in time to assume anxiety before Fleur spoke.

"It's almost certainly measles, Dad."

"Oh!" said Soames, blankly. "What about nursing?"

"Nurse and I, of course."

"That'll mean you can't get about."

“And aren’t you glad?” her face seemed to say. How she read his thoughts!

God knew he wasn’t glad of anything that troubled her — and yet!

“Poor little chap!” he said, evasively: “Your mother must come back. I must try and find him something that’ll take his attention off.”

“Don’t trouble, Dad; he’s too feverish, poor darling. Dinner’s ready. I’m having mine upstairs.”

Soames rose and went up to her.

“Don’t you be worrying,” he said. “All children —”

Fleur put her arm out.

“Not too near, Dad. No, I won’t worry.”

“Give him my love,” said Soames. “He won’t care for it.”

Fleur looked at him. Her lips smiled a very little. Her eyelids winked twice. Then she turned and went out, and Soames thought:

‘She — poor little thing! I’m no use!’ It was of her, not of his grandson, that he thought.

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CHAPTER IV

IN THE MEADS

The Meads of St. Augustine had, no doubt, once on a time been flowery, and burgesses had walked there of a Sunday, plucking summer nosegays. If there were a flower now, it would be found on the altar of the Reverend Hilary's church, or on Mrs. Hilary's dining-table. The rest of a numerous population had heard of these unnatural products, and, indeed, seeing them occasionally in baskets, would utter the words: "Aoh! Look at the luv-ly flahers!"

When Michael visited his uncle, according to promise, on Ascot Cup Day, he was ushered hurriedly into the presence of twenty little Augustinians on the point of being taken in a covered motor van for a fortnight among flowers in a state of nature. His Aunt May was standing among them. She was a tall woman with bright brown shingled hair going grey, and the slightly rapt expression of one listening to music. Her smile was very sweet, and this, with the puzzled twitch of her delicate eyebrows, as who should say placidly: "What next, I wonder?" endeared her to everyone. She had emerged from a Rectory in Huntingdonshire, in the early years of the century, and had married Hilary at the age of twenty. He had kept her busy ever since. Her boys and girls were all at school now, so that in term time she had merely some hundreds of Augustinians for a family. Hilary was wont to say: "May's a wonder. Now that she's had her hair off, she's got so much time on her hands that we're thinking of keeping guinea-pigs. If she'd only let me grow a beard, we could really get a move on."

She greeted Michael with a nod and a twitch.

"Young London, my dear," she said, privately, "just off to Leatherhead. Rather sweet, aren't they?"

Michael, indeed, was surprised by the solidity and neatness of the twenty young Augustinians. Judging by the streets from which they came and the mothers who were there to see them off, their families had evidently gone 'all out' to get them in condition for Leatherhead.

He stood grinning amiably, while they were ushered out on the glowing pavement between the unrestrained appreciation of their mothers and sisters. Into the van, open only at the rear, they were piled, with four young ladies to look after them.

"Four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in a pie," murmured Michael.

His aunt laughed.

"Yes, poor little dears, won't they be hot! But aren't they good?" She lowered her voice. "And d'you know what they'll say when they come back after their fortnight? 'Oh! yes, we liked it all very much, thank you, but it was rather slow. We like the streets better.' Every year it's the same."

"Then, what's the use of sending them, Aunt May?"

"It does them good physically; they look sturdy enough, but they aren't really strong. Besides, it seems so dreadful they should never see the country. Of course we country-bred folk, Michael, never can realise what London streets are to children — very nearly Heaven, you know."

The motor van moved to an accompaniment of fluttered handkerchiefs and shrill cheering.

"The mothers love them to go," said his aunt; "it's kind of distinguished. Well, that's that! What would you like to see next? The street we've just bought, to gut and re-gut? Hilary'll be there with the architect."

"Who owned the street?" asked Michael.

"He lived in Capri. I don't suppose he ever saw it. He died the other day, and we got it rather reasonably, considering how central we are, here. Sites are valuable."

"Have you paid for it?"

"Oh! no." Her eyebrows twitched. "Postdated a cheque on Providence."

"Good Lord!"

"We had to have the street. It was such a chance. We've paid the deposit, and we've got till September to get the rest."

"How much?" said Michael.

"Thirty-two thousand."

Michael gasped.

“Oh! We shall get it, dear, Hilary’s wonderful in that way. Here’s the street.”

It was a curving street of which, to Michael, slowly passing, each house seemed more dilapidated than the last. Grimy and defaced, with peeling plaster, broken rails and windows, and a look of having been abandoned to its fate — like some half-burnt-out ship — it hit the senses and the heart with its forlornness.

“What sort of people live here, Aunt May?”

“All sorts — three or four families to each house. Covent Garden workers, hawkers, girls in factories, out-of-works — every kind. The unmentionable insect abounds, Michael. The girls are wonderful — they keep their clothes in paper bags. Many of them turn out quite neat. If they didn’t, of course, they’d get the sack, poor dears.”

“But is it possible,” said Michael, “that people can WANT to go on living here?”

His aunt’s brows became intricate.

“It isn’t a question of want, my dear. It’s a simple economic proposition. Where else can they live so cheaply? It’s more than that, even; where else can they go at all, if they’re turned out? The Authorities demolished a street not long ago up there, and built that great block of workmen’s flats; but the rents were prohibitive to the people who had been living in the street, and they simply melted away to other slums. Besides, you know, they don’t like those barracky flats, and I don’t wonder. They’d much rather have a little house, if they can; or the floor of a house if they can’t. Or even a room. That’s in the English nature, and it will be till they design workmen’s dwellings better. The English like to live low down: I suppose because they always have. Oh! Here’s Hilary!”

Hilary Charwell, in a dark grey Norfolk suit, a turn-down collar open at the neck, and no hat, was standing in the doorway of a house, talking to another spare man with a thin, and, to Michael, very pleasant face.

“Well, Michael, my boy, what think you of Slant Street? Each one of these houses is going to be gutted and made as bright as a new pin.”

“How long will they keep bright, Uncle Hilary?”

“Oh! That’s all right,” said Hilary, “judging by our experiments so far. Give ’em a chance, and the people are only too glad to keep their houses clean. It’s wonderful what they do, as it is. Come in and see, but don’t touch the walls. May, you stay and talk to James. An Irish lady in here; we haven’t many. Can I come in, Mrs. Corrigan?”

“Sure an’ ye can. Plased to see your rivirence, though ut’s not tidy I am this mornin’.”

A broad woman, with grizzled black hair and brawny arms, had paused in whatever she was doing to a room inconceivably crowded and encrusted. Three people evidently slept in the big bed, and one in a cot; cooking seemed to go on at the ordinary small black hearth, over which, on a mantel-board, were the social trophies of a lifetime. Some clothes were hung on a line. The patched and greasy walls had no pictures.

“My nephew, Mr. Michael Mont, Mrs. Corrigan; he’s a Member of Parliament.”

The lady put her arms akimbo.

“Indeed, an’ is he, then?”

It was said with an infinite indulgence that went to Michael’s heart. “An’ is ut true your rivirence has bought the street? An’ what would ye be doing with ut? Ye won’t be afther turning us out, I’m thinking.”

“Not for the world, Mrs. Corrigan.”

“Well, an’ I knew that. I said to them: ‘It’s cleaning our insides he’ll maybe doing, but he’ll never be afther putting us out.’”

“When the turn of this house comes, Mrs. Corrigan — I hope before very long — we’ll find you good lodgings till you can come back here to new walls and floors and ceilings, a good range, no more bugs, and proper washing arrangements.”

“Well, an’ wouldn’t that be the day I’d like to see!”

“You’ll see it fast enough. Look Michael, if I put my finger through there, the genuine article will stalk forth! It’s you that can’t knock holes in your walls, Mrs. Corrigan.”

“An’ that’s the truth o’ God,” replied Mrs. Corrigan. “The last time Corrigan knocked a peg in, ’twas terrible — the life there was in there!”

"Well, Mrs. Corrigan, I'm delighted to see you looking so well. Good morning, and tell Corrigan if his donkey wants a rest any time, there'll be room in our paddock. Will you be going hopping this year?"

"We will that," replied Mrs. Corrigan. "Good-day to you rivirence; good-day, sorr!"

On the bare, decrepit landing Hilary Charwell said: "Salt of the earth, Michael. But imagine living in that atmosphere! Luckily, they're all 'snoof'."

"What?" said Michael, taking deep breaths of the somewhat less complicated air.

"It's a portmanteau syllable for 'Got no sense of smell to speak of.' And wanted, too. One says 'deaf,' 'blind,' 'dumb'—why not 'snoof'?"

"Excellent! How long do you reckon it'll take you to convert this street, Uncle Hilary?"

"About three years."

"And how are you going to get the money?"

"Win, wangle and scrounge it. In here there are three girls who serve in 'Fetter and Poplin's.' They're all out, of course. Neat, isn't it? See their paper bags?"

"I say, Uncle, would you blame a girl for doing anything to get out of a house like this?"

"No," said the Reverend Hilary, "I would not, and that's the truth o' God."

"That's why I love you, Uncle Hilary. You restore my faith in the Church."

"My dear boy," said Hilary, "the old Reformation was nothing to what's been going on in the Church lately. You wait and see! Though I confess a little wholesome Disestablishment would do us all no harm. Come and have lunch, and we'll talk about my slum conversion scheme. We'll bring James along."

"You see," he resumed, when they were seated in the Vicarage dining-room, "there must be any amount of people who would be glad enough to lay out a small proportion of their wealth at two per cent., with the prospect of a rise to four as time went on, if they were certain that it meant the elimination of the slums. We've experimented and we find that we can put slum houses into proper living condition for their existing population at a mere fraction over the old rents, and pay two per cent, on our outlay. If we can do that here, it can be done in all slum centres, by private Slum Conversion Societies such as ours, working on the principle of not displacing the existing slum population. But what's wanted, of course, is money — a General Slum Conversion fund — Bonds at two per cent., with bonuses, repayable in twenty years, from which the Societies could draw funds as they need them for buying and converting slum property."

"How will you repay the Bonds in twenty years?"

"Oh! Like the Government — by issuing more."

"But," said Michael, "the local Authorities have very wide powers, and much more chance of getting the money."

Hilary shook his head.

"Wide powers, yes; but they're slow, Michael — the snail is a fast animal compared with them; besides, they only displace, because the rents they charge are too high. Also it's not in the English character, my dear. Somehow we don't like being 'done for' by officials, or being answerable to them. There's lots of room, of course, for slum area treatment by Borough Councils, and they do lots of good work, but by themselves, they'll never scotch the evil. You want the human touch; you want a sense of humour, and faith; and that's a matter for private effort in every town where there are slums."

"And who's going to start this general fund?" asked Michael, gazing at his aunt's eyebrows, which had begun to twitch.

"Well," said Hilary, twinkling, "I thought that might be where you came in. That's why I asked you down today, in fact."

"The deuce!" said Michael almost leaping above the Irish stew on his plate.

"Exactly!" said his uncle; "but couldn't you get together a Committee of both Houses to issue an appeal? From the work we've done James can give you exact figures. They could see for themselves what's happened here. Surely, Michael, there must be ten just men who could be got to move in a matter like this —"

"'Ten Apostles'," said Michael, faintly.

"Well, but there's no real need to bring Christ in-nothing remote or sentimental; you could approach them from any angle. Old Sir Timothy Fanfield, for example, would love to have a 'go' at slum landlordism. Then we've electrified all the kitchens so far, and mean to go on doing it — so you could get old Shropshire on that. Besides, there's no need to confine the Committee to the two Houses — Sir Thomas Morsell, or, I should think, any of the big doctors, would come in; you could pinch a brace of bankers with Quaker blood in them; and there are always plenty of retired Governor Generals with their tongues out. Then if you could rope in a member of the Royal Family to head it — the trick would be done."

"Poor Michael!" said his aunt's soft voice: "Let him finish his stew, Hilary."

But Michael had dropped his fork for good; he saw another kind of stew before him.

"The General Slum Conversion Fund," went on Hilary, "affiliating every Slum Conversion Society in being or to be, so long as it conforms to the principle of not displacing the present inhabitant. Don't you see what a pull that gives us over the inhabitants? — we start them straight, and we jolly well see that they don't let their houses down again."

"But can you?" said Michael.

"Ah! you've heard stories of baths being used for coal and vegetables, and all that. Take it from me, they're exaggerated, Michael. Anyway, that's where we private workers come in with a big advantage over municipal authorities. They have to drive, we try to lead."

"Let me hot up your stew, dear?" said his aunt.

Michael refused. He perceived that it would need no hotting up! Another crusade! His Uncle Hilary had always fascinated him with his crusading blood — at the time of the Crusades the name had been Keroual, and, now spelt Charwell, was pronounced Cherwell, in accordance with the sound English custom of worrying foreigners.

"I'm not approaching you, Michael, with the inducement that you should make your name at this, because, after all, you're a gent!"

"Thank you!" murmured Michael; "always glad of a kind word."

"No. I'm suggesting that you ought to do something, considering your luck in life."

"I quite agree," said Michael, humbly. "The question seems to be: Is this the something?"

"It is, undoubtedly," said his uncle, waving a salt-spoon on which was engraved the Charwell crest. "What else can it be?"

"Did you never hear of Foggartism, Uncle Hilary?"

"No; what's that?"

"My aunt!" said Michael.

"Some blanc-mange, dear?"

"Not you, Aunt May! But did you really never hear of it, Uncle Hilary?"

"Foggartism? Is it that fog-abating scheme one reads about?"

"It is not," said Michael. "Of course, you're sunk in misery and sin here. Still, it's almost too thick. YOU'VE heard of it, Aunt May?"

His aunt's eyebrows became intricate again.

"I think," she said, "I do remember hearing someone say it was balderdash!"

Michael groaned: "And you, Mr. James?"

"It's to do with the currency, isn't it?"

"And here," said Michael, "we have three intelligent, public-spirited persons, who've never heard of Foggartism — and I've heard of nothing else for over a year."

"Well," said Hilary, "had you heard of my slum-conversion scheme?"

"Certainly not."

"I think," said his aunt, "it would be an excellent thing if you'd smoke while I make the coffee. Now I do remember, Michael: Your mother did say to me that she wished you would get over it. I'd forgotten the name. It had to do with taking town-children away from their parents."

"Partly," said Michael, with gloom.

"You have to remember, dear, that the poorer people are, the more they cling to their children."

"Vicarious joy in life," put in Hilary.

“And the poorer children are, the more they cling to their gutters, as I was telling you.”

Michael buried his hands in his pockets.

“There is no good in me,” he said, stonily. “You’ve pitched on a stumer, Uncle Hilary.”

Both Hilary and his wife got up very quickly, and each put a hand on his shoulder.

“My dear boy!” said his aunt.

“God bless you!” said Hilary: “Have a ‘gasper.’”

“All right,” said Michael, grinning, “it’s wholesome.”

Whether or not it was the “gasper” that was wholesome, he took and lighted it from his uncle’s.

“What is the most pitiable sight in the world, Aunt May — I mean, next to seeing two people dance the Charleston?”

“The most pitiable sight?” said his aunt, dreamily. “Oh! I think — a rich man listening to a bad gramophone.”

“Wrong!” said Michael. “The most pitiable sight in the world is a politician barking up the right tree. Behold him!”

“Look out, May! Your machine’s boiling. She makes very good coffee, Michael — nothing like it for the grumps. Have some, and then James and I will show you the houses we’ve converted. James — come with me a moment.”

“Noted for his pertinacity,” muttered Michael, as they disappeared.

“Not only noted, Michael — dreaded.”

“Well, I would rather be Uncle Hilary than anybody I know.”

“He IS rather a dear,” murmured his aunt. “Coffee?”

“What does he really believe, Aunt May?”

“Well, he hardly has time for that.”

“Ah! that’s the new hope of the Church. All the rest is just as much an attempt to improve on mathematics as Einstein’s theory. Orthodox religion was devised for the cloister, Aunt May, and there aren’t any cloisters left.”

“Religion,” said his aunt, dreamily, “used to burn a good many people, Michael, not in cloisters.”

“Quite so, when it emerged from cloisters, religion used to be red-hot politics; then it became caste feeling, and now it’s a cross — word puzzle — You don’t solve THEM with your emotions.”

His aunt smiled.

“You have a dreadful way of putting things, my dear.”

“In our ‘suckles,’ Aunt May, we do nothing but put things — it destroys all motive power. But about this slum business: do you really advise me to have ‘a go’?”

“Not if you want a quiet life.”

“I don’t know that I do. I did, after the war; but not now. But, you see, I’ve tried Foggartism and everybody’s too sane to look at it. I really can’t afford to back another loser. Do you think there’s a chance of getting a national move on?”

“Only a sporting chance, dear.”

“Would you take it up then, if you were me?”

“My dear, I’m prejudiced — Hilary’s heart is so set on it; but it does seem to me that there’s no other cause I’d so gladly fail in. Well, not that exactly; but there really is nothing so important as giving our town dwellers decent living conditions.”

“It’s rather like going over to the enemy,” muttered Michael. “Our future oughtn’t to be so bound up in the towns.”

“It WILL be, whatever’s done. ‘A bird in the hand,’ and such a big bird, Michael. Ah! Here’s Hilary!”

Hilary and his architect took Michael forth again into the Meads. The afternoon had turned drizzly, and the dismal character of that flowerless quarter was more than ever apparent. Up street, down street, Hilary extolled the virtues of his parishoners. They drank, but not nearly so much as was natural in the circumstances; they were dirty, but he would be dirtier under their conditions. They didn’t come to church — who on earth would expect them to? They assaulted their wives to an almost negligible extent; were extraordinarily good, and extremely unwise, to their children. They had the most marvellous faculty for living on what was not a living wage. They helped each other far better than those who could afford to; never saved a bean, having no beans to save, and took no thought for a morrow which might be worse than today. Institutions they abominated. They were no more moral than was natural in their overcrowded state. Of philosophy they had plenty, of religion none that he could speak of. Their amusements were cinemas, streets, gaspers, public houses, and Sunday papers. They liked a tune, and would dance if afforded a chance. They had their own brand of honesty, which required special study. Unhappy? Not precisely, having given up a future state in this life or in that — realists to their encrusted fingernails. English? Well, nearly all, and mostly London-born. A few country folk had come in young, and would never go out old.

“You’d like them, Michael; nobody who really knows them can help liking them. And now, my dear fellow, good-bye, and think it over. The hope of England lies in you young men. God bless you!”

And with these words in his ears, Michael went home, to find his little son sickening for measles.

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CHAPTER V

MEASLES

The diagnosis of Kit's malady was soon verified, and Fleur went into purdah.

Soames' efforts to distract his grandson arrived almost every day. One had the ears of a rabbit, with the expression of a dog, another the tail of a mule detachable from the body of a lion, the third made a noise like many bees; the fourth, though designed for a waistcoat, could be pulled out tall. The procuring of these rarities, together with the choicest mandarine oranges, muscatel grapes, and honey that was not merely "warranted" pure, occupied his mornings in town. He was staying at Green Street, whereto the news, judiciously wired, had brought Annette. Soames, who was not yet entirely resigned to a spiritual life, was genuinely glad to see her. But after one night, he felt he could spare her to Fleur. It would be a relief to feel that she had her mother with her. Perhaps by the end of her seclusion that young fellow would be out of her reach again. A domestic crisis like this might even put him out of her head. Soames was not philosopher enough to gauge inround the significance of his daughter's yearnings. To one born in 1855 love was a purely individual passion, or if it wasn't, ought to be. It did not occur to him that Fleur's longing for Jon might also symbolise the craving in her blood for life, the whole of life, and nothing but life; that Jon had represented her first serious defeat in the struggle for the fulness of perfection; a defeat that might yet be wiped out. The modern soul, in the intricate turmoil of its sophistication, was to Soames a book which, if not sealed, had its pages still uncut. 'Crying for the moon' had become a principle when he was already much too old for principles. Recognition of the limits of human life and happiness was in his blood, and had certainly been fostered by his experience. Without, exactly, defining existence as "making the best of a bad job," he would have contended that though, when you had almost everything, you had better ask for more, you must not fash yourself if you did not get it. The virus of a time-worn religion which had made the really irreligious old Forsytes say their prayers to the death, in a muddled belief that they would get something for them after death, still worked inhibitively in the blood of their prayerless offspring, Soames; so that, although fairly certain that he would get nothing after death, he still believed that he would not get everything before death. He lagged, in fact, behind the beliefs of a new century in whose "make-up" resignation played no part — a century which either believed, with spiritualism, that there were plenty of chances to get things after death, or that, since one died for good and all, one must see to it that one had everything before death. Resignation! Soames would have denied, of course, that he believed in any such thing; and certainly he thought nothing too good for his daughter! And yet, somehow, he felt in his bones that there WAS a limit, and Fleur did not — this little distinction, established by the difference in their epochs, accounted for his inability to follow so much of her restive search.

Even in the nursery, grieved and discomforted by the feverish miseries of her little son, Fleur continued that search. Sitting beside his cot, while he tossed and murmured and said he was "so 'ot," her spirit tossed and murmured and said so, too. Except that, by the doctor's orders, bathed and in changed garments, she went for an hour's walk each day, keeping to herself, she was entirely out of the world, so that the heart from which she suffered had no anodyne but that of watching and ministering to Kit. Michael was "ever so sweet" to her; and the fact that she wanted another in his place could never have been guessed from her manner. Her resolution to give nothing away was as firm as ever, but it was a real relief not to encounter the gimletting affection of her father's eye. She wrote to no one; but she received from Jon a little letter of condolence.

"Wansdon. "June 22.

"DEAR FLEUR,

"We are so awfully sorry to hear of Kit's illness. It must be wretched for you. We do hope the poor little chap is over the painful part by now. I remember my measles as two beastly days, and then lots of things that felt nice and soothing all the way down. But I expect he's too young to be conscious of anything much except being thoroughly uncomfy.

"Rondavel, they say, is all the better for his race. It was jolly seeing it together.

"Good-bye, dear Fleur; with all sympathy,

Your affectionate friend,

"JON."

She kept it — as she had kept his old letters — but not, like them, about her; there had come to be a dim, round mark on the "affectionate friend" which looked as if it might have dropped from an eye; besides, Michael was liable to see her in any stage of costume. So she kept it in her jewel box, whereof she alone had the key.

She read a good deal to Kit in those days, but still more to herself, conscious that of late she had fallen behind the forward march of literature, and seeking for distraction in an attempt to be up-to-date, rather than in the lives of characters too lively to be alive. They had so much soul, and that so contortionate, that she could not even keep her attention on them long enough to discover why they were not alive. Michael brought her book after book, with the words, "This is supposed to be clever," or "Here's the last Nazing," or "Our old friend Calvin again — not quite so near the hambone this time, but as near as makes no matter." And she would sit with them on her lap and feel gradually that she knew enough to be able to say: "Oh! yes, I've read 'The Gorgons'— it's marvellously Proustian." Or "'Love — the Chameleon'? — well, it's better than her 'Green Cave,' but not up to 'Souls in the Nude.'" Or, "You MUST read 'The Whirligig,' my dear — it gets quite marvellously nowhere."

She held some converse with Annette, but of the guarded character, suitable between mothers and daughters after a certain age; directed, in fact, towards elucidating problems not unconnected with garb. The future — according to Annette — was dark. Were skirts to be longer or shorter by the autumn? If shorter, she herself would pay no attention; it might be all very well for Fleur, but she had reached the limit herself — at her age she would NOT go above the knee. As to the size of hats — again there was no definite indication. The most distinguished cocotte in Paris was said to be in favour of larger hats, but forces were working in the dark against her — motoring and Madame de Michel-Ange "qui est toute pour la vieille cloche." Fleur wanted to know whether she had heard anything fresh about shingling. Annette, who was not yet shingled, but whose neck for a long time had trembled on the block, confessed herself "desesperee." Everything now depended on the Basque cap. If women took to them, shingling would stay; if not, hair might come in again. In any case the new tint would be pure gold; "Et ca sera impossible. Ton pere aurait une apoplexie. En tout cas, cherie, je crains que je suis condamnee aux cheveux longs, jusqu'au jugement dernier. Eh bien, peutetre, on me donnera une bonne petite marque a cause de cela."

"If you want to shingle, Mother, I should. It's just father's conservatism — he doesn't really know what he likes. It would be a new sensation for him."

Annette grimaced. "Ma chere; je n'en sais rien, ton pere est capable de tout."

The man "capable of anything" came every afternoon for half an hour, and would remain seated before the Fragonard, catechising Michael or Annette, and then say, rather suddenly:

"Well, give my love to Fleur; I'm glad the little chap's better!" Or, "That pain he's got will be wind, I expect. But I should have what's-his-name see to it. Give my love to Fleur." And in the hall he would stand a moment by the coat-sarcophagus, listening. Then, adjusting his hat, he would murmur what sounded like: "Well, there it is!" or: "She doesn't get enough air," and go out.

And from the nursery window Fleur would see him, departing at his glum and measured gait, with a compunctious relief. Poor old Dad! Not his fault that he symbolised for her just now the glum and measured paces of domestic virtue. Soames' hope, indeed, that enforced domesticity might cure her, was not being borne out. After the first two or three anxious days, while Kit's temperature was still high, it worked to opposite ends. Her feeling for Jon, in which now was an element of sexual passion, lacking before her marriage, grew, as all such feelings grow, without air and exercise for the body and interest for the mind. It flourished like a plant transferred into a hot-house. The sense of having been defrauded fermented in her soul. Were they never to eat of the golden apple — she and Jon? Was it to hang there, always out of reach — amid dark, lustrous leaves, quite unlike an apple-tree's? She took out her old water-colour box — long now since it had seen the light — and coloured a fantastic tree with large golden fruits.

Michael caught her at it.

"That's jolly good," he said. "You ought to keep up your water-colours, old thing."

Rigid, as if listening for something behind the words, Fleur answered: "Sheer idleness!"

"What's the fruit?"

Fleur laughed.

"Exactly! But this is the soul of a fruit-tree, Michael — not its body!"

“I might have known,” said Michael, ruefully. “Anyway, may I have it for my study when it’s done? It’s got real feeling.”

Fleur felt a queer gratitude. “Shall I label it ‘The Uneatable Fruit’?”

“Certainly not — it looks highly luscious; you’d have to eat it over a basin, like a mango.”

Fleur laughed again.

“Steward!” she said. And, to Michael bending down to kiss her, she inclined her cheek. At least he should guess nothing of her feelings. And, indeed, the French blood in her never ran cold at one of whom she was fond but did not love; the bitter spice which tinctured the blood of most of the Forsytes preserved the jest of her position. She was still the not unhappy wife of a good comrade and best of fellows, who, whatever she did herself, would never do anything ungenerous or mean. Fastidious recoilings from unloved husbands of which she read in old-fashioned novels, and of which she knew her father’s first wife had been so guilty, seemed to her rather ludicrous. Promiscuity was in the air; a fidelity of the spirit so logical that it extended to the motions of the body, was paleolithic, or at least Victorian and ‘middle-class.’ Fulness of life could never be reached on those lines. And yet the frank paganism, advocated by certain masters of French and English literature, was also debarred from Fleur, by its austerely logical habit of going the whole hog. There wasn’t enough necessary virus in her blood, no sex mania about Fleur; indeed, hereunto, that obsession had hardly come her way at all. But now — new was the feeling, as well as old, that she had for Jon; and the days went by in scheming how, when she was free again, she could see him and hear his voice and touch him as she had touched him by the enclosure rails while the horses went flashing by.

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CHAPTER VI

FORMING A COMMITTEE

In the meantime Michael was not so unconscious as she thought, for when two people live together, and one of them is still in love, he senses change as a springbok will scent drought. Memories of that lunch, and of his visit to June, were still unpleasantly green. In his public life — that excellent anodyne for its private counterpart — he sought distraction, and made up his mind to go 'all out' for his Uncle Hilary's slum-conversion scheme. Having amassed the needed literature, he began considering to whom he should go first, well aware that public bodies are centrifugal. Round what fine figure of a public man should he form his committee? Sir Timothy Fanfield and the Marquess of Shropshire would come in usefully enough later, but, though well known for their hobbies, they 'cut no ice' with the general public. A certain magnetism was needed. There was none in any banker he could think of, less in any lawyer or cleric, and no reforming soldier could be otherwise than discredited, until he had carried his reforms, by which time he would be dead. He would have liked an admiral, but they were all out of reach. Retired Prime Ministers were in too lively request, besides being tarred with the brush of Party; and literary idols would be too old, too busy with themselves, too lazy, or too erratic. There remained doctors, business men, governor generals, dukes, and newspaper proprietors. It was at this point that he consulted his father.

Sir Lawrence, who had also been coming to South Square almost daily during Kit's illness, focussed the problem with his eyeglass, and said nothing for quite two minutes.

"What do you mean by magnetism, Michael? The rays of a setting or of a rising sun?"

"Both, if possible, Dad."

"Difficult," said his progenitor, "difficult. One thing's certain — you can't afford cleverness."

"How?"

"The public have suffered from it too much. Besides, we don't really like it in this country, Michael. Character, my dear, character!"

Michael groaned.

"Yes, I know," said Sir Lawrence, "awfully out of date with you young folk." Then, raising his loose eyebrow abruptly so that his eyeglass fell on to the problem, he added: "Eureka! Wilfred Bentworth! The very man — last of the squires — reforming the slums. It's what you'd call a stunt."

"Old Bentworth?" repeated Michael, dubiously.

"He's only my age — sixty-eight, and got nothing to do with politics."

"But isn't he stupid?"

"There speaks your modern! Rather broad in the beam, and looking a little like a butler with a moustache, but — stupid? No. Refused a peerage three times. Think of the effect of that on the public!"

"Wilfred Bentworth? I should never have thought of him — always looked on him as the professional honest man," murmured Michael.

"But he IS honest!"

"Yes, but when he speaks, he always alludes to it."

"That's true," said Sir Lawerence, "but one must have a defect. He's got twenty thousand acres, and knows all about fatting stock. He's on a railway board; he's the figurehead of his county's cricket, and chairman of a big hospital. Everybody knows him. He has Royalty to shoot; goes back to Saxon times; and is the nearest thing to John Bull left. In any other country he'd frighten the life out of any scheme, but in England — well, if you can get him, Michael, your job's half done."

Michael looked quizzically at his parent. Did Bart quite understand the England of today? His mind roved hurriedly over the fields of public life. By George! He did!

"How shall I approach him, Dad? Will you come on the committee yourself? You know him; and we could go together."

"If you'd really like to have me," said Sir Lawrence, almost wistfully, "I will. It's time I did some work again."

"Splendid! I think I see your point about Bentworth. Beyond suspicion — has too much already to have anything to gain, and isn't clever enough to take in anyone if he wanted to."

Sir Lawrence nodded. "Add his appearance; that counts tremendously in a people that have given up the land as a bad job. We still love to think of beef. It accounts for a good many of our modern leaderships. A people that's got away from its base, and is drifting after it knows not what, wants beam, beef, beer — or at least port — in its leaders. There's something pathetic about that, Michael. What's today — Thursday? This'll be Bentworth's board day. Shall we strike while the iron's hot? We'll very likely catch him at Burton's."

"Good!" said Michael, and they set forth.

"This club," murmured Sir Lawrence, as they were going up the steps of Burton's Club, "is confined to travellers, and I don't suppose Bentworth's ever travelled a yard. That shows how respected he is. No, I'm wronging him. I remember he commanded his yeomanry in the Boer War. 'The Squire' in the Club, Smileman?"

"Yes, Sir Lawrence; just come in."

The "last of the squires" was, indeed, in front of the tape. His rosy face, with clipped white moustache, and hard, little, white whiskers, was held as if the news had come to him, not he to the news. Banks might inflate and Governments fall, wars break out and strikes collapse, but there would be no bending of that considerable waist, no flickering in the steady blue stare from under eyebrows a little raised at their outer ends. Rather bald, and clipped in what hair was left, never did man look more perfectly shaved; and the moustache ending exactly where the lips ended, gave an extreme firmness to the general good humour of an open-air face.

Looking from him to his own father — thin, quick, twisting, dark, as full of whims as a bog is of snipe — Michael was impressed. A whim, to Wilfred Bentworth, would be strange fowl indeed! 'However he's managed to keep out of politics,' thought Michael, 'I can't conceive.'

"'Squire'— my son — a sucking statesman. We've come to ask you to lead a forlorn hope. Don't smile! You're 'for it,' as they say in this Bonzoid age. We propose to shelter ourselves behind you in the breach."

"Eh! What? Sit down! What's all this?"

"It's a matter of the slums, 'if you know what I mean,' as the lady said. But go ahead, Michael!"

Michael went ahead. Having developed his uncle's thesis and cited certain figures, he embroidered them with as much picturesque detail as he could remember, feeling rather like a fly attacking the flanks of an ox and watching his tail.

"When you drive a nail into the walls, sir," he ended, "things come out."

"Good God!" said the squire suddenly. "Good God!"

"One doubts the good, there," put in Sir Lawrence.

The squire stared.

"Irreverent beggar," he said. "I don't know Charwell; they say he's cracked."

"Hardly that," murmured Sir Lawrence; "merely unusual, like most members of really old families."

The early English specimen in the chair before him twinkled.

"The Charwells, you know," went on Sir Lawrence, "were hoary when that rascally lawyer, the first Mont, founded us under James the First."

"Oh!" said the squire. "Are you one of HIS precious creations? I didn't know."

"You're not familiar with the slums, sir?" said Michael, feeling that they must not wander in the mazes of descent.

"What! No. Ought to be, I suppose. Poor devils!"

"It's not so much," said Michael, cunningly, "the humanitarian side, as the deterioration of stock, which is so serious."

"M'm?" said the squire. "Do you know anything about stock-breeding?"

Michael shook his head.

"Well, you can take it from me that it's nearly all heredity. You could fat a slum population, but you can't change their character!"

"I don't think there's anything very wrong with their character," said Michael. "The children are predominantly fair, which means, I suppose, that they've still got the Anglo-Saxon qualities."

He saw his father cock an eye. "Quite the diplomat!" he seemed saying.

"Whom have you got in mind for this committee?" asked the squire, abruptly.

"My father," said Michael; "and we'd thought of the Marquess of Shropshire —"

"Very long in the tooth."

"But very spry," said Sir Lawrence. "Still game to electrify the world."

"Who else?"

"Sir Timothy Fanfield —"

"That fire-eating old buffer! Yes?"

"Sir Thomas Morsell —"

"M'm!"

Michael hurried on: "Or any other medical man you thought better of, sir."

"There are none. Are you sure about the bugs?"

"Absolutely!"

"Well, I should have to see Charwell. I'm told he can gammon the hind-leg off a donkey."

"Hilary's a good fellow," put in Sir Lawrence; "a really good fellow, 'squire.'"

"Well, Mont, if I take to him, I'll come in. I don't like vermin."

"A great national movement, sir," began Michael, "and nobody —"

The squire shook his head.

"Don't make any mistake," he said. "May get a few pounds, perhaps — get rid of a few bugs; but national movements — no such things in this country." . . .

"Stout fellow," said Sir Lawrence when they were going down the steps again; "never been enthusiastic in his life. He'll make a splendid chairman. I think we've got him, Michael. You played your bugs well. We'd better try the Marquess next. Even a duke will serve under Bentworth, they know he's of older family than themselves, and there's something about him."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Well, he isn't thinking about himself; he never gets into the air; and he doesn't give a damn for anyone or anything."

"There must be something more than that," said Michael.

"Well, there is. The fact is, he thinks as England really thinks, and not as it thinks it thinks."

"By Jove!" said Michael. "'Some' diagnosis! Shall we dine, sir?"

"Yes, let's go to the Parthenaeum! When they made me a member there, I used to think I should never go in, but d'you know, I use it quite a lot. It's more like the East than anything else in London. A Yogi could ask for nothing better. I go in and I sit in a trance until it's time for me to come out again. There isn't a sound; nobody comes near me. There's no vulgar material comfort. The prevailing colour is that of the Ganges. And there's more inaccessible wisdom in the place than you could find anywhere else in the West. We'll have the club dinner. It's calculated to moderate all transports. Lunch, of course, you can't get if you've a friend with you. One must draw the line somewhere at hospitality."

"Now," he resumed, when they had finished moderating their transports, "let's go and see the Marquess! I haven't set eyes on the old boy since that Marjorie Ferrar affair. We'll hope he hasn't got gout." . . .

In Curzon Street, they found that the Marquess had finished dinner and gone back to his study.

"Don't wake him if he's asleep," said Sir Lawrence.

"The Marquess is never asleep, Sir Lawrence."

He was writing when they were ushered in, and stopped to peer at them round the corner of his bureau.

"Ah, young Mont!" he said. "How pleasant!" Then paused rather abruptly. "Nothing to do with my grand-daughter, I trust?"

"Far from it, Marquess. We just want your help in a public work on behalf of the humble. It's a slum proposition, as the Yanks say.”

The Marquess shook his head.

“I don’t like interfering with the humble; the humbler people are, the more one ought to consider their feelings.”

“We’re absolutely with you there, sir; but let my son explain.”

“Sit down, then.” And the Marquess rose, placed his foot on his chair, and leaning his elbow on his knee, inclined his head to one side. For the second time that evening Michael plunged into explanation.

“Bentworth?” said the Marquess. “His shorthorns are good; a solid fellow, but behind the times.”

“That’s why we want you, Marquess.”

“My dear young Mont, I’m too old.”

“It’s precisely because you’re so young that we came to you.”

“Frankly, sir,” said Michael, “we thought you’d like to be on the committee of appeal, because in my uncle’s policy there’s electrification of the kitchens; we must have someone who’s an authority on that and can keep it to the fore.”

“Ah!” said the Marquess. “Hilary Charwell — I once heard him preach in St. Paul’s — most amusing! What do the slum-dwellers say to electrification?”

“Nothing till it’s done, of course, but once it’s done, it’s everything to them, sir.”

“H’m!” said the Marquess. “H’m! It would appear that there are no flies on your uncle.”

“We hope,” pursued Michael, “that, with electrification, there will soon be no flies on anything else.”

The Marquess nodded. “It’s the right end of the stick. I’ll think of it. My trouble is that I’ve no money; and I don’t like appealing to others without putting down something substantial myself.”

The two Monts looked at each other; the excuse was patent, and they had not foreseen it.

“I suppose,” went on the Marquess, “you don’t know anyone who would buy some lace — point de Venise, the real stuff? Or,” he added, “I’ve a Morland —”

“Have you, sir?” cried Michael. “My father-inlaw was saying only the other day that he wanted a Morland.”

“Has he a good home for it?” said the Marquess, rather wistfully. “It’s a white pony.”

“Oh, yes, sir; he’s a real collector.”

“Any chance of its going to the nation, in time?”

“Quite a good chance, I think.”

“Well, perhaps he’d come and look at it. It’s never changed hands so far. If he would give me the market price, whatever that may be, it might solve the problem.”

“That’s frightfully good of you, sir.”

“Not at all,” said the Marquess. “I believe in electricity, and I detest smoke; this seems a movement in the right direction. It’s a Mr. Forsyte, I think. There was a case — my granddaughter; but that’s a past matter. I trust you’re friends again?”

“Yes, sir; I saw her about a fortnight ago, and it was quite O.K.”

“Nothing lasts with you modern young people,” said the Marquess; “the younger generation seems to have forgotten the war already. Is that good, I wonder? What do YOU say, Mont?”

“‘Tout casse, tout passe,’ Marquess.”

“Oh! I don’t complain,” said the Marquess; “rather the contrary. By the way — on this committee you’ll want a new man with plenty of money.”

“Can you suggest one, sir?”

“My next-door neighbour — a man called Montross — I think his real name is shorter — might possibly serve. He’s made millions, I believe, out of the elastic band — had some patent for making them last only just long enough. I see him sometimes gazing longingly at me — I don’t use them, you know. Perhaps if you mention my name. He has a wife, and no title at present. I should imagine he might be looking for a public work.”

“He sounds,” said Sir Lawrence, “the very man. Do you think we might venture now?”

“Try!” said the Marquess, “try. A domestic character, I’m told. It’s no use doing things by halves; an immense amount of money will be wanted if we are to electrify any considerable number of kitchens. A man who would help substantially towards that would earn his knighthood much better than most people.”

“I agree,” said Sir Lawrence; “a real public service. I suppose we mustn’t dangle the knighthood?”

The Marquess shook the head that was resting on his hand.

“In these days — no,” he said. “Just the names of his colleagues. We can hardly hope that he’ll take an interest in the thing for itself.”

“Well, thank you ever so much, sir. We’ll let you know whether Wilfred Bentworth will take the chair, and how we progress generally.”

The Marquess took his foot down and inclined his head at Michael.

“I like to see young politicians interesting themselves in the future of England, because, in fact, no amount of politics will prevent her having one. By the way, have you had your own kitchen electrified?”

“My wife and I are thinking of it, sir.”

“Don’t think!” said the Marquess. “Have it done!”

“We certainly shall, now.”

“We must strike while the strike is on,” said the Marquess. “If there is anything shorter than the public’s memory, I am not aware of it.”

“Phew!” said Sir Lawrence, on the next doorstep; “the old boy’s spryer than ever. I take it we may assume that the name here was originally Moss. If so, the question is: ‘Have we the wits for this job?’”

And, in some doubt, they scrutinised the mansion before them.

“We had better be perfectly straightforward,” said Michael. “Dwell on the slums, mention the names we hope to get, and leave the rest to him.”

“I think,” said his father, “we had better say ‘got,’ not ‘hope to get.’”

“The moment we mention the names, Dad, he’ll know we’re after his dibs.”

“He’ll know that in any case, my boy.”

“I suppose there’s no doubt about the dibs?”

“Montross, Ltd.! They’re not confined to elastic bands.”

“I should like to make a perfectly plain appeal to his generosity, Dad. There’s a lot of generosity in that blood, you know.”

“We can’t stand just here, Michael, discussing the make-up of the chosen. Ring the bell!”

Michael rang.

“Mr. Montross at home? Thank you. Will you give him these cards, and ask if we might see him for a moment?”

The room into which they were ushered was evidently accustomed to this sort of thing, for, while there was nothing that anyone could take away, there were chairs in which it was possible to be quite comfortable, and some valuable but large pictures and busts.

Sir Lawrence was examining a bust, and Michael a picture, when the door was opened, and a voice said: “Yes, gentlemen?”

Mr. Montross was of short stature, and somewhat like a thin walrus who had once been dark but had gone grey; his features were slightly aquiline, he had melancholy brown eyes, and big drooping grizzly moustaches and eyebrows.

“We were advised to come to you, sir,” began Michael at once, “by your neighbour, the Marquess of Shropshire. We’re trying to form a committee to issue an appeal for a national fund to convert the slums.” And for the third time he plunged into detail.

“And why do you come to ME, gentlemen?” said Mr. Montross, when he had finished.

Michael subdued a stammer.

“Because of your wealth, sir,” he said, simply.

“Good!” said Mr. Montross. “You see, I began in the slums, Mr. Mont — is it? — yes, Mr. Mont — I began there — I know a lot about those people, you know. I thought perhaps you came to me because of that."

"Splendid, sir," said Michael, "but of course we hadn't an idea."

"Well, those people are born without a future."

"That's just what we're out to rectify, sir."

"Take them away from their streets and put them in a new country, then — perhaps; but leave them to their streets —" Mr. Montross shook his head. "I know them, you see, Mr. Mont; if these people thought about the future, they could not go on living. And if you do not think about the future, you cannot have one."

"How about yourself?" said Sir Lawrence. Mr. Montross turned his gaze from Michael to the cards in his hand, then raised his melancholy eyes.

"Sir Lawrence Mont, isn't it? — I am a Jew — that is different. A Jew will rise from any beginnings, if he is a real Jew. The reason the Polish and the Russian Jews do not rise so easily you can see from their faces — they have too much Slav or Mongol blood. The pure Jew like me rises."

Sir Lawrence and Michael exchanged a glance. "We like this fellow," it seemed to say.

"I was a poor boy in a bad slum," went on Mr. Montross, intercepting the glance, "and I am now — well, a millionaire; but I have not become that, you know, by throwing away my money. I like to help people that will help themselves."

"Then," said Michael, with a sigh, "there's nothing in this scheme that appeals to you, sir?"

"I will ask my wife," answered Mr. Montross, also with a sigh. "Good-night, gentlemen. Let me write to you."

The two Monts moved slowly towards Mount Street in the last of the twilight.

"Well?" said Michael.

Sir Lawrence cocked his eyebrow.

"An honest man," he said; "it's fortunate for us he has a wife."

"You mean —?"

"The potential Lady Montross will bring him in. There was no other reason why he should ask her. That makes four, and Sir Timothy's a 'sitter'; slum landlords are his betes noires. We only want three more. A bishop one can always get, but I've forgotten which it is for the moment; we MUST have a big doctor, and we ought to have a banker, but perhaps your uncle, Lionel Charwell, will do; he knows all about the shady side of finance in the courts, and we could make Alison work for us. And now, my dear, good-night! I don't know when I've felt more tired."

They parted at the corner, and Michael walked towards Westminster. He passed under the spikes of Buckingham Palace Gardens, and along the stables leading to Victoria Street. All this part had some very nice slums, though of late he knew the authorities had been 'going for them.' He passed an area where they had 'gone' for them to the extent of pulling down a congery of old houses. Michael stared up at the remnants of walls mosaicked by the unstripped wall papers. What had happened to the tribe outdriven from these ruins; whereto had they taken the tragic lives of which they made such cheerful comedy? He came to the broad river of Victoria Street and crossed it, and, taking a route that he knew was to be avoided, he was soon where women encrusted with age sat on doorsteps for a breath of air, and little alleys led off to unplumbed depths. Michael plumbed them in fancy, not in fact. He stood quite a while at the end of one, trying to imagine what it must be like to live there. Not succeeding, he walked briskly on, and turned into his own square, and to his own habitat with its bay-treed tubs, its Danish roof, and almost hopeless cleanliness. And he suffered from the feeling which besets those who are sensitive about their luck.

'Fleur would say,' he thought, perching on the coat-sarcophagus, for he, too, was tired, 'that those people having no aesthetic sense and no tradition to wash up to, are at least as happy as we are. She'd say that they get as much pleasure out of living from hand to mouth (and not too much mouth), as we do from baths, jazz, poetry and cocktails; and she's generally right.' Only, what a confession of defeat! If that were really so, to what end were they all dancing? If life with bugs and flies were as good as life without bugs and flies, why Keating's powder and all the other aspirations of the poets? Blake's New Jerusalem was, surely, based on Keating, and Keating was based on a sensitive skin. To say, then, that civilisation was skin-deep, wasn't cynical at all. People possibly had souls, but they certainly had skins, and progress was real only if thought of in terms of skin!

So ran the thoughts of Michael, perched on the coat-sarcophagus; and meditating on Fleur's skin, so clear and smooth, he went upstairs.

She had just had her final bath, and was standing at her bedroom window. Thinking of — what? The moon over the square?

“Poor prisoner!” he said, and put his arm round her.

“What a queer sound the town makes at night, Michael. And, if you think, it’s made up of the seven million separate sounds of people going their own separate ways.”

“And yet — the whole lot are going one way.”

“We’re not going any way,” said Fleur, “there’s only pace.”

“There must be direction, my child, underneath.”

“Oh! Of course, change.”

“For better or worse; but that’s direction in itself.”

“Perhaps only to the edge, and over we go.”

“Gadarene swine!”

“Well, why not?”

“I admit,” said Michael unhappily, “it’s all hair-triggerish; but there’s always common-sense.”

“Common-sense — in face of passions!”

Michael slackened his embrace. “I thought you were always on the side of common-sense. Passion? The passion to have? Or the passion to know?”

“Both,” said Fleur. “That’s the present age, and I’m a child of it. You’re not, you know, Michael.”

“Query!” said Michael, letting go of her waist. “But if you want to have or know anything in particular, Fleur, I’d like to be told.”

There was a moment of stillness, before he felt her arm slipping through his, and her lips against his ear.

“Only the moon, my dear. Let’s go to bed.”

❦

Chapter VII

Two Visits

On the very day that Fleur was freed from her nursing she received a visit from the last person in her thoughts. If she had not altogether forgotten the existence of one indelibly associated with her wedding-day, she had never expected to see her again. To hear the words: “Miss June Forsyte, ma’am,” and find her in front of the Fragonard, was like experiencing a very slight earthquake.

The silvery little figure had turned at her entrance, extending a hand clad in a fabric glove.

“It’s a flimsy school, that,” she said, pointing her chin at the Fragonard; “but I like your room. Harold Blade’s pictures would look splendid here. Do you know his work?”

Fleur shook her head.

“Oh! I should have thought any —” The little lady stopped, as if she had seen a brink.

“Won’t you sit down?” said Fleur. “Have you still got your gallery off Cork Street?”

“That? Oh, no! It was a hopeless place. I sold it for half what my father gave for it.”

“And what became of that Polo-American — Boris Strumo something — you were so interested in?”

“He! Oh! Gone to pieces utterly. Married, and does purely commercial work. He gets big prices for his things — no good at all. So Jon and his wife —” Again she stopped, and Fleur tried to see the edge from which she had saved her foot.

“Yes,” she said, looking steadily into June’s eyes, which were moving from side to side, “Jon seems to have abandoned America for good. I can’t see his wife being happy over here.”

“Ah!” said June. “Holly told me you went to America, yourself. Did you see Jon over there?”

“Not quite.”

“Did you like America?”

“It’s very stimulating.”

June sniffed.

“Do they buy pictures? I mean, do you think there’d be a chance for Harold Blade’s work there?”

“Without knowing the work —”

“Of course, I forgot; it seems so impossible that you don’t know it.”

She leaned towards Fleur and her eyes shone.

“I do so want you to sit to him, you know; he’d make such a wonderful picture of you. Your father simply must arrange that. With your position in Society, Fleur, especially after that case last year,”— Fleur winced, if imperceptibly —“it would be the making of poor Harold. He’s such a genius,” she added, frowning; “you MUST come and see his work.”

“I should like to,” said Fleur. “Have you seen Jon yet?”

“No. They’re coming on Friday. I hope I shall like her. As a rule, I like all foreigners, except the Americans and the French. I mean — with exceptions, of course.”

“Naturally, said Fleur. “What time are you generally in?”

“Every afternoon between five and seven are Harold’s hours for going out — he has my studio, you know. I can show you his work better without him; he’s so touchy — all real geniuses are. I want him to paint Jon’s wife, too. He’s extraordinary with women.”

“In that case, I think you should let Jon see him and his work first.”

June’s eyes stared up at her for a moment, and flew off to the Fragonard.

“When will your father come?” she asked.

“Perhaps it would be best for me to come first.”

“Soames naturally likes the wrong thing,” said June, thoughtfully; “but if you tell him you want to be painted — he’s sure to — he always spoils you —”

Fleur smiled.

"Well, I'll come. Perhaps not this week." And, in thought, she added: 'And perhaps, yes — Friday.'

June rose. "I like your house, and your husband. Where is he?"

"Michael? Slumming, probably; he's in the thick of a scheme for their conversion."

"How splendid! Can I see your boy?"

"I'm afraid he's only just over measles."

June sighed. "It does seem long since I had measles. I remember Jon's measles so well; I got him his first adventure books." Suddenly she looked up at Fleur: "Do you like his wife? I think it's ridiculous his being married so young. I tell Harold he must never marry; it's the end of adventure." Her eyes moved from side to side, as if she were adding: "Or the beginning, and I've never had it." And suddenly she held out both hands.

"I shall expect you. I don't know whether he'll like your hair!"

Fleur smiled.

"I'm afraid I can't grow it for him. Oh! Here's my father coming in!" She had seen Soames pass the window.

"I don't know that I want to see him unless it's necessary," said June.

"I expect he'll feel exactly the same. If you just go out, he won't pay any attention."

"Oh!" said June, and out she went.

Through the window Fleur watched her moving as if she had not time to touch the ground.

A moment later Soames came in.

"What's that woman want here?" he said. "She's a stormy petrel."

"Nothing much, dear; she has a new painter, whom she's trying to boost."

"Another of her lame ducks! She's been famous for them all her life — ever since —" He stopped short of Bosinney's name. "She'd never go anywhere without wanting something," he added. "Did she get it?"

"Not more than I did, dear!"

Soames was silent, feeling vaguely that he had been near the proverb, "The kettle and the pot." What was the use, indeed, of going anywhere unless you wanted something? It was one of the cardinal principles of life.

"I went to see that Morland," he said; "it's genuine enough. In fact, I bought it." And he sank into a reverie . . . .

Acquainted by Michael with the fact that the Marquess of Shropshire had a Morland he wanted to sell, he had said at once: "I don't know that I want to buy one."

"I thought you did, sir, from what you were saying the other day. It's a white pony."

"That, of course," said Soames. "What does he want for it?"

"The market price, I believe."

"There isn't such a thing. Is it genuine?"

"It's never changed hands, he says." Soames brooded aloud. "The Marquess of Shropshire — that's that red haired baggage's grandfather, isn't it?"

"Yes, but perfectly docile. He'd like you to see it, he said."

"I daresay," said Soames, and no more at the moment . . . .

"Where's this Morland?" he asked a few days later.

"At Shropshire House — in Curzon Street, sir."

"Oh! Ah! Well, I'll have a look at it."

Having lunched at Green Street, where he was still staying, he walked round the necessary corners, and sent in his card, on which he had pencilled the words: "My son-inlaw, Michael Mont, says you would like me to see your Morland."

The butler came back, and, opening a door, said:

"In here, sir. The Morland is over the sideboard."

In that big dining-room, where even large furniture looked small, the Morland looked smaller, between two still-lifes of a Dutch size and nature. It had a simple scheme — white pony in stable, pigeon picking up some grains, small boy on upturned basket eating apple. A glance told Soames that it was genuine, and had not even been restored — the chiaroscuro was considerable. He stood, back to the light, looking at it attentively. Morland was not so sought after as he used to be; on the other hand, his pictures were distinctive and of a handy size. If one had not much space left, and wanted that period represented, he was perhaps the most repaying after Constable — good Old Cromes being so infernally rare. A Morland was a Morland, as a Millet was a Millet; and would never be anything else. Like all collectors in an experimental epoch, Soames was continually being faced with the advisability of buying not only what was what, but what would remain what. Such modern painters as were painting modern stuff, would, in his opinion, be dead as door-nails before he himself was; besides, however much he tried, he did not like the stuff. Such modern painters, like most of the academicians, as were painting ancient stuff, were careful fellows, no doubt, but who could say whether any of them would live? No! The only safe thing was to buy the dead, and only the dead who were going to live, at that. In this way — for Soames was not alone in his conclusions — the early decease of most living painters was ensured. They were already, indeed, saying that hardly one of them could sell a picture for love or money.

He was looking at the pony through his curved thumb and forefinger when he heard a slight sound; and, turning, saw a short old man in a tweed suit, apparently looking at him in precisely the same way.

Dropping his hand, and deciding not to say “His Grace,” or whatever it was, Soames muttered:

“I was looking at the tail — some good painting in that.”

The Marquess had also dropped his hand, and was consulting the card between his other thumb and forefinger.

“Mr. Forsyte? Yes. My grandfather bought it from the painter. There’s a note on the back. I don’t want to part with it, but these are lean days. Would you like to see the back?”

“Yes,” said Soames; “I always look at their backs.”

“Sometimes,” said the Marquess, detaching the Morland with difficulty, “the best part of the picture.”

Soames smiled down the further side of his mouth; he did not wish the old fellow to receive a false impression that he was ‘kowtowing,’ or anything of that sort.

“Something in the hereditary principle, Mr. Forsyte,” the Marquess went on, with his head on one side, “when it comes to the sale of heirlooms.”

“Oh! I can see it’s genuine,” said Soames, “without looking at the back.”

“Then, if you do want to buy, we can have a simple transaction between gentlemen. You know all about values, I hear.”

Soames put his head to the other side, and looked at the back of the picture. The old fellow’s words were so disarming, that for the life of him he could not tell whether or not to be disarmed.

“‘George Morland to Lord George Ferrar,’” he read, “‘for value received — L80. 1797.’”

“He came into the title later,” said the Marquess. “I’m glad Morland got his money — great rips, our grandfathers, Mr. Forsyte; days of great rips, those.”

Subtly flattered by the thought that “Superior Dosset” was a great rip, Soames expanded slightly.

“Great rip, Morland,” he said. “But there were real painters then, people could buy with confidence — they can’t now.”

“I’m not sure,” said the Marquess, “I’m not sure. The electrification of art may be a necessary process. We’re all in a movement, Mr. Forsyte.”

“Yes,” said Soames, glumly; “but we can’t go on at this rate — it’s not natural. We shall be standing-pat again before long.”

“I wonder. We must keep our minds open, mustn’t we?”

“The pace doesn’t matter so much,” said Soames, astonished at himself, “so long as it leads somewhere.”

The Marquess resigned the picture to the sideboard, and putting his foot up on a chair, leaned his elbow on his knee.

“Did your son-inlaw tell you for what I wanted the money? He has a scheme for electrifying slum kitchens. After all, we ARE cleaner and more humane than our grandfathers, Mr. Forsyte. Now, what do you think would be a fair price?”

“Why not get Dumetrius’ opinion?”

“The Haymarket man? Is his opinion better than yours?”

“That I can’t say,” said Soames, honestly. “But if you mentioned my name, he’d value the picture for five guineas, and might make you an offer himself."

"I don't think I should care for it to be known that I was selling pictures."

"Well," said Soames, "I don't want you to get less than perhaps you could. But if I told Dumetrius to buy me a Morland, five hundred would be my limit. Suppose I give you six."

The Marquess tilted up his beard. "That would be too generous, perhaps. Shall we say five-fifty?"

Soames shook his head.

"We won't haggle," he said. "Six. You can have the cheque now, and I'll take it away. It will hang in my gallery at Mapledurham."

The Marquess took his foot down, and sighed.

"Really, I'm very much obliged to you. I'm delighted to think it will go to a good home."

"If you care to come and see it at any time —" Soames checked himself. An old fellow with one foot in the House of Lords and one in the grave, and no difference between them, to speak of — as if he'd want to come!

"That would be delightful," said the Marquess, with his eyes wandering, as Soames had suspected they would. "Have you your own electric plant there?"

"Yes," and Soames took out his cheque-book. "May I have a taxi called? If you hang the still-lifes a little closer together, this won't be missed."

With that doubtful phrase in their ears, they exchanged goods, and Soames, with the Morland, returned to Green Street in a cab. He wondered a little on the way whether or not the Marquess had 'done' him, by talking about a transaction between gentlemen. Agreeable old chap in his way, but quick as a bird, looking through his thumb and finger like that! . . .

And now, in his daughter's 'parlour' he said: "What's this about Michael electrifying slum kitchens?"

Fleur smiled, and Soames did not approve of its irony.

"Michael's over head and ears."

"In debt?"

"Oh, no! Committed himself to a slum scheme, just as he did to Foggartism. I hardly see him."

Soames made a sound within himself. Young Jon Forsyte lurked now behind all his thoughts of her. Did she really resent Michael's absorption in public life, or was it pretence — an excuse for having a private life of her own?

"The slums want attending to, no doubt," he said. "He must have something to do."

Fleur shrugged.

"Michael's too good to live."

"I don't know about that," said Soames; "but he's — er — rather trustful."

"That's not your failing, is it, Dad? You don't trust ME a bit."

"Not trust you!" floundered Soames. "Why not?"

"Exactly!"

Soames sought refuge in the Fragonard. Sharp! She had seen into him!

"I suppose June wants me to buy a picture," he said.

"She wants you to have me painted."

"Does she? What's the name of her lame duck?"

"Blade, I think."

"Never heard of him!"

"Well, I expect you will."

"Yes," muttered Soames; "she's like a limpet. It's in the blood."

"The Forsyte blood? You and I, then, too, dear."

Soames turned from the Fragonard and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Yes; you and I, too."

"Isn't that nice?" said Fleur.

Chapter VIII

The Jolly Accident

In doubting Fleur's show of resentment at Michael's new "stunt," Soames was near the mark. She did not resent it at all. It kept his attention off herself, it kept him from taking up birth control, for which she felt the country was not yet quite prepared, and it had a popular appeal denied to Foggartism. The slums were under one's nose, and what was under the nose could be brought to the attention even of party politics. Being a town proposition, slums would concern six-sevenths of the vote. Foggartism, based on the country life necessary to national stamina and the growth of food within and overseas, concerned the whole population, but only appealed to one-seventh of the vote. And Fleur, nothing if not a realist, had long grasped the fact that the main business of politicians was to be, and to remain, elected. The vote was a magnet of the first order, and unconsciously swayed every political judgment and aspiration; or, if not, it ought to, for was it not the touchstone of democracy? In the committee, too, which Michael was forming, she saw, incidentally, the best social step within her reach.

"If they want a meeting-place," she had said, "why not here?"

"Splendid!" answered Michael. "Handy for the House and clubs. Thank you, old thing!"

Fleur had added honestly:

"Oh, I shall be quite glad. As soon as I take Kit to the sea, you can start. Norah Curfew's letting me her cottage at Loring for three weeks." She did not add: "And it's only five miles from Wansdon."

On the Friday, after lunch, she telephoned to June:

"I'm going to the sea on Monday — I COULD come this afternoon, but I think you said Jon was coming. Is he? Because if so —"

"He's coming at 4.30, but he's got to catch a train back at six-twenty."

"His wife, too?"

"No. He's just coming to see Harold's work."

"Oh! — well — I think I'd better come on Sunday, then."

"Yes, Sunday will be all right; then Harold will see you. He never goes out on Sunday. He hates the look of it so."

Putting down the receiver, Fleur took up the time-table. Yes, there was the train! What a coincidence if she happened to take it to make a preliminary inspection of Norah Curfew's cottage! Not even June, surely, would mention their talk on the 'phone.

At lunch she did not tell Michael she was going — he might want to come, too, or at least to see her off. She knew he would be at 'the House' in the afternoon, she would just leave a note to say that she had gone to make sure the cottage would be in order for Monday. And after lunch she bent over and kissed him between the eyes, without any sense of betrayal. A sight of Jon was due to her after these dreary weeks! Any sight of Jon was always due to her who had been defrauded of him. And, as the afternoon drew on, and she put her night things into her dressing-case, a red spot became fixed in each cheek, and she wandered swiftly, her hands restive, her spirit homeless. Having had tea, and left the note giving her address — an hotel at Nettlefold — she went early to Victoria Station. There, having tipped the guard to secure emptiness, she left her bag in a corner seat and took up her stand by the book-stall, where Jon must pass with his ticket. And, while she stood there, examining the fiction of the day, all her faculties were busy with reality. Among the shows and shadows of existence, an hour and a half of real life lay before her. Who could blame her for filching it back from a filching Providence? And if anybody could, she didn't care! The hands of the station clock moved on, and Fleur gazed at this novel after that, all of them full of young women in awkward situations, and vaguely wondered whether they were more awkward than her own. Three minutes to the time! Wasn't he coming after all? Had that wretched June kept him for the night? At last in despair she caught up a tome called "Violin Obbligato," which at least would be modern, and paid for it. And then, as she was receiving her change, she saw him hastening. Turning, she passed through the wicket, walking quickly, knowing that he was walking more quickly. She let him see her first.

"Fleur!"

"Jon! Where are you going?"

"To Wansdon."

"Oh! And I'm going to Nettlefold, to see a cottage at Loring for my baby. Here's my bag, in here — quick! We're off!"

The door was banged to, and she held out both her hands.

"Isn't this queer, and jolly?"

Jon held the hands, and dropped them rather suddenly.

"I've just been to see June. She's just the same — bless her!"

"Yes, she came round to me the other day; wants me to be painted by her present pet."

"You might do worse. I said he should paint Anne."

"Really? Is he good enough for HER?"

And she was sorry; she hadn't meant to begin like that! Still — must begin somehow — must employ lips which might otherwise go lighting on his eyes, his hair, HIS lips! And she rushed into words: Kit's measles, Michael's committee, "Violin Obbligato," and the Proustian School; Val's horses, Jon's poetry, the smell of England — so important to a poet — anything, everything, in a sort of madcap medley.

"You see, Jon, I must talk; I've been in prison for a month." And all the time she felt that she was wasting minutes that might have been spent with lips silent and heart against his, if the heart, as they said, really extended to the centre of the body. And all the time, too, the proboscis of her spirit was scenting, searching for the honey and the saffron of his spirit. Was there any for her, or was it all kept for that wretched American girl he had left behind him, and to whom — alas! — he was returning? But Jon gave her no sign. Unlike the old impulsive Jon, he had learned secrecy. By a whim of memory, whose ways are so inscrutable, she remembered being taken, as a very little girl, to Timothy's on the Bayswater Road to her great-aunt Hester — an old still figure in black Victorian lace and jet, and a Victorian chair, with a stilly languid voice, saying to her father: "Oh, yes, my dear; your Uncle Jolyon, before he married, was very much in love with our great friend Alice Read; but she was consumptive, you know, and of course he felt he couldn't marry her — it wouldn't have been prudent, he felt, because of children. And then she died, and he married Edith Moor." Funny how that had stuck in her ten-year-old mind! And she stared at Jon. Old Jolyon — as they called him in the family — had been his grandfather. She had seen his photograph in Holly's album — a domed head, a white moustache, eyes deep-set under the brows, like Jon's. "It wouldn't have been prudent!" How Victorian! Was Jon, too, Victorian? She felt as if she would never know what Jon was. And she became suddenly cautious. A single step too far, or too soon, and he might be gone from her again for good! He was not — no, he was not modern! For all she knew, there might be something absolute, not relative, in his "make-up," and to Fleur the absolute was strange, almost terrifying. But she had not spent six years in social servitude without learning to adjust herself swiftly to the playing of a new part. She spoke in a calmer tone, almost a drawl; her eyes became cool and quizzical. What did Jon think about the education of boys — before he knew where he was, of course, he would be having one himself? It hurt her to say that, and, while saying it, she searched his face; but it told her nothing.

"We've put Kit down for Winchester. Do you believe in the Public Schools, Jon? Or do you think they're out of date?"

"Yes; and a good thing, too."

"How?"

"I mean I should send him there."

"I see," said Fleur. "Do you know, Jon, you really have changed. You wouldn't have said that, I believe, six years ago."

"Perhaps not. Being out of England makes you believe in dams. Ideas can't be left to swop around in the blue. In England they're not, and that's the beauty of it."

"I don't care what happens to ideas," said Fleur, "but I don't like stupidity. The Public Schools —"

"Oh, no; not really. Certain things get cut and dried there, of course; but then, they ought to."

Fleur leaned forward, and with faint malice said: "Have you become a moralist, my dear?"

Jon answered glumly:

"Why, no — no more than reason!"

"Do you remember our walk by the river?"

"I told you before — I remember everything."

Fleur restrained her hand from a heart which had given a jump.

"We nearly quarrelled because I said I hated people for their stupid cruelties, and wanted them to stew in their own juice."

"Yes; and I said I pitied them. Well?"

"Repression is stupid, you know, Jon." And, by instinct, added: "That's why I doubt the Public Schools. They teach it."

"They're useful socially, Fleur," and his eyes twinkled.

Fleur pursed her lips. She did not mind. But she would make him sorry for that; because his compunction would be a trump card in her hand.

"I know perfectly well," she said, "that I'm a snob — I was called so publicly."

"What!"

"Oh, yes; there was a case about it."

"Who dared?"

"Oh! my dear, that's ancient history. But of course you knew — Francis Wilmot must have —"

Jon made a horrified gesture.

"Fleur, you never thought I—"

"Oh, but, of course! Why not?" A trump, indeed!

Jon seized her hand.

"Fleur, say you knew I didn't —"

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. "My dear, you have lived too long among the primitives. Over here we stab each other daily, and no harm done."

He dropped her hand, and she looked at him from beneath her lids.

"I was only teasing, Jon. It's good for primitives to have their legs pulled. Parlons d'autre chose. Have you found your place, to grow things, yet?"

"Practically."

"Where?"

"About four miles from Wansdon, on the south side of the Downs — Green Hill Farm. Fruit — a lot of glass; and some arable."

"Why, it must be close to where I'm going with Kit. That's on the sea and only five miles from Wansdon. No, Jon; don't be alarmed. We shall only be there three weeks at most."

"Alarmed! It's very jolly. We shall see you there. Perhaps we shall meet at Goodwood anyway."

"I've been thinking —" Fleur paused, and again she stole a look. "We CAN be steady friends, Jon, can't we?"

Jon answered, without looking up. "I hope so."

If his face had cleared, and his voice had been hearty, how different — how much slower — would have been the beating of her heart!

"Then that's all right," she murmured. "I've been wanting to say that to you ever since Ascot. Here we are, and here we shall be — and anything else would be silly, wouldn't it? This is not the romantic age."

"H'm!"

"What do you mean by that unpleasant noise?"

"I always think it's rot to talk about ages being this or that. Human feelings remain the same."

"Do you really think they do? The sort of life we live affects them. Nothing's worth more than a year or two, Jon. I found that out. But I forgot — you hate cynicism. Tell me about Anne. Is she still liking England?"

"Loving it. You see, she's pure Southern, and the South's old still, too, in a way — or some of it is. What she likes here is the grass, the birds, and the villages. She doesn't feel homesick. And, of course, she loves the riding."

"I suppose she's picking up English fast?"

And to his stare she made her face quite candid.

"I should like you to like her," he said, wistfully.

"Oh! of course I shall, when I know her."

But a fierce little wave of contempt passed up from her heart. What did he think she was made of? Like her! A girl who lay in his arms, who would be the mother of his children. Like her! And she began to talk about the preservation of Box Hill. And all the rest of the way till Jon got out at Pulborough, she was more wary than a cat — casual and friendly, with clear candid eyes, and a little tremble up at him when she said:

"Au revoir, then, at Goodwood, if not before! This HAS been a jolly accident!"

But on the way to her hotel, driving in a station fly through air that smelled of oysters, she folded her lips between her teeth, and her eyes were damp beneath her frowning brows.

❦

Chapter IX

But — Jon

But Jon, who had over five miles to walk, started with the words of the old English song beating a silent tattoo within him:

“How happy could I be with either,
Were t’other dear charmer away!”

To such confusion had he come, contrary to intention, but in accordance with the impulses of a loyal disposition. Fleur had been his first love, Anne his second. But Anne was his wife, and Fleur the wife of another. A man could not be in love with two women at once, so he was tempted to conclude that he was not in love with either. Why, then, the queer sensations of his circulatory system? Was popular belief in error? A French, or Old-English way of looking at his situation, did not occur to him. He had married Anne, he loved Anne — she was a darling! There it ended! Why, then, walking along a grassy strip beside the road, did he think almost exclusively of Fleur? However cynical, or casual, or just friendly she might seem, she no more deceived him than she at heart wished to. He knew she had her old feeling for him, just as he knew he had it, or some of it, for her. But then he had feeling for another, too. Jon was not more of a fool than other men, nor was he more self-deceiving. Like other men before him, he intended to face what was, and to do what he believed to be right; or, rather, not to do what he believed to be wrong. Nor had he any doubt as to what was wrong. His trouble was more simple. It consisted of not having a control of his thoughts and feelings greater than that with which any man has hitherto been endowed. After all, it had not been his fault that he had once been wholly in love with Fleur, nor that she had been wholly in love with him; not his fault that he had met her again, nor that she was still in love with him. Nor again was it his fault that he was in love with his native land and tired of being out of it.

It was not his fault that he had fallen in love a second time or married the object of his affections. Nor, so far as he could see, was it his fault that the sight and the sound and the scent and the touch of Fleur had revived some of his former feelings. He was none the less disgusted at his double-heartedness; and he walked now fast, now slow, while the sun shifted over and struck on a neck always sensitive since his touch of the sun in Granada. Presently, he stopped and leaned over a gate. He had not been long enough back in England to have got over its beauty on a fine day. He was always stopping and leaning over gates, or in other ways, as Val called it, mooning!

Though it was already the first day of the Eton and Harrow Match, which his father had been wont to attend so religiously, hay harvest was barely over, and the scent of stacked hay still in the air. The Downs lay before him to the south, lighted along their northern slopes. Red Sussex cattle were standing under some trees close to the gate, dribbling and slowly swishing their tails. And away over there he could see others lingering along the hill-side. Peace lay thick on the land. The corn in that next field had an unearthly tinge, neither green nor gold, under the slanting sunlight. And in the restful beauty of the evening Jon could well perceive the destructiveness of love — an emotion so sweet, restless, and thrilling, that it drained Nature of its colour and peace, made those who suffered from it bores to their fellows and useless to the life of everyday. To work — and behold Nature in her moods! Why couldn’t he get away to that, away from women? Why — like Holly’s story of the holiday slum girl, whose family came to see her off by train — why couldn’t he just get away and say: “Thank Gawd! I’m shut o’ that lot!”

The midges were biting, and he walked on. Should he tell Anne that he had come down with Fleur? Not to tell her was to stress the importance of the incident; but to tell her was somehow disagreeable to him. And then he came on Anne herself, without a hat, sitting on a gate, her hands in the pockets of her jumper. Very lissome and straight she looked.

“Lift me down, Jon!”

He lifted her down in a prolonged manner. And, almost instantly, said:

“Whom do you think I travelled with? Fleur Mont. We ran up against each other at Victoria. She’s taking her boy to Loring next week, to convalesce him.”

“Oh! I’m sorry.”

“Why?”

"Because I'm in love with you, Jon." She tilted her chin, so that her straight and shapely nose looked a little more sudden.

"I don't see —" began Jon.

"You see she's another. I saw that at Ascot. I reckon I'm old-fashioned, Jon."

"That's all right, so am I."

She turned her eyes on him, eyes not quite civilised, nor quite American, and put her arm round his waist.

"Rondavel's off his feed. Greenwater's very upset about it."

"'Very,' Anne."

"Well, you can't pronounce 'very' as I pronounce it, any more than I can as you do."

"Sorry. But you told me to remind you. It's silly, though: why shouldn't you speak your own lingo?"

"Because I want to speak like you."

"Want, then, not waunt."

"Damn!"

"All right, darling. But isn't your lingo just as good?"

Anne disengaged her arm.

"No, you don't think that. You're awfully glad to be through with the American accent — you ARE, Jon."

"It's natural to like one's own country's best."

"Well, I do want — there! — to speak English. I'm English by law, now, and by descent, all but one French great-grandmother. If we have children, they'll be English, and we're going to live in England. Shall you take Greenhill Farm?"

"Yes. And I'm not going to play at things any more. I've played twice, and this time I'm going all out."

"You weren't playing in North Carolina."

"Not exactly. But this is different. It didn't matter there. — What are peaches, anyway? It does here — it matters a lot. I mean to make it pay."

"Bully!" said Anne: "I mean — er — splendid. But I never believed you'd say that."

"Paying the only proof. I'm going in for tomatoes, onions, asparagus, and figs; and I mean to work the arable for all it's worth; and if I can get any more land, I will."

"Jon! What energy!" And she caught hold of his chin.

"All right!" said Jon, grimly. "You watch out, and see if I don't mean it."

"And you'll leave the house to me? I'll make it just too lovely!"

"That's a bargain."

"Kiss me, then."

With her lips parted and her eyes looking into his, with just that suspicion of a squint which made them so enticing, Jon thought: 'It's quite simple. The other thing's absurd. Why, of course!' He kissed her forehead and lips, but, even while he did so, he seemed to see Fleur trembling up at him, and to hear her words: "Au revoir! It WAS a jolly accident!"

"Let's go and have a look at Rondavel," he said.

In his box, when those two went in, the grey colt stood by the far wall, idly contemplating a carrot in the hand of Greenwater.

"Clean off!" said the latter over his shoulder: "It's goodbye to Goodwood! The colt's sick."

What had Fleur said: "Au revoir at Goodwood, if not before!"

"Perhaps it's just a megrim, Greenwater," said Anne.

"No, Ma'am; the horse has got a temperature. Well, we'll win the Middle Park Plate with him yet!"

Jon passed his hand over the colt's quarter: "Poor old son! Funny! You can tell he's not fit by the feel of his coat!"

"You can that," replied Greenwater: "But where's he got it from? There isn't a sick horse that I know of anywhere about. If there's anything in the world more perverse than horses! — We didn't train him for Ascot, and he goes and wins. We meant him for Goodwood, and he's gone amiss. Mr. Dartie wants me to give him some South African stuff I never heard of."

"They have a lot of horse sickness out there," said Jon.

"See," said the trainer, stretching his hand up to the colt's ears; "no kick in him at all! Looks like blackberry sickness out of season. I'd give a good deal to know how he picked it up."

The two young people left him standing by the colt's dejected head, his dark, hawk-like face thrust forward, as if trying to read the sensations within his favourite.

That night, Jon went up, bemused by Val's opinions on Communism, the Labour Party, the qualities inherent in the off-spring of "Sleeping Dove," with a dissertation on a horse-sickness in South Africa. He entered a dim bedroom. A white figure was standing at the window. It turned when he came near and flung its arms round him.

"Jon, you mustn't stop loving me."

"Why should I?"

"Because men do. Besides, it's not the fashion to be faithful."

"Bosh!" said Jon, gently; "it's just as much the fashion as it ever was."

"I'm glad we shan't be going to Goodwood. I'm afraid of her. She's so clever."

"Fleur?"

"You WERE in love with her, Jon; I feel it in my bones. I wish you'd told me."

Jon leaned beside her in the window.

"Why?" he said, dully.

She did not answer. They stood side by side in the breathless warmth, moths passed their faces, a night-jar churred in the silence, and now and then, from the stables, came the stamp of a sleepless horse. Suddenly Anne stretched out her hand:

"Over there — somewhere — she's awake, and wanting you. I'm not happy, Jon."

"Don't be morbid, darling!"

"But I'm NOT happy, Jon."

Like a great child — slim within his arm, her cheek pressed to his, her dark earlock tickling his neck! And suddenly her lips came round to his, vehement.

"Love me!"

But when she was asleep, Jon lay wakeful. Moonlight had crept in and there was a ghost in the room — a ghost in a Goya dress, twirling, holding out its skirts, beckoning with its eyes, and with its lips seeming to whisper: "Me, too! Me, too!"

And, raising himself on his elbow, he looked resolutely at the dark head beside him. No! There was — there should be nothing but that in the room! Reality — reality!

❦

CHAPTER X

THAT THING AND THIS THING

On the following Monday at breakfast Val said to Holly: Listen to this!

"DEAR DARTIE —

"I think I can do you a good turn. I have some information that concerns your 'Sleeping Dove' colt and your stable generally, worth a great deal more than the fifty pounds which I hope you may feel inclined to pay for it. Are you coming up to town this week-end? If so, can I see you at the Brummell? Or I could come to Green Street if you prefer it. It's really rather vital.

"Sincerely yours,

"AUBREY STAINFORD."

"That fellow again!"

"Pay no attention, Val."

"I don't know," said Val, glumly. "Some gang or other are taking altogether too much interest in the colt. Greenwater's very uneasy. I'd better get to the bottom of it, if I can."

"Consult your uncle, then, first. He's still at your mother's."

Val made a wry face.

"Yes," said Holly, "but he'll know what you can do and what you can't. You really mustn't deal single-handed with people like that."

"All right, then. There's hanky-panky in the wind, I'm sure. Somebody knew all about the colt at Ascot."

He took the morning train and arrived at his mother's at lunch time. She and Annette were lunching-out, but Soames, who was lunching-in, crossed a cold hand with his nephew's.

"Have you still got that young man and his wife staying with you?"

"Yes," said Val.

"Isn't he ever going to do anything?"

On being told that Jon was about to do something, Soames grunted.

"Farm — in England? What's he want to do that for? He'll only throw his money away. Much better go back to America, or some other new country. Why doesn't he try South Africa? His half-brother died out there."

"He won't leave England again, Uncle Soames — seems to have developed quite a feeling for the old country."

Soames masticated.

"Amateurs," he said, "all the young Forsytes. How much has he got a year?"

"The same as Holly and her half-sister — only about two thousand, so long as his mother's alive."

Soames looked into his wineglass and took from it an infinitesimal piece of cork. His mother! She was in Paris again, he was told. SHE must have three thousand a year, now, at least. He remembered when she had nothing but a beggarly fifty pounds a year, and that fifty pounds too much, putting the thought of independence into her head. In Paris again! The Bois de Boulogne, that Green Niobe — all drinking water, he remembered it still, and the scene between them, there . . . .

"What have YOU come up for?" he said to Val.

"This, Uncle Soames."

Soames fixed on his nose the glasses he had just begun to need for reading purposes, read the letter, and returned it to his nephew.

"I've known impudence in my time, but this chap —!"

"What do you recommend me to do?"

"Pitch it into the waste-paper basket."

Val shook his head.

"Stainford dropped in on me one day at Wansdon. I told him nothing; but you remember we couldn't get more than fours at Ascot, and it was Rondavel's first outing. And now the colt's sick just before Goodwood; there's a screw loose somewhere."

"What do you think of doing, then?"

"I thought I'd see him, and that perhaps you'd like to be present, to keep me from making a fool of myself."

"There's something in that," said Soames. "This fellow's the coolest ruffian I ever came across."

"He's pedigree stock, Uncle Soames. Blood will tell."

"H'm!" muttered Soames. "Well, have him here, if you must see him, but clear the room first and tell Smither to put away the umbrellas."

Having seen Fleur and his grandson off to the sea that morning, he felt flat, especially as, since her departure, he had gathered from the map of Sussex that she would be quite near to Wansdon and the young man who was always now at the back of his thoughts. The notion of a return match with "this ruffian" Stainford, was, therefore, in the nature of a distraction. And, as soon as the messenger was gone, he took a chair whence he could see the street. On second thoughts he had not spoken about the umbrellas — it was not quite dignified; but he had counted them. The day was warm and rainy, and, through the open window of that ground-floor dining-room, the air of Green Street came in, wetted and a little charged with the scent of servants' dinners.

"Here he is," he said, suddenly, "languid beggar!"

Val crossed from the sideboard and stood behind his Uncle's chair. Soames moved uneasily. This fellow and his nephew had been at College together, and had — goodness knew what other vices in common.

"By Jove!" he heard Val mutter: "He does look ill."

The "languid beggar" wore the same dark suit and hat, and the same slow elegance that Soames had first noted on him; a raised eyebrow and the half-lidded eyes despised as ever the bitter crow's-footed exhaustion on his face. And that indefinable look of a damned soul, lost to all but its contempt for emotion, awakened within Soames, just as it had before, the queerest little quirk of sympathy.

"He'd better have a drink," he said.

Val moved back to the sideboard.

They heard the bell, voices in the hall; then Smither appeared, red, breathless, deprecatory.

"Will you see that gentleman, sir, who took the you know what, sir?"

"Show him in, Smither."

Val turned towards the door. Soames remained seated.

The "languid beggar" entered, nodded to Val, and raised his eyebrows at Soames, who said:

"How d'you do, Mr. Stainford?"

"Mr. Forsyte, I think?"

"Whisky or brandy, Stainford?"

"Brandy, thanks."

"Smoke, won't you? You wanted to see me. My uncle here is my solicitor."

Soames saw Stainford smile. It was as if he had said: "Really! How wonderful these people are!" He lighted the proffered cigar, and there was silence.

"Well?" said Val, at last.

"I'm sorry your 'Sleeping Dove' colt's gone amiss, Dartie."

"How did you know that?"

"Exactly! But before I tell you, d'you mind giving me fifty pounds and your word that my name's not mentioned."

Soames and his nephew stared in silence. At last Val said:

"What guarantee have I that your information's worth fifty pounds, or even five?"

"The fact that I knew your colt had gone amiss."

However ignorant of the turf, Soames could see that the fellow had scored.

"You mean you know where the leakage is?"

Stainford nodded.

"We were College pals," said Val. "What would you expect me to do if I knew that about a stable of yours?"

"My dear Dartie, there's no analogy. You're a man of means, I'm not."

Trite expressions were knocking against Soames' palate. He swallowed them. What use in talking to a chap like this!

"Fifty pounds is a lot," said Val. "Is your information of real value?"

"Yes — on my word of honour."

Soames sniffed audibly.

"If I buy this leakage from you," said Val, "can you guarantee that it won't break out, in another direction?"

"Highly improbable that two pipes will leak in your stable."

"I find it hard to believe there's one."

"Well, there is."

Soames saw his nephew move up to the table and begin counting over a roll of notes.

"Tell me what you know, first, and I'll give them to you if on the face of it your information's probable. I won't mention your name."

Soames saw the languid eyebrows lift.

"I'm not so distrustful as you, Dartie. Get rid of a boy called Sinnet — that's where your stable leaks."

"Sinnet?" said Val; "My best boy? What proof have you?"

Stainford took out a dirty piece of writing paper and held it up. Val read aloud:

"'The grey colt's amiss all right — he'll be no good for Goodwood.' All right?" he repeated: "Does that mean he engineered it?"

Stainford shrugged his shoulders.

"Can I have this bit of paper?" said Val.

"If you'll promise not to show it to him."

Val nodded and took the paper.

"Do you know his writing?" asked Soames: "All this is very fishy."

"Not yet," said Val, and to Soames' horror, put the notes into the outstretched hand. The little sigh the fellow gave was distinctly audible. Val said suddenly:

"Did you get at him the day you came down to see me?"

Stainford smiled faintly, shrugged his shoulders again and turned to the door. "Good-bye, Dartie," he said.

Soames' mouth fell open. The return match was over! The fellow had gone!

"Here!" he said. "Don't let him go like that. It's monstrous."

"Dam' funny!" said Val suddenly, and began to laugh. "Oh! dam' funny!"

"Funny!" muttered Soames. "I don't know what the world's coming to."

"Never mind, Uncle Soames. He's taken fifty of the best of me, but it was worth it. Sinnet, my best boy!"

Soames continued to mutter:

"To corrupt one of your men, and get you to pay him for it. It's the limit."

"That's what tickles me, Uncle Soames. Well, I'll go back to Wansdon now, and get rid of that young blackguard."

"I shouldn't have any scruple, if I were you, in telling him exactly how you got the knowledge."

"Well, I don't know. Stainford's on his beam ends. I'm not a moralist, but I think I'll keep my word to him."

For a moment Soames said nothing; then, with a sidelong glance at his nephew:

"Well, perhaps. But he ought to be locked up."

With those words he walked into the hall and counted the umbrellas. Their number was undiminished, and taking one of them, he went out. He felt in need of air. With the exception of that Elderson affair, he had encountered little flagrant dishonesty in his time, and that only in connection with the lower classes. One could forgive a poor devil of a tramp, or even a clerk or domestic servant. They had temptations, and no particular traditions to live up to. But what was coming to the world, if you couldn't rely on gentlemen in a simple matter like honesty! Every day one read cases, and for every one that came into Court one might be sure there were a dozen that didn't! And when you added all the hanky-panky in the City, all the dubious commissions, bribery of the police, sale of honours — though he believed that had been put a stop to — all the dicky-dealing over contracts, it was enough to make one's hair stand on end. They might sneer at the past, and no doubt there was more temptation in the present, but something simple and straightforward seemed to have perished out of life. By hook or by crook people had to get their ends, would no longer wait for their ends to come to them. Everybody was in such a hurry to make good, or rather bad! Get money at all costs-look at the quack remedies they sold and the books they published now-a-days, without caring for truth or decency or anything. And the advertisements! Good Lord!

In the gloom of these reflections he had come to Westminster. He might as well call in at South Square and see if Fleur had telephoned her arrival at the sea! In the hall eight hats of differing shape and colour lay on the coat-sarcophagus. What the deuce was going on? A sound of voices came from the dining-room, then the peculiar drone of somebody making a speech. Some meeting or other of Michael's, and the measles only just out of the house!

"What's going on here?" he said to Coaker.

"Something to do with the slums, sir. I believe; they're converting of them, I heard Mr. Mont say."

"Don't put my hat with those," said Soames; "have you had any message from your mistress?"

"Yes, sir. They had a good journey. The little dog was sick, I believe. He will have his own way."

"Well," said Soames, "I'll go up and wait in the study."

On getting there, he noticed a water-colour drawing on the bureau: a tree with large dark green leaves and globular golden fruit, against a silvery sort of background — peculiar thing, amateurish, but somehow arresting. Underneath, he recognized his daughter's handwriting:

> "The Golden Apple: F.M. 1926."

Really he had no idea that she could use water-colour as well as that! She was a clever little thing! And he put the drawing up on end where he could see it better! Apple? Passion-fruit, he would have said, of an exaggerated size. Thoroughly uneatable — they had a glow like lanterns. Forbidden fruit! Eve might have given them to Adam. Was this thing symbolic? Did it fancifully reveal her thoughts? And in front of it he fell into sombre mood, which was broken by the opening of the door. Michael had entered.

"Hallo, sir!"

"Hallo!" replied Soames: "What's this thing?"

⁂

Chapter XI

Converting the Slums

In an Age governed almost exclusively by Committees, Michael knew fairly well what Committees were governed by. A Committee must not meet too soon after food, for then the Committeemen would sleep; nor too soon before food, because then the Committeemen would be excitable. The Committeemen should be allowed to say what they liked, without direction, until each was tired of hearing the others say it. But there must be some one present, preferably the Chairman, who said little, thought more, and could be relied on to be awake when that moment was reached, whereupon a middle policy voiced by him to exhausted receivers, would probably be adopted.

Having secured his bishop, and Sir Godfrey Bedwin, who specialised in chests, and failed with his Uncle Lionel Charwell, who had scented the work destined for Lady Alison his wife, Michael convened the first meeting for three o'clock in South Square on the day of Fleur's departure for the sea. Hilary was present, and a young woman, to take them down. Surprise came early. They all attended, and fell into conversation around the Spanish table. It was plain to Michael that the bishop and Sir Timothy Fanfield had expectations of the Chair; and he kicked his father under the table, fearing that one of them might propose the other in the hope of the other proposing the one. Sir Lawrence then murmured:

"My dear, that's my shin."

"I know," muttered Michael; "shall we get on with it?"

Dropping his eyeglass, Sir Lawrence said:

"Exactly! Gentlemen, I propose that the Squire takes the Chair. Will you second that, Marquess?"

The Marquess nodded.

The blow was well received, and the Squire proceeded to the head of the table. He began as follows:—

"I won't beat about the bush. You all know as much about it as I do, which is precious little. The whole thing is the idea of Mr. Hilary Charwell here, so I'll ask him to explain it to us. The slums are C3 breeders, and verminous into the bargain, and anything we can do to abate this nuisance, I, for one, should be happy to do. Will you give tongue, Mr. Charwell?"

Hilary dropped at once into a warm, witty and thorough exposition of his views, dwelling particularly on the human character of a problem "hitherto," he said, "almost exclusively confined to Borough Councils, Bigotry and Blue Books." That he had made an impression was instantly demonstrated by the buzz of voices. The Squire, who was sitting with his head up and his heels down, his knees apart and his elbows close to his sides, muttered:

"Let it rip! Can we smoke, Mont?" And, refusing the cigars and cigarettes proffered by Michael, he filled a pipe, and smoked in silence for several minutes.

"Then we're all agreed," he said, suddenly, "that what we want to do is to form this Fund."

No one having as yet expressed any such opinion, this was the more readily assented to.

"In that case, we'd better get down to it and draw up our appeal." And, pointing his pipe at Sir Lawrence, he added:

"You've got the gift of the gab with a pen, Mont; suppose you and the bishop and Charwell here go into another room and knock us out a draft. Pitch it strong, but no waterworks."

When the designated three had withdrawn, conversation broke out again. Michael could hear the Squire and Sir Godfrey Bedwin talking of distemper, and the Marquess discussing with Mr. Montross the electrification of the latter's kitchen. Sir Timothy Fanfield was staring at the Goya. He was a tall, lean man of about seventy, with a thin, hooked nose, brown face, and large white moustaches, who had been in the Household Cavalry and come out of it.

A little afraid of his verdict on the Goya, Michael said hastily:

"Well, Sir Timothy, the coal strike doesn't end."

"No; they ought to be shot. I'm all for the working man; but I'd shoot his leaders tomorrow."

"What about the mine-owners?" queried Michael.

"I'd shoot their leaders, too. We shall never have industrial peace till we shoot somebody. Fact is, we didn't shoot half enough people during the war. Conshies and Communists and Profiteers — I'd have had 'em all against a wall."

"I'm very glad you came on our Committee, sir," Michael murmured; "we want someone with strong views."

"Ah!" said Sir Timothy, and pointing his chin towards the end of the table, he lowered his voice. "Between ourselves — bit too moderate, the Squire. You want to take these scoundrels by the throat. I knew a chap that owned half a slum and had the face to ask me to subscribe to a Missionary Fund in China. I told the fellow he ought to be shot. Impudent beggar — he didn't like it."

"No?" said Michael; and at this moment the young woman pulled his sleeve. Was she to take anything down?

Not at present — Michael thought.

Sir Timothy was again staring at the Goya.

"Family portrait?" he said.

"No," said Michael; it's a Goya."

"Deuce it is! Goy is Jewish for Christian. Female Christian — what?"

"No, sir. Name of the Spanish painter."

"No idea there were any except Murillo and Velasquez — never see anything like THEM now-a-days. These modern painters, you know, ought to be tortured. I say," and again he lowered his voice, "bishop! — what! — they're always running some hare of their own — Anti-Birth-Control, or Missions of sorts. We want to cut this C3 population off at the root. Stop 'em having babies by hook or crook; and then shoot a slum landlord or two — deal with both ends. But they'll jib at it, you'll see. D'you know anything about ants?"

"Only that they're busy," said Michael.

"I've made a study of 'em. Come down to my place in Hampshire, and I'll show you my slides — most interestin' insects in the world." He lowered his voice again:

"Who's that talkin' to the old Marquess? What! The rubber man? Jew, isn't he? What axe is HE grinding? The composition of this Committee's wrong, Mr. Mont. Old Shropshire's a charmin' old man, but —" Sir Timothy touched his forehead —"mad as a March hare about electricity. You've got a doctor, too. They're too mealy-mouthed. What you want is a Committee that'll go for those scoundrels. Tea? Never drink it. Chap who invented tea ought to have been strung up."

At this moment the Sub-Committee re-entering the room, Michael rose, not without relief.

"Hallo!" he heard the Squire say: "you've been pretty slippy."

The look of modest worth which passed over the faces of the Sub-Committee did not altogether deceive Michael, who knew that his Uncle had brought the draft appeal in his coat pocket. It was now handed up, and the Squire, putting on some horn-rimmed spectacles, began reading it aloud, as if it were an entry of hounds, or the rules of a race meeting. Michael could not help feeling that what it lost it gained — the Squire and emphasis were somehow incompatible. When he had finished reading, the Squire said:

"We can discuss it now, clause by clause. But time's getting on, gentlemen. Personally, I think it about fills the bill. What do you say, Marquess?"

The Marquess leaned forward and took his beard in his hand.

"An admirable draft, with one exception. Not sufficient stress is laid on electrification of the kitchens. Sir Godfrey will bear me out. You can't expect these poor people to keep their houses clean unless you can get rid of the smoke and the smells and the flies."

"Well, we can put in something more about that, if you'll give us the wording, Marquess."

The Marquess began to write. Michael saw Sir Timothy twirl his moustaches.

"I'M not satisfied," he began abruptly. "I want something that'll make slum landlords sit up. We're here to twist their tails. The appeal's too mild."

"M-m!" said the Squire; "What do you suggest, Fanfield?"

Sir Timothy read from his shirt cuff.

"'We record our conviction that anyone who owns slum property ought to be shot. These gentlemen —'"

"THAT won't do," said the Squire.

"Why not?"

"All sorts of respectable people own slum property — Widows, Syndicates, Dukes, goodness-knows-who! We can't go calling them gentlemen, and sayin' they ought to be shot. It won't DO."

The bishop leaned forward:

"Might we rather word it like this? 'The signatories much regret that those persons who own slum property are not more alive to their responsibilities to the community at large.'"

"Good Lord!" burst from Sir Timothy.

"I think we might pitch it stronger than that, Bishop," said Sir Lawrence: "But we ought to have a lawyer here, to tell us exactly how far we can go."

Michael turned to the Chairman:

"I've got one in the house, sir. My father-inlaw — I saw him come in just now. I daresay he'd advise us."

"Old Forsyte!" said Sir Lawrence. "The very man! We ought to have him on the Committee, Squire. He's well up in the law of libel."

"Ah!" said the Marquess: "Mr. Forsyte! By all means — a steady head."

"Let's co-opt him, then," said the Squire; "a lawyer's always useful."

Michael went out.

Having drawn the Fragonard blank, he went up to his study, and was greeted by Soames' "What's this?"

"Pretty good, sir, don't you think? It's Fleur's — got feeling."

"Yes," muttered Soames; "too much, I shouldn't wonder."

"You saw the hats in the hall, no doubt. My Slum Conversion Committee are just drafting their appeal, and they'd be most frightfully obliged to you, sir, as a lawyer, if you'd come down and cast your eye over one or two of the allusions to slum landlords. They want to go just far enough, you know. In fact, if it wouldn't bore you terribly, they'd like to co-opt you on the Committee."

"Would they?" said Soames: "And who are THEY?"

Michael ran over the names.

Soames drew up a nostril. "Lot of titles! Is this a wild-cat thing?"

"Oh! no, sir. Our wish to have you on is a guarantee against that. Besides, our Chairman, Wilfred Bentworth, has refused a title three times."

"Well," said Soames, "I don't know. I'll come and have a look at them."

"That's very good of you. I think you'll find them thoroughly respectable," and he preceded Soames downstairs.

"This is quite out of my line," said Soames on the threshold. He was greeted with a number of little silent bows and nods. It was his impression that they'd been having a scrap.

"Mr. — Mr. Forsyte," said what he supposed was this Bentworth, "we want you as a lawyer to come on this Committee and keep us — er — straight — check our fire-eaters, like Fanfield there, if you know what I mean;" and he looked over his tortoiseshell spectacles at Sir Timothy. "Just cast your eye over this, will you be so good?" He passed a sheet of paper to Soames, who had sat down on a chair slipped under him by the young woman. Soames began to read:

"'While we suppose that there may be circumstances which justify the possession of slum property, we never-the-less regret profoundly the apparent indifference of most slum owners to this great national evil. With the hearty cooperation of slum property owners, much might be done which at present cannot be done. We do not wish to hold them up to the execration of anyone, but we want them to realise that they must at least co-operate in getting rid of this blot on our civilisation.'"

He read it twice, holding the end of his nose between his thumb and finger; then said: "'We don't wish to hold them up to the execration of anyone.' If you don't, you don't; then why say so? The word 'execration'! H'm!"

"Exactly!" said the Chairman: "Most valuable to have you on the Committee, Mr. — Forsyte."

"Not at all," said Soames, staring round him: "I don't know that I'm coming on."

"Look here, sir!" And Soames saw a fellow who looked like a General in a story-book, leaning towards him: "D'you mean to say we can't use a mild word like 'execration,' when we know they ought to be shot?"

Soames gave a pale smile: if there was a thing he couldn't stand, it was militarism.

"You can use it if you like," he said, "but not with me or any other man of judgment on the Committee."

At his words at least four members of the Committee burst into speech. Had he said anything too strong?

"We'll pass that without those words, then," said the Chairman. "Now for your clause about the kitchens, Marquess. That's important."

The Marquess began reading; Soames looked at him almost with benevolence. They had hit it off very well over the Morland. No one objected to the addition, and it was adopted.

"That's that, then. I don't think there's anything more. I want to get off."

"A minute, Mr. Chairman." Soames saw that the words were issuing from behind a walrus-like moustache. "I know more of these people than any of you here. I started life in the slums, and I want to tell you something. Suppose you get some money, suppose you convert some streets, will you convert those people? No, gentlemen; you won't."

"Their children, Mr. Montross, their children," said a man whom Soames recognized as one of those who had married Michael to his daughter.

"I'm not against the appeal, Mr. Charwell, but I'm a self-made man and a realist, and I know what we're up against. I'm going to put some money into this, gentlemen, but I want you to know that I do so with my eyes open."

Soames saw the eyes, melancholy and brown, fixed on himself, and had a longing to say: "You bet!" But, looking at Sir Lawrence, he saw that "old Mont" had the longing, too, and closed his lips firmly.

"Capital!" said the Chairman. "Well, Mr. Forsyte, are you joining us?"

Soames looked round the table.

"I'll go into the matter," he said, "and let you know."

Almost instantly the Committee broke towards their hats, and he was left opposite the Goya with the Marquess.

"A Goya, Mr. Forsyte, I think, and a good one. Am I mistaken, or didn't it once belong to Burlingford?"

"Yes," said Soames, astonished. "I bought it when Lord Burlingford sold his pictures in 1910."

"I thought so. Poor Burlingford! He got very rattled, I remember over the House of Lords. But, you see, they've done nothing since. How English it all was!"

"They're a dilatory lot," murmured Soames, whose political recollections were of the vaguest.

"Fortunately, perhaps," said the Marquess; "there is so much leisure for repentance."

"I can show you another picture or two, here, if you care for them," said Soames.

"Do," said the Marquess; and Soames led him across the hall, now evacuated by the hats.

"Watteau, Fragonard, Pater, Chardin," said Soames.

The Marquess was gazing from picture to picture with his head a little on one side.

"Delightful!" he said. "What a pleasant, and what a worthless age that was! After all, the French are the only people that can make vice attractive, except perhaps the Japanese, before they were spoiled. Tell me, Mr. Forsyte, do you know any Englishman who has done it?"

Soames, who had never studied the question and was hampered by not knowing whether he wanted an Englishman to do it, was hesitating when the Marquess added:

"And yet no such domestic people as the French."

"My wife's French," said Soames, looking round his nose.

"Indeed!" said the Marquess: "How pleasant!"

Soames was again about to answer, when the Marquess continued:

"To see them go out on Sundays — the whole family, with their bread and cheese, their sausage and wine! A truly remarkable people!"

"I prefer ourselves," said Soames, bluntly. "Less ornamental, perhaps, but —" he stopped short of his country's virtues.

"The first of my family, Mr. Forsyte, was undoubtedly a Frenchman — not even a Norman Frenchman. There's a tradition that he was engaged to keep William Rufus's hair red, when it was on the turn. They gave him lands, so he must have been successful. We've had a red streak in the family ever since. My granddaughter —" He regarded Soames with a bird-like eye —"But she and your daughter hardly got on, I remember."

"No," said Soames, grimly, "they hardly got on."

"I'm told they've made it up."

"I don't think so," said Soames; "but that's ancient history."

In the stress of his present uneasiness he could have wished it were modern.

"Well, Mr. Forsyte, I'm delighted to have seen these pictures. Your son-inlaw tells me he's going to electrify the kitchen here. Believe me, there's nothing more conducive to a quiet stomach than a cook who never gets heated. Do tell Mrs. Forsyte that!"

"I will," said Soames; "but the French are conservative."

"Lamentably so," replied the Marquess, holding out his hand: "Good-bye to you!"

"Good-bye!" said Soames, and remained at the window, gazing after the old man's short, quick figure in its grey-green tweeds, with a feeling of having been slightly electrified.

❦

Chapter XII

Delicious Night

Fleur sat under a groyne at Loring. There were few things with which she had less patience than the sea. It was not in her blood. The sea, with its reputation for never being in the same mood, blue, wet, unceasing, had for her a distressing sameness. And, though she sat with her face to it she turned to it the back of her mind. She had been there a week without seeing Jon again. They knew where she was, yet only Holly had been over; and her quick instinct apprehended the cause — Anne must have become aware of her. And now, as Holly had told her, there was no longer even Goodwood to look forward to. Everywhere she was baulked and with all her heart she resented it! She was indeed in a wretched state of indecision. If she had known precisely the end she wished to attain, she could have possessed her soul; but she knew it not. Even the care of Kit was no longer important. He was robust again, and employed, all day, with spade and bucket.

‘I can’t stand it,’ she thought; ‘I shall go up to town. Michael will be glad of me.’

She went up after an early lunch, reading in the train a book of reminiscences which took away the reputations of various dead persons. Quite in the mode, it distracted her thoughts more than she had hoped from its title; and her spirits rose as the scent of oysters died out of the air. She had letters from her father and Michael in her bag, and got them out to read again.

“DEAR HEART” (ran Michael’s — yes, she supposed she WAS still his dear heart)—

“I hope this finds you and Kit as it leaves me ‘at the present time of speaking.’ But I miss you horribly as usual, and intend to descend on you before long, unless you descend on me first. I don’t know if you saw our appeal in the papers on Monday. People are already beginning to take bonds. The committee weighed in well for a send-off. The walrus put down five thousand of the best, the Marquess sent your father’s Morland cheque for six hundred, and your Dad and Bart each gave two-fifty. The Squire gave five hundred; Bedwin and Sir Timothy a hundred apiece, and the Bishop gave us twenty and his blessing. So we opened with six thousand eight hundred and twenty from the committee alone — none so dusty. I believe the thing will go. The appeal has been re-printed, and is going out to everyone who ever gives to anything; and amongst other propaganda, we’ve got the Polytheum to promise to show a slum film if we can get one made. My Uncle Hilary is very bucked. It was funny to see your Dad — he was a long time making up his mind, and he actually went down to look at the Meads. He came back saying — he didn’t know, it was a tumble-down neighbourhood, he didn’t think it could be done for five hundred a house. I had my uncle to him that evening, and he knocked under to Hilary’s charm. But next morning he was very grumpy — said his name would be in the papers as signing the appeal, and seemed to think it would do him harm. ‘They’ll think I’ve taken leave of my senses,’ was his way of putting it. However, there he is, on the committee, and he’ll get used to it in time. They’re a rum team, and but for the bugs I don’t think they’d hold together. We had another meeting today. Old Blythe’s nose is properly out of joint; he says I’ve gone back on him and Foggartism. I haven’t, of course — but, dash it, one must have something real to do!

“All my love to you and Kit.

“MICHAEL.”

“I’ve got your drawing framed and hung above my bureau, and very jolly it looks. Your Dad was quite struck. M.”

Above his bureau —“The golden apple!” How ironical! Poor Michael — if he knew —!

Her father’s letter was short — she had never had a long one from him.

“MY DEAR CHILD,

“Your mother has gone back to ‘The Shelter,’ but I am staying on at Green Street about this thing of Michael’s. I don’t know, I’m sure, whether there’s anything in it; there’s a lot of gammon talked about the slums; still, for a parson, I find his Uncle Hilary an amiable fellow, and there are some goodish names on the committee. We shall see.

“I had no idea you had kept up your water-colours. The drawing has considerable merit, though the subject is not clear to me. The fruit looks too soft and rich for apples. Still, I suppose you know what you were driving at. I am glad the news of Kit is so good, and that you are feeling the better for the sea air.

“Ever your affectionate father,

“S. F.”

Knew what she was driving at! If only she did! And if only her father didn’t! That was the doubt in her mind when she tore up the letter and scattered it on Surrey through the window. He watched her like a lynx — like a lover; and she did not want to be watched just now.

She had no luggage, and at Victoria took a cab for Chiswick. June would at least know something about those two; whether they were still at Wansdon, or where they were.

How well she remembered the little house from the one visit she had paid to it — in the days when she and Jon —!

June was in the hall, on the point of going out.

“Oh! It’s you!” she said. “You didn’t come that Sunday!”

“No, I had too much to do before I went away.”

“Jon and Anne are staying here now. Harold is painting a beautiful thing of her. It’ll be quite unique. She’s a nice little thing, I think,” (she was several inches taller than June, according to Fleur’s recollection) “and pretty. I’m just going out to get him something he specially wants, but I shan’t be a quarter of an hour. If you’ll wait in the meal room till I come back, I’ll take you up, and then he’ll see you. He’s the only man who’s doing real work just now.”

“It’s so nice that there’s one,” said Fleur.

“Here’s an album of reproductions of his pictures”— and June opened a large book on a small dining-table. “Isn’t that lovely? But all his work has such quality. You look through it, and I’ll come back.” And, with a little squeeze of Fleur’s shoulder, she fled.

Fleur did not look through the album, she looked through the window and round the room. How she remembered it, and that round, dim mirror of very old glass wherein she had seen herself while she waited for Jon. And the stormy little scene they had been through together in this room too small for storms, seven years ago! Jon staying here! Her heart beat, and she stared at herself again in that dim mirror. Surely she was no worse to look at than she had been then! Nay! She was better! Her face had a stamp on it now, line on the roundness of youth! Couldn’t she let him know that she was here? Couldn’t she see him somehow just for a minute alone! That little one-eyed fanatic — for so in her thoughts Fleur looked on June — would be back directly. And quick mind took quick decision. If Jon were in, she would find him! Touching her hair at the sides, the pearls round her neck, and flicking an almost powderless puff over her nose, she went out into the hall and listened. No sound! And slowly she began mounting the stairs. In his bedroom he would be, or in the studio — there was no other covert. On the first landing, bedroom to right of her, bedroom to left of her, bathroom in front of her, the doors open. Blank! — and blank in her heart! The studio was all there was above. And there — as well as Jon, would be the painter and that girl, his wife. Was it worth it? She took two steps down, and then retraced them. Yes! It was. Slowly, very silently, she went. The studio door was open, for she could hear the quick, familiar shuffle of a painter to his canvas and away again. She closed her eyes a moment, and then again went up. On the landing, close to the open door, she stood still. No need to go further. For, in the room directly opposite to her, was a long, broad mirror, and in it — unseen herself — she could see. Jon was sitting on the end of a low divan with an unsmoked pipe in his hand, staring straight before him. On the dais that girl was standing, dressed in white; her hands held a long-stemmed lily whose flower reached to within an inch of her chin. Oh! she was pretty — pretty and brown, with those dark eyes and that dark hair framing her face. But Jon’s expression — deepset on the mask of his visage as the eyes in his head! She had seen lion cubs look like that, seeing nothing close to them, seeing — what? — in the distance. That girl’s eyes, what was it Holly had called them? —“best type of water-nymph’s”— slid round and looked at him, and at once his eyes left the distance and smiled back. Fleur turned then, hurried down the stairs, and out of the house. Wait for June — hear her rhapsodise — be introduced to the painter — have to control her face in front of that girl? No! Mounting to the top of her ‘bus, she saw June skimming round a corner, and thought with malicious pleasure of her disappointment — when one had been hurt, one wanted to hurt somebody. The ‘bus carried her away down the King’s Road, Hammersmith, sweating in the westering sunlight, away into the big town with its myriad lives and interests, untouchable, indifferent as Fate.

At Kensington Gardens she descended. If she could get her legs to ache, perhaps her heart would not. And she walked fast between the flowers and the nursemaids, the old ladies and the old gentlemen. But her legs were strong, and Hyde Park Corner came too soon for all but one old gentleman who had tried to keep pace with her because, at his age, it did him good to be attracted. She crossed to the Green Park and held on. And she despised herself while she walked. She despised herself. She — to whom the heart was such vieux jeu; who had learned, as she thought, to control or outspeed emotions!

She reached home, and it was empty — Michael not in. She went upstairs, ordered herself some Turkish coffee, got into a hot bath, and lay there smoking cigarettes. She experienced some alleviation. Among her friends the recipe had long been recognized. When she could steep herself no more, she put on a wrapper and went to Michael's study. There was her "Golden Apple"— very nicely framed. The fruit looked to her extraordinarily uneatable at that moment. The smile in Jon's eyes, answering that girl's smile! Another woman's leavings! The fruit was not worth eating. Sour apples — sour apples! Even the white monkey would refuse fruit like that. And for some minutes she stood staring instead, at the eyes of the ape in that Chinese painting — those almost human eyes that yet were not human because their owner had no sense of continuity. A modern painter could not have painted eyes like that. The Chinese artist of all those centuries ago had continuity and tradition in his blood; he had seen the creature's restlessness at a sharper angle than people could see it now, and stamped it there for ever.

And Fleur — charming in her jade-green wrapper — tucked a corner of her lip behind a tooth, and went back to her room to finish dressing. She put on her prettiest frock. If she could not have the wish of her heart — the wish that she felt would give her calm and continuity — let her at least have pleasure, speed, distraction, grasp it with both hands, eat it with full lips. And she sat down before her glass to make herself as perfect as she could. She manicured her hands, titivated her hair, scented her eyebrows, smoothed her lips, put on no rouge, and the merest dusting of powder, save where the seaside sun had stained her neck.

Michael found her still seated there — a modern masterpiece — almost too perfect to touch.

"Fleur!" he said, and nothing more; but any more would have spoiled it.

"I thought I deserved a night out. Dress quickly, Michael, and let's dine somewhere amusing, and do a theatre and a club afterwards. You needn't go to the House this evening, need you?"

He had meant to go, but there was in her voice what would have stopped him from affairs even more serious.

Inhaling her, he said:

"Delicious! I've been in the slums. Shan't be a jiffy, darling!" and he fled.

During the jiffy she thought of him and how good he was; and while she thought, she saw the eyes and the hair and the smile of Jon.

The "somewhere amusing" was a little restaurant full of theatrical folk. Fleur and Michael knew many of them, and they came up, as they passed out of their theatres, and said:

"How delightful to see you!" and looked as if they meant it — so strange! But then, theatre folk were like that! They looked things so easily. And they kept saying: "Have you seen our show? Oh! You must. It's just too frightful!" or, "It's a marvellous play!" And then, over the other shoulder they would see somebody else, and call out: "Ha! How delightful to see you!" There was no boring continuity about them. Fleur drank a cocktail and two glasses of champagne. She went out with her cheeks slightly flushed. "Dat Lubly Lady" had been in progress over half-an-hour before they reached her; but this did not seem to matter, for what they saw conveyed to them no more than what they had not seen. The house was very full, and people were saying that the thing would "run for years." It had a tune which had taken the town by storm, a male dancer whose legs could form the most acute angles, and no continuity whatever. Michael and Fleur went out humming the tune, and took a taxi to the dancing club to which they belonged because it was the thing, rather than because they ever went there. It was a select club, and contained among its members a Cabinet Minister who had considered it his duty. They found a Charleston in progress, seven couples wobbling weak knees at each other in various corners of the room.

"Gawd!" said Michael. "I do think it's the limit of vacuity. What's its attraction?"

"Vacuity, my dear. This is a vacuous age — didn't you know?"

"Is there no limit?"

"A limit," said Fleur, "is what you can't go beyond; one can always become more vacuous."

The words were nothing, for, after all, cynicism was in fashion, but the tone made Michael shiver; he felt in it a personal ring. Did she, then, feel her life so vacuous; and, if so, why?

"They say," said Fleur, "there's another American dance coming, called 'The White Beam,' that's got even less in it."

“Not possible,” muttered Michael; “for congenital idiocy this’ll never be surpassed. Look at those two!”

The two in question were wobbling towards them with their knees flexed as if their souls had slipped down into them; their eyes regarded Fleur and Michael with no more expression than could have been found in four first-class marbles. A strange earnestness radiated from them below the waist, but above that line they seemed to have passed away. The music stopped, and each of the seven couples stopped also and began to clap their hands, holding them low, as though afraid of disturbing the vacuity attained above.

“I refuse to believe it,” said Michael, suddenly.

“What?”

“That this represents our Age — no beauty, no joy, no skill, not even devil — just look a fool and wobble your knees.”

“You can’t do it, you see.”

“D’you mean you can?”

“Of course,” said Fleur; “one must keep up with things.”

“Well, for the land’s sake, don’t let me see you.”

At this moment the seven couples stopped clapping their hands — the band had broken into a tune to which the knee could not be flexed. Michael and Fleur began to dance. They danced together, two fox-trots and a waltz, then left.

“After all,” said Fleur, in the taxi, “dancing makes you forget yourself. That was the beauty of the canteen. Find me another job, Michael; I can bring Kit back in about a week.”

“How about joint secretaryship with me of our Slum Conversion Fund? You’d be invaluable to get up balls, bazaars, and matinees.”

“I wouldn’t mind. I suppose they’re worth converting.”

“Well, *I* think so. You don’t know Hilary; I must get him and Aunt May to lunch; after that you can judge for yourself.”

He slipped his hand under her bare arm, and added: “Fleur, you’re not quite tired of me, are you?”

The tone of his voice, humble and a little anxious, touched her, and she pressed his hand with her arm.

“I should never be tired of you, Michael.”

“You mean you’d never have a feeling so definite towards me.”

It was exactly what she had meant, and she hastened to deny it.

“No, dear boy; I mean I know a good thing, and even a good person, when I’ve got it.”

Michael sighed, and, taking up her hand, put it to his lips.

“I wish,” cried Fleur, “one wasn’t so complex. You’re lucky to be single-hearted. It’s the greatest gift. Only, don’t ever become serious, Michael. That’d be a misfortune.”

“No, after all, comedy’s the real thing.”

“Let’s hope so,” said Fleur, as the taxi stopped. “Delicious night!”

And Michael, having paid the driver, looked at her lighted up in the open doorway. Delicious night! Yes — for him.

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CHAPTER XIII

"ALWAYS"

The announcement by Michael on the following Monday that Fleur would be bringing Kit home the next morning, caused Soames to say:

"I'd like to have a look at that part of the world. I'll take the car down this afternoon and drive them up tomorrow. Don't say anything to Fleur. I'll let her know when I get down to Nettlefold. There's an hotel there, I'm told."

"Quite a good one," said Michael. "But it'll be full for Goodwood."

"I'll telephone. They must find a room for me."

He did, and they found for him a room which somebody else lost. He started about five — Riggs having informed him that it was a two-and-a-half hours' drive. The day had been somewhat English in character, but by the time he reached Dorking had become fine enough to enjoy. He had seen little of the England that lay beyond the straight line between his river home and Westminster, for many years; and this late afternoon, less preoccupied than usual, he was able to give it a somewhat detached consideration. It was certainly a variegated and bumpy land, incorrigibly green and unlike India, Canada, and Japan. They said it had been jungle, heath and marsh not fifteen hundred years ago. What would it be fifteen hundred years hence? Jungle, heath and marsh again, or one large suburb — who could say? He had read somewhere that people would live underground, and come up to take the air in their flying machines on Sundays. He thought it was unlikely. The English would still want their windows down and a thorough draught, and so far as he could see, it would always be stuffy to play with a ball underground, and impossible to play with a ball up in the air. Those fellows who wrote prophetic articles and books, were always forgetting that people had passions. He would make a bet that the passions of the English in 3400 A.D. would still be: playing golf, cursing the weather, sitting in draughts, and revising the prayer-book.

And that reminded him that old Gradman was getting very old; he must look out for somebody who could take his place. There was nothing to do in the family trusts now — the only essential was perfect honesty. And where was he going to find it? Even if there was some about, it could only be tested by prolonged experiment. Must be a youngish man, too, because he himself couldn't last very much longer. And, moving at forty miles an hour along the road to Billingshurst, he recalled being fetched by old Gradman at six miles an hour from Paddington Station to Park Lane in a growler with wet straw on the floor — over sixty years ago — when old Gradman himself was only a boy of twenty, trying to grow side-whiskers and writing round-hand all day. "Five Oaks" on a signpost; he couldn't see the oaks! What a pace that chap Riggs was going! One of these days he would bring the whole thing to grief, and be sorry for it. But it was somehow infra dig. to pull him up for speed when there wasn't a woman in the car; and Soames sat the stiller, with a slightly contemptuous expression as a kind of insurance against his own sensations. Through Pulborough, down a twisting hill, across a little bridge, a little river, into a different kind of country — something new to him — flat meadows all along, that would be marsh in the winter, he would wager, with large, dark red cattle, and black-and-white, and strawberry roan cattle; and over away to the south, high rising downs of a singularly cool green, as if they were white inside. Chalk — out-cropping here and there, and sheep up on those downs, no doubt — his father had always sworn by Southdown mutton. A very pretty light, a silvery look, a nice prospect altogether, that made you feel thinner at once and lighter in the head! So this was the sort of country his nephew had got hold of, and that young fellow Jon Forsyte. Well! It might have been worse — very individual; he didn't remember anything just like it. And a sort of grudging fairness, latent in Soames' nature, applauded slightly. How that chap Riggs was banging the car up this hill — the deuce of a hill, too, past chalk-pits and gravel-pits, and grassy down and dipping spurs of covert, past the lodge of a park, into a great beech-wood. Very pretty — very still — no life but trees, spreading trees, very cool, very green! Past a monstrous great church thing, now, and a lot of high walls and towers — Arundel Castle, he supposed; huge, great place; would look better, no doubt, the further you got from it; then over another river and up another hill, banging along into this Nettlefold and the hotel, and the sea in front of you!

Soames got out.

"What time's dinner?"

"Dinner is on, sir."

“Do they dress?”

“Yes, sir. There’s a fancy dress dance, sir, this evening, before Goodwood.”

“What a thing to have! Get me a table; I’ll be down directly.”

He had once read in a Victorian novel that the mark of a gentleman was being able to dress for dinner in ten minutes, tying his own tie. He had never forgotten it. He was down in twelve. Most people had nearly finished, but there was no one in fancy dress. Soames ate leisurely, contemplating a garden with the sea beyond. He had not, like Fleur, an objection to the sea — had he not once lived at Brighton for seven years, going up and down to his work in town? That was the epoch when he had been living down the disgrace of being deserted by his first wife. Curious how the injured party was always the one in disgrace! People admired immorality, however much they said they didn’t. The deserted husband, the deserted wife, were looked on as poor things. Was it due to some thing still wild in human nature, or merely to reaction against the salaried morality of judges and parsons, and so forth? Morality you might respect, but salaried morality — no! He had seen it in people’s eyes after his own trouble; he had seen it in the Marjorie Ferrar case. The fact was, people took the protection of the law and secretly disliked it because it was protective. The same thing with taxes — you couldn’t do without them, but you avoided paying them when you could.

Having finished dinner, he sat with his cigar in a somewhat deserted lounge, turning over weekly papers full of ladies with children or dogs, ladies with clothes in striking attitudes, ladies with no clothes in still more striking attitudes; men with titles, men in aeroplanes, statesmen in trouble, racehorses; large houses prefaced with rows of people with the names printed clearly for each, and other evidences of the millennium. He supposed his fellow-guests were “dolling up” (as young Michael would put it) for this ball — fancy dressing up at their age! But people WERE weak-minded — no question of that! — Fleur would be surprised when he dropped in on her tomorrow early. Soon she would be coming down to him on the river — its best time of year — and perhaps he could take her for a motor trip into the west somewhere; it might divert her thoughts from this part of the country and that young man. He had often promised himself a visit to where the old Forsytes came from; only he didn’t suppose she would care to look at anything so rustic as genuine farmland. The magazine dropped from his fingers, and he sat staring out of the large windows at the flowers about to sleep. He hadn’t so many more years before him now, he supposed. They said that people lived longer than they used to, but how he was going to outlive the old Forsytes, he didn’t know — the ten of them had averaged eighty-seven years — a monstrous age! And yet he didn’t feel it would be natural to die in another sixteen years, with the flowers growing like that out there, and his grandson coming along nicely. With age one suffered from the feeling that one might have enjoyed things more. Cows, for instance, and rooks, and good smells. Curious how the country grew on you as you got older! But he didn’t know that it would ever grow on Fleur — she wanted people about her; still she might lose that when she found out once for all that there was so little in them. The light faded on the garden and his reverie. There were lots of people out on the sea front, and a band had begun to play. A band was playing behind him, too, in the hotel somewhere. They must be dancing! He might have a look at that before he went up. On his trip round the world with Fleur he had often put his nose out and watched the dancing on deck — funny business nowadays, shimmying, bunnyhugging, didn’t they call it? — dreadful! He remembered the academy of dancing where he had been instructed as a small boy in the polka, the mazurka, deportment and calisthenics. And a pale grin spread over his chaps — that little old Miss Shears, who had taught him and Winifred, what wouldn’t she have died of if she had lived to see these modern dances! People despised the old dances, and when he came to think of it, he had despised them himself, but compared with this modern walking about and shaking at the knees, they had been dances, after all. Look at the Highland schottische, where you spun round and howled, and the old galop to the tune “D’ye ken John Peel”— some stingo in them; and you had to change your collar. No changing collars nowadays — they just dawdled. For an age that prided itself on enjoying life, they had a funny idea of it. He remembered once, before his first marriage, going — by accident — to one of those old dancing clubs, the Athenians, and seeing George Forsyte and his cronies waltzing and swinging the girls round and round clean off their feet. The girls at those clubs, then, were all professional lights-o’-love. Very different now, he was told; but there it was — people posed nowadays, they posed as viveurs, and all the rest of it, but they didn’t vive; they thought too much about how to.

The music — all jazz — died behind him and rose again, and he, too, rose. He would just have a squint and go to bed.

The ball-room was somewhat detached, and Soames went down a corridor. At its end he came on a twirl of sound and colour. They were hard at it, “dolled up” to the nines — Mephistopheleses, ladies of Spain, Italian peasants, Pierrots. His bewildered eyes with difficulty took in the strutting, wheeling mass; his bewildered ears decided that the tune was trying to be a waltz. He remembered that the waltz was in three-time, remembered the waltz of olden days — too well — that dance at Roger's, and Irene, his own wife, waltzing in the arms of young Bosinney; to this day remembered the look on her face, the rise and fall of her breast, the scent of the gardenias she was wearing, and that fellow's face when she raised to his her dark eyes — lost to all but themselves and their guilty enjoyment; remembered the balcony on which he had refuged from that sight, and the policeman down below him on the strip of red carpet from house to street.

"'Always'— good tune!" said someone behind his ears.

Not bad, certainly — a sort of sweetness in it. His eyes, from behind the neck of a large lady who seemed trying to be a fairy, roved again among the dancers. What! Over there! Fleur! Fleur in her Goya dress, grape-coloured —"La Vendimia — the Vintage"— floating out from her knees, with her face close to the face of a sheik, and his face close to hers. Fleur! And that sheik, that Moor in a dress all white and flowing! In Soames a groan was converted to a cough. THOSE TWO! So close — so — so lost — it seemed to him! As Irene with Bosinney, so she with that young Jon! They passed, not seeing him behind the fairy's competent bulk. Soames' eyes tracked them through the shifting, yawing throng. Round again they came — her eyes so nearly closed that he hardly knew them; and young Jon's over her fichued shoulder, deep-set and staring. Where was the fellow's wife? And just then Soames caught sight of her, dancing, too, but looking back at them — a nymph all trailing green, the eyes surprised, and jealous. No wonder, since under her very gaze was Fleur's swinging skirt, the rise and falling of her breast, the languor in her eyes! "Always!" Would they never stop that cursed tune, stop those two, who with every bar seemed to cling closer and closer! And, fearful lest he should be seen, Soames turned away and mounted slowly to his room. He had had his squint. It was enough!

The band had ceased to play on the sea front, people were deserting, lights going out; by the sound out there, the tide must be rising. Soames touched himself where he was sore, beneath his starched shirt, and stood still. "Always!" Incalculable consequences welled in on his consciousness, like the murmuring tide of that sea. Daughter exiled, grandson lost to him; memories deflowered; hopes in the dust! "Always!" Forsooth! Not if he knew it — not for Joe! And all that grim power of self-containment which but twice or three times in his life had failed him, and always with disastrous consequence, again for a moment failed him, so that to any living thing present in the dim and austere hotel bedroom, he would have seemed like one demented. The paroxysm passed. No use to rave! Worse than no use — far; would only make him ill, and he would want all his strength. For what? For sitting still; for doing nothing; for waiting to see! Venus! Touch not the goddess — the hot, the jealous one with the lost dark eyes! He had touched her in the past, and she had answered with a blow. Touch her not! Possess his sore and anxious heart! Nothing to do but wait and see!

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Part III

Chapter I

Soames Gives Advice

On her return to Nettlefold from her night in town, Fleur had continued to 'eat her heart out' by 'the sad sea wave.' For still neither Jon nor his wife came to see her. Clearly she was labelled "poison." Twice she had walked over to Green Hill Farm hoping for another "jolly accident." She had seen there an attractive old house with aged farm buildings flanked by a hill and a wide prospect towards the sea. Calm, broad, and homelike, the place roused hostility in her. It could never be HER home, and so was inimical, part of the forces working against her. Loose ends in Jon's life were all in her favour. In exploitation of those calm acres he would be secured to that girl his wife, out of her reach again, this time for good — the twice-burnt child! And yet, with all her heartache, she was still uncertain what, precisely, she wanted. Not having to grapple with actual decision, things seemed possible which, in her bones, she knew might not be possible. Even to fling her 'cap over the windmill,' did not seem like rank and staring madness. To retrieve Spain with Jon! Her hands clenched and her lips loosened at the thought of it — an Odyssey together, till in the shifting, tolerant, modern world, all was forgotten, if not forgiven! Every form of companionship with him from decorous and platonic friendship to the world well lost; from guilty and secret liaison to orderly and above-board glimpses of him at not too long-intervals. According to the tides in her blood, all seemed possible, if not exactly probable, so long as she did not lose him again altogether.

To these feverish veerings of her spirit, a letter from her Aunt Winifred supplied a point of anchorage:

"I hear from Val that they are not going to Goodwood after all — their nice two-year-old is not in form. Such a bore. It's the most comfortable meeting of the year. They seem to be very busy settling about the farm that Jon Forsyte is going to take. It will be pleasant for Val and Holly to have them so close, though I'm afraid that American child will find it dull. Holly writes that they are going to an amusing little fancy dress affair at the hotel in Nettlefold. Anne is to go as a water-nymph — she will make quite a good one with her nice straight legs. Holly is to be Madame Vigee le Brun; and Val says he'll go as a tipster or not at all. I do hope he won't redden his nose. Young Jon Forsyte has an Arab dress he brought from Egypt."

'And I,' thought Fleur, 'have the dress I wore the night I went to his room at Wansdon.' How she had wished now that she had come out of that room his wife; after that nothing could have divided them. But they had been such innocents then!

For at once she had made up her mind to go to that dance herself. She was there first, and with malicious pleasure watched the faces of those two when she met them at the entrance of the room. Her grape-dress. She could see that Jon remembered it, and quickly she began to praise Anne's. A water-nymph to the life! As for Jon — another wife or two was all he needed to be perfect! She was discretion itself until that waltz; and even then she had tried to be discreet to all but Jon. For him she kept (or so she hoped) the closeness, the clinging, and the languor of her eyes; but in those few minutes she let him know quite surely that love ran in her veins.

"'Always,'" was all she said when at last they stopped.

And, after that dance, she stole away; having no heart to see him dance with his water-nymph. She crept up to her small bedroom trembling, and on her bed fell into a passion of silent weeping. And the water-nymph's browned face and eyes and legs flitted torturingly in the tangled glades of her vision. She quieted down at last. At least, for a few minutes, she had had him to herself, heart against heart. That was something.

She rose late, pale and composed again. At ten o'clock the startling appearance of her father's car completed the masking of her face. She greeted him with an emphatic gratitude quite unfelt.

"Dad! How lovely! Where have you sprung from?"

"Nettlefold. I spent the night there."

"At the hotel?"

"Yes."

"Why! I was there myself last night at a dance!"

"Oh!" said Soames, "that fancy dress affair — they told me of it. Pleasant?"

"Not very; I left early. If I'd known you were there! Why didn't you tell me you were coming down to fetch us home?"

"It just came into my mind that it was better for the boy than the train."

And Fleur could not tell what he had seen, or if, indeed, he had seen anything.

Fortunately, during the journey up, Kit had much to say, and Soames dozed, very tired after a night of anxiety, indecision, and little sleep. The aspect of the South Square house, choice and sophisticated, and the warmth of Michael's greeting, quite beautifully returned by Fleur, restored to him at least a measure of equanimity. Here, at all events, was no unhappy home; that counted much in the equation of a future into which he could no longer see.

After lunch he went up to Michael's study to discuss slum conversion. Confronted, while they were talking, with Fleur's water-colour, Soames rediscovered the truth that individuals are more interesting than the collection of them called the State. Not national welfare, but the painter of those passion fruits, possessed his mind. How prevent her from eating them?

"Yes, sir. That's really quite good, isn't it? I wish Fleur would take seriously to water-colour work."

Soames started.

"I wish she'd take seriously to anything, and keep her mind occupied."

Michael looked at him. 'Rather like a dog,' Soames thought, 'trying to understand.' Suddenly, he saw the young man wet his lips.

"You've got something to tell me, sir, I believe. I remember what you said to me some weeks ago. Is it anything to do with that?"

"Yes," answered Soames, watching his eyes. "Don't take it too much to heart, but I've reason to believe she's never properly got over the feeling she used to have. I don't know how much you've heard about that boy and girl affair."

"Pretty well all, I think." Again he saw Michael moisten his lips.

"Oh! From her?"

"No. Fleur's never said a word. From Miss June Forsyte."

"That woman! SHE'S sure to have plumped it all out. But Fleur's fond of you."

"I belong."

It seemed to Soames a queer way of putting it; pathetic, somehow!

"Well," he said, "I've not made a sign. Perhaps you'd like to know how I formed my view."

"No, sir."

Soames glanced quickly at him and away again. This was a bitter moment, no doubt, for young Michael! Was one precipitating a crisis which one felt, deeply yet vaguely, had to be reached and passed? He himself knew how to wait, but did this modern young man, so feather-pated and scattery? Still, he was a gentleman. That at least had become a cardinal belief with Soames. And it was a comfort to him, looking at the "White Monkey," on the wall, who had so slender a claim to such a title.

"The only thing," he muttered, "is to wait —"

"Not 'and see,' sir; anything but that. I can wait and not see, or I can have the whole thing out."

"No," said Soames, with emphasis, "don't have it out! I may be mistaken. There's everything against it; she knows which side her bread is buttered."

"Don't!" said Michael, and got up.

"Now, now," murmured Soames, "I've upset you. Everything depends on keeping your head."

Michael emitted an unhappy little laugh.

"YOU can't go round the world again, sir. Perhaps I'D better, this time, and alone."

Soames looked at him. "This won't do," he said. "She's got a strong affection for you; it's just feverishness, if it's anything. Take it like a man, and keep quiet." He was talking to the young man's back now, and found it easier. "She was always a spoiled child, you know; spoiled children get things into their heads, but it doesn't amount to anything. Can't you get her interested in these slums?"

Michael turned round.

"How far has it gone?"

"There you go!" said Soames. "Not any way so far as I know. I only happened to see her dancing with him last night at that hotel, and noticed her — her expression."

The word "eyes" had seemed somehow too extravagant.

"There's always his wife," he added, quickly, "she's an attractive little thing; and he's going to farm down there — they tell me. That'll take him all his time. How would it be if I took Fleur to Scotland for August and September? With this strike on there'll be some places in the market still."

"No, sir. That's only putting off the evil day. It must go to a finish, one way or the other."

Soames did not answer for some time.

"It's never any good to meet trouble half way," he said at last. "You young people are always in a hurry. One can do things, but one can't undo them. It's not," he went on, shyly, "as if this were anything new — an unfortunate old business revived for the moment; it'll die away again as it did before, if it's properly left alone. Plenty of exercise, and keep her mind well occupied."

The young man's expression was peculiar.

"And have you found that successful, sir, in your experience?" it seemed to say. That woman June had been blurting out his past, he shouldn't wonder!

"Promise me, anyway, to keep what I've said to yourself, and do nothing rash."

Michael shook his head. "I can't promise anything; it must depend, but I'll remember your advice, sir."

And with this Soames had to be content.

Acting on that instinct, born of love, which guided him in his dealings with Fleur, he bade her an almost casual farewell, and next day returned to Mapledurham. He detailed to Annette everything that was not of importance, for to tell her what was would never do.

His home on these last days of July was pleasurable; and almost at once he went out fishing in the punt. There, in contemplation of his line and the gliding water, green with reflection, he felt rested. Bullrushes, water lilies, dragon flies, and the cows in his own fields, the incessant cooing of the wood pigeons — with their precious "Take TWO cows, David!"— the distant buzz of his gardener's lawn mower, the splash of a water rat, shadows lengthening out from the poplars and the willow-trees, the scent of grass and of elder flowers bright along the banks, and the slow drift of the white river clouds — peaceful — very peaceful; and something of Nature's calm entered his soul, so that the disappearance of his float recalled him to reality with a jerk.

'It'll be uneatable,' he thought, winding at his line.

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Chapter II

Occupying the Mind

Comedy the real thing? Was it? Michael wondered. In saying to Soames that he could not wait and see, he had expressed a very natural abhorrence. Watch, spy, calculate — impossible! To go to Fleur and ask for a frank exposure of her feelings was what he would have liked to do; but he could not help knowing the depth of his father-inlaw's affection and concern, and the length of his head; and he had sufficient feeling to hesitate before imperilling what was as much 'old Forsyte's' happiness as his own. The 'old boy' had behaved so decently in pulling up his roots and going round the world with Fleur, that every consideration was due to him. It remained, then, to wait without attempting to see — hardest of all courses because least active. "Keep her mind well occupied!" So easy! Recollecting his own prenuptial feelings, he did not see how it was to be done. And Fleur's was a particularly difficult mind to occupy with anything except that on which she had set her heart. The slums? No! She possessed one of those eminently sane natures which rejected social problems, as fruitless and incalculable. An immediate job, like the canteen, in which she could shine a little — she would perform beautifully; but she would never work for a remote object, without shining! He could see her clear eyes looking at the slums as they had looked at Foggartism, and his experiment with the out-of-works. He might take her to see Hilary and Aunt May, but it would be futile in the end.

Night brought the first acute trouble. What were to be his relations with her, if her feelings were really engaged elsewhere? To wait and not see meant continuation of the married state. He suspected Soames of having wished to counsel that. Whipped by longing, stung and half numbed by a jealousy he must not show, and unwishful to wound her, he waited for a sign, feeling as if she must know why he was waiting. He received it, and was glad, but it did not convince him. Still!

He woke much lighter in spirit.

At breakfast he asked her what she would like to do, now that she was back and the season over. Did this slum scheme amuse her at all, because, if so, there was a lot to do in it; she would find Hilary and May great sports.

"Rather! Anything really useful, Michael!"

He took her round to the Meads. The result was better than he had hoped.

For his uncle and aunt were human buildings the like of which Fleur had not yet encountered — positively fashioned, concreted in tradition, but freely exposed to sun and air, tiled with taste, and windowed with humour. Michael, with something of their 'make-up,' had neither their poise, nor active certainty. Fleur recognized at once that those two dwelt in unity unlike any that she knew, as if, in their twenty odd years together, they had welded a single instrument to carry out a new discovery — the unselfconscious day. They were not fools, yet cleverness in their presence seemed jejune, and as if unrelated to reality. They knew — especially Hilary — a vast deal about flowers, printing, architecture, mountains, drains, electricity, the price of living, Italian cities; they knew how to treat the ailments of dogs, play musical instruments, administer first and even second aid, amuse children, and cause the aged to laugh. They could discuss anything from religion to morality with fluency, and the tolerance that came from experience of the trials of others and forgetfulness of their own. With her natural intelligence Fleur admired them. They were good, but they were not dull — very odd! Admiring them, she could not help making up to them. Their attitude in life — she recognised — was superior to her own, and she was prepared to pay at least lip-service. But lip-service 'cut no ice' in the Meads. Hand, foot, intellect and heart were the matter-of-course requirements. To occupy her mind, however, she took the jobs given her. Then trouble began. The jobs were not her own, and there was no career in them. Try as she would, she could not identify herself with Mrs. Corrigan or the little Topmarshes. The girls, who served at Petter and Poplins and kept their clothes in paper bags, bored her when they talked and when they didn't. Each new type amused her for a day, and then just seemed unlovely. She tried hard, however, for her own sake, and in order to deceive Michael. She had been at it more than a week before she had an idea.

"You know, Michael, I feel I should be ever so much more interested if I ran a place of my own in the country — a sort of rest-house that I could make attractive for girls who wanted air and that."

To Michael, remembering the canteen, it seemed "an idea" indeed. To Fleur it seemed more — a "lease and release," as her father might have put it. Her scheming mind had seen the possibilities. She would be able to go there without let or cavil, and none would know what she did with her time. A base of operations with a fool-proof title was essential for a relationship, however innocent, with Jon. She began at once to learn to drive the car; for the "rest-house" must not be so near him as to excite suspicion. She approached her father on the finance of the matter. At first doubtfully, and then almost cordially, Soames approved. If he would pay the rent and rates of the house, she would manage the rest out of her own pocket. She could not have bettered such a policy by way of convincing him that her interest was genuine; for he emphatically distrusted the interest of people in anything that did not cost them money. A careful study of the map suggested to her the neighbourhood of Dorking. Box Hill had a reputation for air and beauty, and was within an hour's fast drive of Wansdon. In the next three weeks she found and furnished a derelict house, rambling and cheap, close to the road on the London side of Box Hill, with a good garden and stables that could be converted easily. She completed her education with the car, and engaged a couple who could be left in charge with impunity. She consulted Michael and the Hilarys freely. In fact, like a mother cat, who carefully misleads the household as to where she is going to 'lay' her kittens, so Fleur, by the nature of her preparations, disguised her roundabout design. The Meads "Rest House," as it was called, was opened at the end of August.

All this time she possessed her soul with only the scantiest news of Jon. A letter from Holly told her that negotiations for Green Hill Farm were 'hanging fire' over the price, though Jon was more and more taken with it; and Anne daily becoming more rural and more English. Rondavel was in great form again, and expected to win at Doncaster. Val had already taken a long shot about him for the Derby next year.

Fleur replied in a letter so worded as to give the impression that she had no other interest in the world just then but her new scheme. They must all drive over and see whether her "Rest House" didn't beat the canteen. The people were "such dears"— it was all "terribly amusing." She wished to convey the feeling that she had no fears of herself, no alarm in the thought of Jon; and that her work in life was serious. Michael, never wholly deserted by the naivete of a good disposition, was more and more deceived. To him her mind seemed really occupied; and certainly her body, for she ran up from Dorking almost daily and spent the week-ends with him either at "The Shelter," where Kit was installed with his grandparents, or at Lippinghall, where they always made a fuss of Fleur. Rowing her on the river in bland weather, Michael recaptured a feeling of security. "Old Forsyte" must have let his imagination run away with him; the old boy WAS rather like a hen where Fleur was concerned, clucking and turning an inflamed eye on everything that came near!

Parliament had risen, and slum conversion work was now all that he was doing. These days on that river, which he ever associated with his wooing, were the happiest he had spent since the strike began — the strike that in narrowed form dragged wearyingly on, so that people ceased to mention it, the weather being warm.

And Soames? By his daughter's tranquil amiability, he, too, was tranquilised. He would look at Michael and say nothing, in accordance with the best English traditions, and his own dignity. It was he who revived the idea of Fleur's being painted by June's "lame duck." He felt it would occupy her mind still further. He would like, however, to see the fellow's work first, though he supposed it would mean a visit to June's.

"If she were to be out," he said to Fleur, "I shouldn't mind having a look round her studio."

"Shall I arrange that, then, Dad?"

"Not too pointedly," said Soames; "or she'll get into a fantod."

Accordingly at the following week-end Fleur said to him:

"If you'll come up with me on Monday, dear, we'll go round. The Rafaelite will be in, but June won't. She doesn't want to see you any more than you want to see her."

"H'm!" said Soames. "She always spoke her mind."

They went up, in his car. After forming his opinion Soames was to return, and Fleur to go on home. The Rafaelite met them at the head of the stairs. To Soames he suggested a bullfighter (not that he had ever seen one in the flesh), with his short whiskers, and his broad, pale face which wore the expression: "If you suppose yourself capable of appreciating my work, you make a mistake." Soames' face, on the other hand, wore the expression: "If you suppose that I want to see your work, you make a greater." And, leaving him to Fleur, he began to look round. In truth he was not unfavourably impressed. The work had turned its back on modernity. The surfaces were smooth, the drawing in perspective, and the colouring full. He perceived a new note, or rather the definite revival of an old one. The chap had undoubted talent; whether it would go down in these days he did not know, but its texture was more agreeable to live with than any he had seen for some time.

When he came to the portrait of June he stood for a minute, with his head on one side, and then said, with a pale smile:

“You’ve got her to the life.” It pleased him to think that June had evidently not seen in it what he saw. But when his eyes fell on the picture of Anne, his face fell, too, and he looked quickly at Fleur, who said:

“Yes, Dad? What do you think of that?”

The thought had flashed through Soames’ mind: ‘Is it to get in touch with HIM that she’s ready to be painted?’

“Finished?” he asked.

The Rafaelite answered:

“Yes. Going down to them tomorrow.”

Soames’ face rose again. That risk was over then!

“Quite clever!” he murmured. “The lily’s excellent.” And he passed on to a sketch of the woman who had opened the door to them.

“That’s recognisable! Not at all bad.”

In these quiet ways he made it clear that, while he approved on the whole, he was not going to pay any extravagant price. He took an opportunity when Fleur was out of hearing, and said:

“So you want to paint my daughter. What’s your figure?”

“A hundred and fifty.”

“Rather tall for these days — you’re a young man. However — so long as you make a good thing of it!”

The Rafaelite bowed ironically.

“Yes,” said Soames, “I daresay; you think all your geese are swans — never met a painter who didn’t. You won’t keep her sitting long, I suppose — she’s busy. That’s agreed, then. Goodbye! Don’t come down!”

As they went out he said to Fleur:

“I’ve fixed that. You can begin sitting when you like. His work’s better than you’d think from the look of him. Forbidding chap, I call him.”

“A painter has to be forbidding, Dad; otherwise people would think he was cadging.”

“Something in that,” said Soames. “I’ll get back now, as you won’t let me take you home. Good-bye! Take care of yourself, and don’t overdo it.” And, receiving her kiss, he got into the car.

Fleur began to walk towards her eastward-bound ‘bus as his car moved west, nor did he see her stop, give him some law, then retrace her steps to June’s.

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CHAPTER III

POSSESSING THE SOUL

Just as in a very old world to find things or people of pure descent is impossible, so with actions; and the psychologist who traces them to single motives is like Soames, who believed that his daughter wanted to be painted in order that she might see herself hanging on a wall. Everybody, he knew, had themselves hung sooner or later, and generally sooner. Yet Fleur, though certainly not averse to being hung, had motives that were hardly so single as all that. In the service of this complexity, she went back to June's. That little lady, who had been lurking in her bedroom so as not to meet her kinsman, was in high feather.

"Of course the price is nominal," she said. "Harold ought really to be getting every bit as much for his portraits as Thom or Lippen. Still, it's so important for him to be making something while he's waiting to take his real place. What have you come back for?

"Partly for the pleasure of seeing you," said Fleur, "and partly because we forgot to arrange for the first sitting. I think my best time would be three o'clock."

"Yes," murmured June, doubtfully, not so much from doubt as from not having suggested it herself. "I think Harold could manage that. Isn't his work exquisite?"

"I particularly like the thing he's done of Anne. It's going down to them tomorrow, I hear."

"Yes; Jon's coming to fetch it."

Fleur looked hastily into the little dim mirror to see that she was keeping expression off her face.

"What do you think I ought to wear?"

June's gaze swept her from side to side.

"Oh! I expect he'll want an artificial scheme with you."

"Exactly! But what colour? One must come in something."

"We'll go up and ask him."

The Rafaelite was standing before his picture of Anne. He turned and looked at them, without precisely saying: "Good Lord! These women!" and nodded, gloomily, at the suggestion of three o'clock.

"What do you want her in?" asked June.

The Rafaelite stared at Fleur as if determining where her ribs left off and her hip bones began.

"Gold and silver," he said, at last.

June clasped her hands.

"Now, isn't that extraordinary? He's seen through you at once. Your gold and silver room. Harold, how DID you?"

"I happen to have an old 'Folly' dress," said Fleur, "silver and gold, with bells, that I haven't worn since I was married."

"A 'Folly'!" cried June. "The very thing. If it's pretty. Some are hideous, of course."

"Oh! it's pretty, and makes a charming sound."

"He can't paint that," said June. Then added dreamily: "But you could suggest it, Harold — like Leonardo."

"Leonardo!"

"Oh! Of course! I know, he wasn't —"

The Rafaelite interrupted.

"Don't make your face up," he said to Fleur.

"No," murmured Fleur. "June, I do so like that of Anne. Has it struck you that she's sure to want Jon painted now?"

"Of course, I'll make him promise when he comes tomorrow."

"He's going to begin farming, you know; he'll make that an excuse. Men hate being painted."

"Oh, that's all nonsense," said June. "In old days they loved it. Anyway, Jon must sit before he begins. They'll make a splendid pair."

Behind the Rafaelite's back Fleur bit her lip.

"He must wear a turn-down shirt. Blue, don't you think, Harold — to go with his hair?"

"Pink, with green spots," muttered the Rafaelite.

"Then three o'clock tomorrow?" said Fleur, hastily.

June nodded. "Jon's coming to lunch, so he'll be gone before you come."

"All right, then. Au revoir!"

She held her hand out to the Rafaelite, who seemed surprised at the gesture.

"Good-bye, June!"

June came suddenly close and kissed her on the chin. At that moment the little lady's face looked soft and pink, and her eyes soft; her lips were warm, too, as if she were warm all through.

Fleur went away thinking: 'Ought I to have asked her not to tell Jon I was going to be painted?' But surely June, the warm, the single-eyed, would never tell Jon anything that might stop him being useful to her Rafaelite. She stood, noting the geography around "the Poplars." The only approach to this backwater was by a road that dipped into it and came out again. Just here, she would not be seen from the house, and could see Jon leaving after lunch whichever way he went. But then he would have to take a taxi, for the picture. It struck her bitterly that she, who had been his first-adored, should have to scheme to see him. But if she didn't, she would never see him! Ah! what a ninny she had been at Wansdon in those old days when her room was next to his. One little act, and nothing could have kept him from her for all time, not his mother nor the old feud; not her father; nothing; and then there had been no vows of hers or his, no Michael, no Kit, no nymph-eyed girl in barrier between them; nothing but youth and innocence. And it seemed to her that youth and innocence were over-rated.

She lit on no plan by which she could see him without giving away the fact that she had schemed. She would have to possess her soul a little longer. Let him once get his head into the painter's noose, and there would be not one but many chances.

She arrived at three o'clock with her Folly's dress, and was taken into June's bedroom to put it on.

"It's just right," said June; "delightfully artificial. Harold will love it."

"I wonder," said Fleur. The Rafaelite's temperament had not yet struck her as very loving. They went up to the studio without having mentioned Jon.

The portrait of Anne was gone. And when June went to fetch "the exact thing" to cover a bit of background, Fleur said at once:

"Well? Are you going to paint my cousin Jon?"

The Rafaelite nodded.

"He didn't want to be, but SHE made him."

"When do you begin?"

"To-morrow," said the Rafaelite. "He's coming every morning for a week. What's the good of a week?"

"If he's only got a week I should have thought he'd better stay here."

"He won't without his wife, and his wife's got a cold."

"Oh!" said Fleur, and she thought rapidly. "Wouldn't it be more convenient, then, for him to sit early in the afternoons? I could come in the mornings; in fact, I'd rather — one feels fresher. June could give him a trunk call."

The Rafaelite uttered what she judged to be an approving sound. When she left, she said to June: "I want to come at ten every morning, then I get my afternoons free for my 'Rest House' down at Dorking. Couldn't you get Jon to come in the afternoons instead? It would suit him better. Only don't let him know I'm being painted — my picture won't be recognisable for a week, anyway."

"Oh!" said June, "you're quite wrong, there. Harold always gets an unmistakable likeness at once; but of course he'll put it face to the wall, he always does while he's at work on a picture."

"Good! He's made quite a nice start. Then if you'll telephone to Jon, I'll come tomorrow at ten." And for yet another day she possessed her soul. On the day after, she nodded at a canvas whose face was to the wall, and asked:

"Do you find my cousin a good sitter?"

"No," said the Rafaelite; "he takes no interest. Got something on his mind, I should think."

"He's a poet, you know," said Fleur.

The Rafaelite gave her an epileptic stare. "Poet! His head's the wrong shape — too much jaw, and the eyes too deep in."

"But his hair! Don't you find him an attractive subject?"

"Attractive!" replied the Rafaelite —"I paint anything, whether it's pretty or ugly as sin. Look at Rafael's Pope — did you ever see a better portrait, or an uglier man? Ugliness is not attractive, but it's there."

"That's obvious," said Fleur.

"I state the obvious. The only real novelties now are platitudes. That's why my work is important and seems new. People have got so far away from the obvious that the obvious startles them, and nothing else does. I advise you to think that over."

"I'm sure there's a lot in it," said Fleur.

"Of course," said the Rafaelite, "a platitude has to be stated with force and clarity. If you can't do that, you'd better go on slopping around and playing parlour tricks like the Ga-gaists. They're a bathetic lot, trying to prove that cocktails are a better drink than old brandy. I met a man last night who told me he'd spent four years writing twenty-two lines of poetry that nobody can understand. How's that for bathos? But it'll make him quite a reputation, till somebody writes twenty-three lines in five years still more unintelligible. Hold your head up. . . . Your cousin's a silent beggar."

"Silence is quite a quality," said Fleur.

The Rafaelite grinned. "I suppose you think I haven't got it. But you're wrong, madam. Not long ago I went a fortnight without opening my lips except to eat and say yes or no. SHE got quite worried."

"I don't think you're very nice to her," said Fleur.

"No, I'm not. She's after my soul. That's the worst of women — saving your presence — they're not content with their own."

"Perhaps they haven't any," said Fleur.

"The Mohammedan view — well, there's certainly something in it. A woman's always after the soul of a man, a child, or a dog. Men are content with wanting bodies."

"I'm more interested in your platitudinal theory, Mr. Blade."

"Can't afford to be interested in the other? Eh! Strikes home? Turn your shoulder a bit, will you? No, to the left . . . . Well, it's a platitude that a woman always wants some other soul — only people have forgotten it. Look at the Sistine Madonna! The baby has a soul of its own, and the Madonna's floating on the soul of the baby. That's what makes it a great picture, apart from the line and colour. It states a great platitude; but nobody sees it, now. None of the cognoscenti, anyway — they're too far gone."

"What platitude are you going to state in your picture of me?"

"Don't you worry," said the Rafaelite. "There'll be one all right when it's finished, though I shan't know what it is while I'm at it. Character will out, you know. Like a rest?"

"Enormously. What platitude did you express in the portrait of my cousin's wife?"

"Coo Lummy!" said the Rafaelite. "Some catechism!"

"You surely didn't fail with that picture? Wasn't it platitudinous?"

"It got her all right. She's not a proper American."

"How?"

"Throws back to something — Irish, perhaps, or Breton. There's nymph in her."

"She was brought up in the backwoods, I believe," said Fleur, acidly.

The Rafaelite eyed her.

"You don't like the lady?"

"Certainly I do, but haven't you noticed that picturesque people are generally tame? And my cousin — what's his platitude to be?”

“Conscience,” said the Rafaelite; “that young man will go far on the straight and narrow. He worries.”

A sharp movement shook all Fleur’s silver bells.

“What a dreadful prophecy! Shall I stand again?”

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CHAPTER IV

TALK IN A CAR

For yet one more day Fleur possessed her soul; then, at the morning's sitting, accidentally left her vanity bag, behind her, in the studio. She called for it the same afternoon. Jon had not gone. Just out of the sitter's chair, he was stretching himself and yawning.

"Go on, Jon! Every morning I wish I had your mouth. Mr. Blade, I left my bag; it's got my cheque book in it, and I shall want it down at Dorking to-night: By the way, I shall be half an hour late for my sitting tomorrow, I'm afraid. Did you know I was your fellow victim, Jon? We've been playing 'Box and Cox.' How are you? I hear Anne's got a cold. Give her my sympathy. Is the picture going well? Might I have a peep, Mr. Blade, and see how the platitude is coming out? Oh! It's going to be splendid! I can quite see the line."

"Can you?" said the Rafaelite: "I can't."

"Here's my wretched bag! If you've finished, Jon, I could run you out as far as Dorking; you'd catch an earlier train. Do come and cheer me on my way. Haven't seen you for such ages!"

Threading over Hammersmith Bridge, Fleur regained the self-possession she had never seemed to lose. She spoke lightly of light matters, letting Jon grow accustomed to proximity.

"I go down every evening about this time, to see to my chores, and drive up in the morning early. So any afternoon you like I can take you as far as Dorking. Why shouldn't we see a little of each other in a friendly way, Jon?"

"When we do, it doesn't seem to make for happiness, Fleur."

"My dear boy, what is happiness? Surely life should be as harmlessly full as it can be?"

"Harmlessly!"

"The Rafaelite says you have a terrible conscience, Jon."

"The Rafaelite's a bounder."

"Yes; but a clever one. You HAVE changed, you usen't to have that line between your eyes, and your jaw's getting too strong. Look, Jon dear, be a friend to me — as they say, and we won't think of anything else. I always like Wimbledon Common — it hasn't been caught up yet. Have you bought that farm?"

"Not quite."

"Let's go by way of Robin Hill, and look at it through the trees? It might inspire you to a poem."

"I shall never write any more verse. It's quite gone."

"Nonsense, Jon. You only want stirring up. Don't I drive well, considering I've only been at it five weeks?"

"You do everything well, Fleur."

"You say that as if you disapproved. Do you know we'd never danced together before that night at Nettlefold? Shall we ever dance together again?"

"Probably not."

"Optimistic Jon! That's right — smile! Look! Is that the church where you were baptized?"

"I wasn't."

"Oh! No. That was the period, of course, when people were serious about those things. I believe I was done twice over — R.C. and Anglican. That's why I'm not so religious as you, Jon."

"Religious? I'm not religious."

"I fancy you ARE. You have moral backbone, anyway."

"Really!"

"Jon, you remind me of American notices outside their properties — 'Stop — look — take care — keep out!' I suppose you think me a frightful butterfly."

"No, Fleur. Far from it. The butterfly has no knowledge of a straight line between two points."

“Now what do you mean by that?”

“That you set your heart on things.”

“Did you get that from the Rafaelite?”

“No, but he confirmed it.”

“He did — did he? That young man talks too much. Has he expounded to you his theory that a woman must possess the soul of someone else, and that a man is content with bodies?”

“He has.”

“Is it true?”

“I hate to agree with him, but I think it is, in a way.”

“Well, I can tell you there are plenty of women about now who keep their own souls and are content with other people’s bodies.”

“Are you one of them, Fleur?”

“Ask me another! There’s Robin Hill!”

The fount of Forsyte song and story stood grey and imposing among its trees, with the sinking sun aslant on a front where green sunblinds were still down.

Jon sighed. “I had a lovely time there.”

“Till I came and spoiled it.”

“No; that’s blasphemy.”

Fleur touched his arm.

“That’s nice of you, dear Jon. You always were nice, and I shall always love you — in a harmless way. The coppice looks jolly. God had a brain-wave when he invented larches.”

“Yes, Holly says that the coppice was my grandfather’s favourite spot.”

“Old Jolyon — who wouldn’t marry his beloved, because she was consumptive?”

“I never heard that. But he was a great old fellow, my mother and father adored him.”

“I’ve seen his photograph — don’t get a chin like his, Jon! The Forsytes all have such chins. June’s frightens me.”

“June is one of the best people on earth.”

“Oh! Jon, you are horribly loyal.”

“Is that an offence?”

“It makes everything terribly earnest in a world that isn’t worth it. No, don’t quote Longfellow. When you get home, shall you tell Anne you’ve been driving with me?”

“Why not?”

“She’s uneasy about me as it is, isn’t she? You needn’t answer, Jon. But I think it’s unfair of her. I want so little, and you’re so safe.”

“Safe?” It seemed to Fleur that he closed his teeth on the word, and for a moment she was happy.

“Now you’ve got your lion-cub look. Do lion-cubs have consciences? It’s going to be rather interesting for the Rafaelite. I think your conscience might stop before telling Anne, though. It’s a pity to worry her if she has a talent for uneasiness.” Then, by the silence at her side, she knew she had made a mistake.

“This is where I put in my clutch,” she said, “as they say in the ‘bloods!’” And through Epsom and Leatherhead they travelled in silence.

“Do you love England as much as ever, Jon?”

“More.”

“It IS a gorgeous country.”

“The last word I should have used — a great and lovely country.”

“Michael says its soul is grass.”

“Yes, and if I get my farm, I’ll break some up, all right.”

"I can't see you as a real farmer."

"You can't see me as a real anything — I suppose. — Just an amateur."

"Don't be horrid! I mean you're too sensitive to be a farmer."

"No. I want to get down to the earth, and I will."

"You must be a throw-back, Jon. The primeval Forsytes were farmers. My father wants to take me down and show me where they lived."

"Have you jumped at it?"

"I'm not sentimental; haven't you realised that? I wonder if you've realised anything about me?" And drooping forward over her wheel, she murmured: "Oh! it's a pity we have to talk like this!"

"I said it wouldn't work!"

"No, you've got to let me see you sometimes, Jon. This is harmless enough. I must and will see you now and then. It's owed to me!"

Tears stood in her eyes, and rolled slowly down. She felt Jon touch her arm.

"Oh! Fleur, don't!"

"I'll put you out at North Dorking now, you'll just catch the five forty-six. That's my house. Next time I must show you over it. I'm trying to be good, Jon; and you must help me. . . . Well, here we are! Good-bye, dear Jon; and don't worry Anne about me, I beseech you!"

A hard handgrip, and he was gone. Fleur turned from the station and drove slowly back along the road.

She put away the car, and entered her "Rest House." It was full, late holiday time still, and seven young women were resting limbs, tired out in the service of "Petter, Poplin," and their like.

They were at supper, and a cheery buzz assailed Fleur's ears. These girls had nothing, and she had everything, except — the one thing that she chiefly wanted. For a moment she felt ashamed, listening to their talk and laughter. No! She would not change with them — and yet without that one thing she felt as if she could not live. And, while she went about the house, sifting the flowers, ordering for tomorrow, inspecting the bedrooms, laughter, cheery and uncontrolled, floated up and seemed to mock her.

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Chapter V

More Talk in a Car

Jon had too little sense of his own importance to be simultaneously loved with comfort to himself by two pretty and attractive young women. He drove home from Pulborough, where now daily he parked Val's car, with a sore heart and a mind distraught. He had seen Fleur six times since his return to England, in a sort of painful crescendo. That dance with her had disclosed to him her state of heart, but still he did not suspect her of consciously pursuing him; and no amount of heart-searching seemed to make his own feelings clearer. Ought he to tell Anne about today's meeting? In many small and silent ways she had shown that she was afraid of Fleur. Why add to her fears without real cause? The portrait was not his own doing, and only for the next few days was he likely to be seeing Fleur. After that they would meet, perhaps, two or three times a year. "Don't tell Anne — I beseech you!" Could he tell her after that? Surely he owed Fleur that much consideration. She had never consented to give him up; she had not fallen in love with Michael, as he with Anne. Still undecided, he reached Wansdon. His mother had once said to him: "You must never tell a lie, Jon, your face will always give you away." And so, though he did not tell Anne, her eyes following him about noted that he was keeping something from her. Her cold was in the bronchial stage, so that she was still upstairs, and tense from lack of occupation. Jon came up early again after dinner, and began to read to her. He read from 'The Worst Journey in the World,' and on her side she lay with her face pillowed on her arm and watched him over it. The smoke of a wood fire, the scent of balsamic remedies, the drone of his own voice, retailing that epic of a penguin's egg, drowsed him till the book dropped from his hand.

"Have a snooze Jon, you're tired." Jon lay back, but he did not snooze. He thought instead. In this girl, his wife, he knew well that there was what her brother, Francis Wilmot, called 'sand.' She knew how to be silent when shoes pinched. He had watched her making up her mind that she was in danger; and now it seemed to him that she was biding her time. Anne always knew what she wanted. She had a singleness of purpose not confused like Fleur's by the currents of modernity, and she was resolute. Youth in her South Carolinian home had been simple and self-reliant; and unlike most American girls, she had not had too good a time. It had been a shock to her, he knew, that she was not his first love and that his first love was still in love with him. She had shown her uneasiness at once, but now, he felt, she had closed her guard. And Jon could not help knowing, too, that she was still deeply in love with him for all that they had been married two years. He had often heard that American girls seldom really knew the men they married; but it seemed to him sometimes that Anne knew him better than he knew himself. If so, what did she know? What was he? He wanted to do something useful with his life; he wanted to be loyal and kind. But was it all just wanting? Was he a fraud? Not what she thought him? It was all confused and heavy in his mind, like the air in the room. No use thinking! Better to snooze, as Anne said — better to snooze! He woke and said:

"Hallo! Was I snoring?"

"No. But you were twitching like a dog, Jon."

Jon got up and went to the window.

"I was dreaming. It's a beautiful night. A fine September's the pick of the year."

"Yes; I love the 'fall.' Is your mother coming over soon?"

"Not until we're settled in. I believe she thinks we're better without her."

"Your mother would always feel she was de trop before she was."

"That's on the right side, anyway."

"Yes, I wonder if I should."

Jon turned. She was sitting up, staring in front of her, frowning. He went over and kissed her.

"Careful of your chest, darling!" and he pulled up the clothes.

She lay back, gazing up at him; and again he wondered what she saw . . . .

He was met next day by June's: "So Fleur was here yesterday and gave you a lift! I told her what I thought this morning."

"What DID you think?" said Jon.

"That it mustn't begin again. She's a spoiled child not to be trusted."

His eyes moved angrily.

"You'd better leave Fleur alone."

"I always leave people alone," said June; "but this is my house, and I had to speak my mind."

"I'd better stop sitting then."

"Now, don't be silly, Jon. Of course you can't stop sitting — neither of you. Harold would be frightfully upset."

"Damn Harold!"

June took hold of his lapel.

"That's not what I mean at all. The pictures are going to be splendid. I only meant that you mustn't meet here."

"Did you tell Fleur that?"

"Yes."

Jon laughed, and the sound of the laugh was hard.

"We're not children, June."

"Have you told Anne?"

"No."

"There, you see!"

"What?"

His face had become stubborn and angry.

"You're very like your father and grandfather, Jon — they couldn't bear to be told anything."

"Can YOU?"

"Of course, when it's necessary."

"Then please don't interfere."

Pink rushed into June's cheeks, tears into her eyes; she winked them away, shook herself, and said coldly:

"I never interfere."

"No?"

She went more pink, and suddenly stroked his sleeve. That touched Jon, and he smiled.

He "sat" disturbed all that afternoon, while the Rafaelite painted, and June hovered, sometimes with a frown, and sometimes with yearning in her face. He wondered what he should do if Fleur called for him again. But Fleur did not call, and he went home alone. The next day was Sunday, and he did not go up; but on Monday when he came out of "The Poplars," after "sitting," he saw Fleur's car standing by the curb.

"I do want to show you my house today. I suppose June spoke to you, but I'm a reformed character, Jon. Get in!" And Jon got in.

The day was dull, neither lighted nor staged for emotion, and the "reformed character" played her part to perfection. Not a word suggested that they were other than best friends. She talked of America, its language and books. Jon maintained that America was violent in its repressions and in its revolt against repressions.

"In a word," said Fleur, "young."

"Yes; but so far as I can make out, it's getting younger every year."

"I liked America."

"Oh! I liked it all right. I made quite a profit, too, on my orchard when I sold."

"I wonder you came back, Jon. The fact is — you're old-fashioned."

"How?"

"Take sex — I couldn't discuss sex with you."

"Can you with other people?"

"Oh! with nearly anyone. Don't frown like that! You'd be awfully out of it, my dear, in London, or New York, for that matter.”

“I hate fluffy talk about sex,” said Jon gruffly. “The French are the only people who understand sex. It isn’t to be talked about as they do here and in America; it’s much too real.”

Fleur stole another look.

“Then let us drop that hot potato. I’m not sure whether I could even discuss art with you.”

“Did you see that St. Gaudens statue at Washington?”

“Yes; but that’s vieux jeu nowadays.”

“Is it?” growled Jon. “What do they want, then?”

“You know as well as I.”

“You mean it must be unintelligible?”

“Put it that way if you like. The point is that art now is just a subject for conversation; and anything that anybody can understand at first sight is not worth talking about and therefore not art.”

“I call that silly,” said Jon.

“Perhaps. But more amusing.”

“If you see through it, how can you be amused?”

“Another hot potato. Let’s try again! I bet you don’t approve of women’s dress, these days?”

“Why not? It’s jolly sensible.”

“La, la! Are we coming together on that?”

“Naturally, you’d all look better without hats. You can wash your heads easily now, you know.”

“Oh! don’t cut us off hats, Jon. All our stoicism would go. If we hadn’t to find hats that suited us, life would be much too easy.”

“But they don’t suit you.”

“I agree, my dear; but I know the feminine character better than you. One must always give babies something to cut their teeth on.”

“Fleur, you’re too intelligent to live in London.”

“My dear boy, the modern young woman doesn’t live anywhere. She floats in an ether of her own.”

“She touches earth sometimes, I suppose.”

Fleur did not answer for a minute; then, looking at him:

“Yes; she touches earth sometimes, Jon.” And in that look she seemed to say again: “Oh! what a pity we have to talk like this!”

She showed him the house in such a way that he might get the impression that she considered to some purpose the comfort of others. Even her momentary encounters with the denizens had that quality. Jon went away with a tingling in his palm, and the thought: ‘She likes to make herself out a butterfly, but at heart —!’ The memory of her clear eyes smiling at him, the half-comic quiver of her lips when she said: “Good-bye, bless you!” blurred his vision of Sussex all the way home. And who shall say that she had not so intended?

Holly had come to meet him with a hired car.

“I’m sorry, Jon, Val’s got the car. He won’t be able to drive you up and down tomorrow as he said he would. He’s had to go up today. And if he can get through his business in town, he’ll go on to Newmarket on Wednesday. Something rather beastly’s happened. His name’s been forged on a cheque for a hundred pounds by an old college friend to whom he’d been particularly decent.”

“Very adequate reasons,” said Jon. “What’s Val going to do?”

“He doesn’t know yet; but this is the third time he’s played a dirty trick on Val.”

“Is it quite certain?”

“The Bank described him unmistakably. He seems to think Val will stand anything; but it can’t be allowed to go on.”

“I should say not.”

“Yes, dear boy; but what would you do? Prosecute an old College friend? Val has a queer feeling that it’s only a sort of accident that he himself has kept straight.”

Jon stared. WAS it an accident that one kept straight?

“Was this fellow in the war?” he asked.

“I doubt it. He seems to be an absolute rotter. I saw his face once — bone slack and bone selfish.”

“Beastly for Val!” said Jon.

“He’s going to consult his uncle, Fleur’s father. By the way, have you seen Fleur lately?”

“Yes. I saw her today. She brought me as far as Dorking, and showed me her house there.”

The look on Holly’s face, the reflective shadow between her eyes, were not lost on him.

“Is there any objection to my seeing her?” he said, abruptly.

“Only you can know that, dear boy.”

Jon did not answer, but the moment he saw Anne he told her. She showed him nothing by face or voice, just asked how Fleur was and how he liked the house. That night, after she seemed asleep, he lay awake, gnawed by uncertainty. WAS it an accident that one kept straight — was it?

❦

CHAPTER VI

SOAMES HAS BRAIN WAVES

The first question Soames put to his nephew in Green Street, was: "How did he get hold of the cheque form? Do you keep your cheque books lying about?"

"I'm afraid I do, rather, in the country, Uncle Soames."

"Um," said Soames, "then you deserve all you get. What about your signature?"

"He wrote from Brighton asking if he could see me."

"You should have made your wife sign your answer."

Val groaned. "I didn't think he'd run to forgery."

"They run to anything when they're as far gone as that. I suppose when you said 'No,' he came over from Brighton all the same?"

"Yes, he did; but I wasn't in."

"Exactly; and he sneaked a form. Well, if you want to stop him, you'd better prosecute. He'll get three years."

"That'd kill him," said Val, "to judge by his looks."

Soames shook his head. "Improve his health — very likely. Has he ever been in prison?"

"Not that I know of."

"H'm!"

Silence followed this profound remark.

"I can't prosecute," said Val suddenly. "College pal. There, but for the grace of God and all that, don't you know; one might have gone to the dogs oneself."

Soames stared at him.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you might. Your father was always in some scrape or other."

Val frowned. He had suddenly remembered an evening at the Pandemonium, when, in company with another College friend, he had seen his own father, drunk.

"But somehow," he said, "I've got to see that he doesn't do it again. If he didn't look such a 'heart' subject, one could give him a hiding."

Soames shook his head. "Personal violence — besides, he's probably out of England by now."

"No; I called at his club on the way here — he's in town all right."

"You didn't see him?"

"No. I wanted to see you first."

Flattered in spite of himself, Soames said sardonically:

"Perhaps he's got what they call a better nature?"

"By Jove, Uncle Soames, I believe that's a brain wave!"

Soames shook his head. "Not to judge by his face."

"I don't know," said Val. "After all, he was born a gentleman."

"That means nothing nowadays. And, apropos, before I forget it: Do you remember a young fellow called Butterfield, in the Elderson affair — no, you wouldn't. Well, I'm going to take him out of his publishing firm, and put him under old Gradman, to learn about your mother's and the other family Trusts. Old Gradman's on his last legs, and this young man can step into his shoes — it's a permanent job, and better pay than he's getting now. I can rely on him, and that's something in these days. I thought I'd tell you."

"Another brain wave, Uncle Soames. But about your first. Could you see Stainford, and follow that up?"

"Why should *I* see him?"

"You carry so much more weight than I do."

"H'm! Seems to me I always have to do the unpleasant thing. However, I expect it's better than your seeing him."

Val grinned. "I shall feel much happier if you do it."

"*I* shan't," said Soames. "That Bank cashier hasn't made a mistake, I suppose?"

"Who could mistake Stainford?"

"Nobody," said Soames. "Well, if you won't prosecute, you'd better leave it to me."

When Val was gone he remained in thought. Here he was, still keeping the family affairs straight; he wondered what they would do without him some day. That young Butterfield might be a brain wave, but who could tell — the fellow was attached to him, though, in a curious sort of way, with his eyes of a dog! He should put that in hand at once, before old Gradman dropped off. Must give old Gradman a bit of plate, too, with his name engraved, while he could still appreciate it. Most people only got them when they were dead or dotty. Young Butterfield knew Michael, too, and that would make him interested in Fleur's affairs. But as to this infernal Stainford? How was he going to set about it? He had better get the fellow here if possible, rather than go to his club. If he'd had the brass to stay in England after committing such a bare-faced forgery, he would have the brass to come here again and see what more he could get. And, smiling sourly, Soames went to the telephone.

"Mr. Stainford in the club? Ask him if he'd be good enough to step over and see Mr. Forsyte at Green Street."

After a look round to see that there were no ornaments within reach, he seated himself in the dining-room and had Smither in.

"I'm expecting that Mr. Stainford, Smither. If I ring, while he's here, pop out and get a policeman."

At the expression on Smither's face he added:

"I don't anticipate it, but one never knows."

"There's no danger, I hope, Mr. Soames?"

"Nothing of the sort, Smither; I may want him arrested — that's all."

"Do you expect him to take something again, sir?"

Soames smiled, and waved his hand at the lack of ornaments. "Very likely he won't come, but if he does, show him in here."

When she had gone, he settled down with the clock — a Dutch piece too heavy to take away; it had been 'picked up' by James, chimed every thing, and had a moon and a lot of stars on its face. He did not feel so 'bobbish' before this third encounter with that fellow; the chap had scored twice, and so far as he could see, owing to Val's reluctance to prosecute, was going to score a third time. And yet there was a sort of fascination in dealing with what they called 'the limit,' and a certain quality about the fellow which raised him almost to the level of romance. It was as if the idolised maxim of his own youth 'Show no emotion,' and all the fashionableness that, under the aegis of his mother Emily, had clung about Park Lane, were revisiting him in the shape of this languid beggar. And probably the chap wouldn't come!

"Mr. Stainford, sir."

When Smither — very red — had withdrawn, Soames did not know how to begin, the fellow's face, like old parchment, was as if it had come from some grave or other. At last he said:

"I wanted to see you about a cheque. My nephew's name's been forged."

The eyebrows rose, the eyelids drooped still further.

"Yes. Dartie won't prosecute."

Soames' gorge rose.

"You seem very cocksure," he said; "my nephew has by no means made up his mind."

"We were at college together, Mr. Forsyte."

"You trade on that, do you? There's a limit, Mr. Stainford. That was a very clever forgery, for a first."

There was just a flicker of the face; and Soames drew the forged cheque from his pocket. Inadequately protected, of course, not even automatically crossed! Val's cheques would have to have the words "Not negotiable; Credit payee" stamped on them in future. But how could he give this fellow a thorough scare?

"I have a detective at hand," he said, "only waiting for me to ring. This sort of thing must stop. As you don't seem to understand that —" and he took a step towards the bell.

A faint and bitter smile had come on those pale lips.

"You've never been down and out, I imagine, Mr. Forsyte?"

"No," answered Soames, with a certain disgust.

"I always am. It's very wearing."

"In that case," said Soames, "you'll find prison a rest." But even as he spoke them, the words seemed futile and a little brutal. The fellow wasn't a man at all — he was a shade, a languid bitter shade. It was as if one were bullying a ghost.

"Look here!" he said. "As a gentleman by birth, give me your word not to try it on again with my nephew, or any of my family, and I won't ring."

"Very well, you have my word — such as it is!"

"We'll leave it at that, then," said Soames. "But this is the last time. I shall keep the evidence of this."

"One must live, Mr. Forsyte."

"I don't agree," said Soames.

The "Shade" uttered a peculiar sound — presumably a laugh, and Soames was alone again. He went hastily to the door, and watched the fellow into the street. Live? Must one? Wouldn't a fellow like that be better dead? Wouldn't most people be better dead? And, astonished at so extravagant a thought, he went up to the drawing room. Forty-five years since he had laid its foundations, and there it was, as full of marqueterie as ever. On the mantlepiece was a little old daguerreotype, slightly pinked in the cheeks, of his grandfather —'Superior Dosset' set in a deep, enamelled frame. Soames contemplated it. The chin of the founder of the Forsyte clan was settled comfortably between the widely separated points of an old-fashioned collar. The eyes — with thick under-lids, were light and shrewd and rather japing; the side-whiskers grey; the mouth looked as if it could swallow a lot; the old-time tail-coat was of broadcloth; the hands those of a man of affairs. A stocky old boy, with a certain force, and a deal of character! Well-nigh a hundred years since that was taken of him. Refreshing to look at character, after that languid seedy specimen! He would like to see where that old chap had been born and bred before he emerged at the end of the eighteenth century and built the house of Forsyte. He would take Riggs, and go down, and if Fleur wouldn't come — perhaps all the better! Be dull for her! Roots were nothing to young people. Yes, he would go and look at his roots while the weather was still fine. But first to put old Gradman in order. It would do him good to see the old fellow after this experience — he never left the office till half-past five. And, replacing the daguerreotype, Soames took a taxi to the Poultry, reflecting as he went. How difficult it was to keep things secure, with chaps like Elderson and this fellow Stainford always on the look-out. There was the country too — no sooner was it out of one than it was into another mess; the coal strike would end when people began to feel the winter pinch, but something else would crop up, some war or disturbance or other. And then there was Fleur — she had fifty thousand of her own. Had he been wrong to make her so independent? And yet — the idea of controlling her through money had always been repulsive to him. Whatever she did — she was his only child, one might say his only love. If she couldn't keep straight for love of her infant and himself, to say nothing of her husband — he couldn't do it for her by threat of cutting her off or anything like that! Anyway, things were looking better with her, and perhaps he had been wrong.

The City had just begun to disgorge its daily life. Its denizens were scurrying out like rabbits; they didn't scurry in like that, he would bet — work-shy, nowadays! Ten where it used to be nine; five where it used to be six. Still, with the telephone and one thing and another, they got through as much perhaps; and didn't drink all the beer and sherry and eat all the chops they used to — a skimpier breed altogether, compared with that old boy whose effigy he had just been gazing at, a shadowy, narrow-headed lot, with a nervy, anxious look, as if they'd invested in life and found it a dropping stock. And not a tailcoat or a silk hat to be seen. Settling his own more firmly on his head, he got out at the familiar backwater off the Poultry, and entered the offices of Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte.

Old Gradman was still there, his broad, bent back just divested of its workaday coat.

"Ah! Mr. Soames, I was just going. Excuse me while I put on my coat."

A frock-coat made in the year one, to judge by the cut of it!

"I go at half-past five now. There isn't much to do as a rule. I like to get a nap before supper. It's a pleasure to see you;

you're quite a stranger."

"Yes," said Soames. "I don't come in much, but I've been thinking. If anything should happen to either or both of us, things would soon be in Queer Street, Gradman."

"Aow! We won't think about tha-at!"

"But we must; we're neither of us young men."

"Well, I'm not a chicken, but you're NO age, Mr. Soames."

"Seventy-one."

"Dear, dear! It seems only the other day since I took you down to school at Slough. I remember what happened then better than I do what happened yesterday."

"So do I, Gradman; and that's a sign of age. Do you recollect that young chap who came here and told me about Elderson?"

"Aow, yes! Nice young feller. Buttermilk or some such name."

"Butterfield. Well, I'm going to put him under you here, and I want you to get him au fait with everything."

The old fellow seemed standing very still; his face, in its surround of grey beard and hair, was quite expressionless. Soames hurried on:

"It's just precautionary. Some day you'll be wanting to retire."

Gradman lifted his hand with a heavy gesture.

"I'll die in 'arness, I 'ope," he said.

"That's as you like, Gradman. You'll remain as you always have been — in full charge; but you'll have someone to rely on if you don't feel well or want a holiday or what not."

"I'd rather not, Mr. Soames. To have a young man about the place — "

"A good young fellow, Gradman. And, for some reason, grateful to me and to my son-inlaw. He won't give you any trouble. We none of us live for ever, you know."

The old chap's face had puckered queerly, his voice grated more than usual.

"It seems going to meet trouble. I'm quite up to the work, Mr. Soames."

"Oh! I know how you feel," said Soames. "I feel much the same myself, but Time stands still for no man, and we must look to the future."

A sigh escaped from its grizzled prison.

"Well, Mr. Soames, if you've made up your mind, we'll say no more; but I don't like it."

"Let me give you a lift to your station."

"I'd rather walk, thank you; I like the air. I'll just lock up."

Soames perceived that not only drawers but feeling required locking-up, and went out.

Faithful old chap! One might go round to Polkingford's and see if one could pick up that bit of plate.

In that emporium, so lined with silver and gold, that a man wondered whether anything had ever been sold there, Soames stood considering. Must be something that a man could swear by — nothing arty or elegant. He supposed the old chap didn't drink punch — a chapel-goer! How about those camels in silvergilt with two humps each and candles coming out of them? "Joseph Gradman, in gratitude from the Forsyte family" engraved between the humps? Gradman lived somewhere near the Zoo. M'm! Camels? No! A bowl was better. If he didn't drink punch he could put rose-leaves or flowers into it.

"I want a bowl," he said, "a really good one."

"Yes, sir, I think we have the very article."

They always had the very article!

"How about this, sir — massive silver — a very chaste design."

"Chaste!" said Soames. "I wouldn't have it at a gift."

"No, sir; it isn't perhaps EXACTLY what you require. Now, this is a nice little bowl."

"No, no; something plain and solid that would hold about a gallon."

"Mr. Bankwait — come here a minute. This gentleman wants an old-fashioned bowl."

"Yes, sir; I think we have the very thing."

Soames uttered an indistinguishable sound.

"There isn't much demand for the old-fashioned bowl; but we have a very fine second-hand, that used to be in the Rexborough family."

"With arms on?" said Soames. "That won't do. It must be new, or free from arms, anyway."

"Ah! Then this will be what you want, sir."

"My Lord!" said Soames; and raising his umbrella he pointed in the opposite direction. "What's that thing?"

With a slightly chagrined air the shopman brought the article from its case.

Upon a swelling base, with a waist above, a silver bowl sprang generously forth. Soames flipped it with his finger.

"Pure silver, sir; and, as you see, very delicate edging; not too bacchanalian in design; the best gilt within. I should say the very thing you want."

"It might do. What's the price?"

The shopman examined a cabalistic sign.

"Thirty-five pounds, sir."

"Quite enough," said Soames. Whether it would please old Gradman, he didn't know, but the thing was in good taste, and would not do the family discredit. "I'll have that, then," he said. "Engrave these words on it," and he wrote them down. "Send it to that address, and the account to me; and don't be long about it."

"Very good, sir. You wouldn't like those goblets? — they're perfect in their way."

"Nothing more!" said Soames. "Good evening!" And, handing the shopman his card, with a cold circular glance, he went out. That was off his mind!

September sun sprinkled him, threading his way West along Piccadilly into the Green Park. These gentle autumn days were very pleasant. He didn't get hot, and he didn't feel cold. And the plane-trees looked their best, just making up their minds to turn; nice trees, shapely. And, crossing the grassy spaces, Soames felt almost mellow. A rather more rapid step behind impinged on his consciousness. A voice said:

"Ah! Forsyte! Bound for the meeting at Michael's? Might we go along together?"

Old Mont, perky and talkative as ever! There he went — off at once!

"What's your view of all these London changes, Forsyte? You remember the peg-top trouser, and the crinoline — Leech in his prime — Old Pam on his horse — September makes one reminiscent."

"It's all on the surface," said Soames.

"On the surface? I sometimes have that feeling. But there is a real change. It's the difference between the Austen and Trollope novels and these modern fellows. There are no parishes left. Classes? Yes, but divided by man, not by God, as in Trollope's day."

Soames sniffed. The chap was always putting things in that sort of way!

"At the rate we're going, they'll soon not be divided at all," he said.

"I think you're wrong there, Forsyte. I should never be surprised to see the horse come back."

"The horse," muttered Soames; "what he got to do with it?"

"What we must look for," said Sir Lawrence, swinging his cane, "is the millennium. Then we shall soon be developing individuality again. And the millennium's nearly here."

"I don't in the least follow you," said Soames.

"Education's free; women have the vote; even the workman has or soon will have his car; the slums are doomed — thanks to you, Forsyte; amusement and news are in every home; the liberal Party's up the spout; Free Trade's a moveable feast; sport's cheap and plentiful; dogma's got the knock; so has the General Strike; Boy Scouts are increasing rapidly; dress is comfortable; and hair is short — it's all millennial."

"What's all that got to do with the horse?"

“A symbol, my dear Forsyte. It’s impossible to standardize or socialize the horse. We’re beginning to react against uniformity. A little more millennium and we shall soon be cultivating our souls and driving tandem again.”

“What’s that noise?” said Soames. “Sounds like a person in distress.”

Sir Lawrence cocked his eyebrow.

“It’s a vacuum cleaner, in Buckingham Palace. Very human things those.”

Soames grunted — the fellow couldn’t be serious! Well! He might HAVE to be before long. If Fleur —! But he would not contemplate that “if.”

“What I admire about the Englishman,” said Sir Lawrence, suddenly, “is his evolutionary character. He flows and ebbs, and flows again. Foreigners may think him a stick-inthe-mud, but he’s got continuity — a great quality, Forsyte. What are you going to do with your pictures when you take the ferry? Leave them to the nation?”

“Depends on how they treat me. If they’re going to clap on any more Death duties, I shall revoke the bequest.”

“The principle of our ancestors, eh? Voluntary service, or none. Great fellows, our ancestors.”

“I don’t know about yours,” said Soames; “mine were just yeomen. I’m going down to have a look at them tomorrow,” he added defiantly.

“Splendid! I hope you’ll find them at home.”

“We’re late,” said Soames, glancing in at the dining-room window, where the committee were glancing out: “Half-past six! What a funny lot they look!”

“We always look a funny lot,” said Sir Lawrence, following him into the house, “except to ourselves. That’s the first principle of existence, Forsyte.”

❦

CHAPTER VII

TO-MORROW

Fleur met them in the hall. After dropping Jon at Dorking she had exceeded the limit homewards, that she might appear to have nothing in her thoughts but the welfare of the slums. "The Squire" being among his partridges, the Bishop was in the chair. Fleur went to the sideboard, and, while Michael was reading the minutes, began pouring out the tea. The Bishop, Sir Godfrey Bedwin, Mr. Montross, her father-inlaw, and herself drank China tea; Sir Timothy — whisky and soda; Michael nothing; the Marquess, Hilary, and her father Indian tea; and each maintained that the others were destroying their digestions. Her father, indeed, was always telling her that she only drank China tea because it was the fashion — she couldn't possibly like it. While she apportioned their beverages she wondered what they would think if they knew what, besides tea, was going on within her. To-morrow was Jon's last sitting and she was going 'over the top!' All the careful possessing of her soul these two months since she had danced with him at Nettlefold would by this time tomorrow be ended. To-morrow at this hour she would claim her own. The knowledge that there must be two parties to any contact did not trouble her. She had the faith of a pretty woman in love. What she willed would be accomplished, but none should know of it! And, handing her cups, she smiled, pitying the ignorance of these wise old men. They should not know, nor anyone else, least of all the young man who last night had held her in his arms. And, thinking of one not yet so holding her, she sat down by the hearth, with her tea and her tables, while her pulses throbbed and her half-closed eyes saw Jon's face turned round to her from the station door. Fulfilment! She, like Jacob, had served seven years — for the fulfilment of her love — seven long, long years! And — while she sat there listening to the edgeless booming of the Bishop and Sir Godfrey, to the random ejaculations of Sir Timothy, to her father's close and cautious comments — that something clear, precise, unflinching woven into her nature with French blood, silently perfected the machinery of the stolen life, that should begin tomorrow after they had eaten of forbidden fruit. A stolen life was a safe life if there were no chicken-hearted hesitation, no squeamishness, and no remorse! She might have experienced a dozen stolen lives already, from the certainty she felt about that. She alone would arrange — Jon should be spared all. And no one should know!

"Fleur, would you take a note of that?"

"Yes."

And she wrote down on her tablets: "Ask Michael what I was to take a note of."

"Mrs. Mont!"

"Yes, Sir Timothy?"

"Could you get up one of those what d'you call 'ems for us?"

"Matinees?"

"No, no — jumble sales, don't they call 'em?"

"Certainly."

The more she got up for them the more impeccable her reputation, the greater her freedom, and the more she would deserve, and ironically enjoy, her stolen life.

Hilary speaking now. What would HE think if he knew?

"But I think we OUGHT to have a matinee, Fleur. The public are so good, they'll always pay a guinea to go to what most of them would give a guinea any day not to go to. What so you say, Bishop?"

"A matinee — by all means!"

"Matinees — dreadful things!"

"Not if we got a pleasant play, Mr. Forsyte — something a little old-fashioned — one of L.S.D.'s. It would advertise us, you know. What do you think, Marquess?"

"My granddaughter Marjorie would get one up for you. It would do her good."

"H'm. If SHE gets it up, it won't be old-fashioned." And Fleur saw her father's face turning towards her, as he spoke. If only he knew how utterly she was beyond all that; how trivial to her seemed that heart-burning of the past.

"Mr. Montross, have you a theatre in your pocket?"

"I can get you one, Mr. Charwell."

"First rate! Then, will you and the Marquess and my nephew here take that under your wings? Fleur, tell us how your Rest-House is doing?"

"Perfectly, Uncle Hilary. It's quite full. The girls are delightful."

"Wild lot, I should think — aren't they?"

"Oh! no, Sir Timothy; they're quite model."

If only the old gentleman could see over his moustache into the model lady who controlled them!

"Well then, that's that. If there's nothing more, Mr. Chairman, will you excuse me? I've got to meet an American about ants. We aren't properly shaking up these landlords in my opinion. Good-night to you all!"

Motioning to Michael to stay behind, Fleur rose to see Sir Timothy out.

"Which umbrella is yours, Sir Timothy?"

"I don't know; that looks the best. If you get up a jumble sale, Mrs. Mont, I wish you'd sell the Bishop at it. I can't stand a fellow with a plum in his mouth, especially in the Chair."

Fleur smiled, and the "old boy" cocked his hat at her. They all cocked their hats at her, and that was pleasant! But would they if they knew! Dusk among the trees of the Square Garden, the lights just turned up — what luck to have such weather — dry and warm! She stood in the doorway, taking long breaths. By this time tomorrow she meant to be a dishonest wife! Well, not more than she had always been in secret aspiration.

'I'm glad Kit's down at "The Shelter",' she thought. HE should never know, no one should! There would be no change — no change in anything except in her and Jon. The Life Force would break bounds in a little secret river, which would flow — ah, where? Who cared?

"My dear Mont, honesty was never the best policy from a material point of view. The sentiment is purely Victorian. The Victorians were wonderful fellows for squaring circles."

"I agree, Marquess, I agree; they could think what they wanted better than anybody. When times are fat, you can."

Those two in the hall behind her — dried-up and withered! Fleur turned to them with her smile.

"My dear young lady — the evening air! You won't take cold?"

"No thank you, sir; I'm warm all through."

"How nice that is!"

"May I give you a lift, Marquess?"

"Thank you, Mr. Montross. Wish I could afford a car myself. Are you coming our way, Mont? Do you know that song, Mr. Montross: 'We'll all go round to Alice's house'? It seems to have a fascination for my milk boy. I often wonder who Alice is? I have a suspicion she may not be altogether proper. Good-night to you, Mrs. Mont. How charming your house is!"

"Good-night, sir!"

His hand; "the walrus's"; her father-inlaw's.

"Kit all right, Fleur?"

"First rate."

"Good-night, my dear!"

His dear — the mother of his grandson! 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow!'

The rug wrapped round the cargo of age, the door shut — what, a smooth and silent car! Voices again:

"Will you have a taxi, Uncle Hilary?"

"No, thank you, Michael, the Bishop and I will walk."

"Then I'll come with you as far as the corner. Coming, Sir Godfrey? By-bye, darling. Your Dad's staying to dinner. I'll be back from old Blythe's about ten."

The animals went out four by four!

"Don't stand there; you'll get cold!" Her father's voice! The one person whose eyes she feared. She must keep her mask on now.

“Well, Dad, what have you been doing today? Come into the ‘parlour’— we’ll have dinner quite soon.”

“How’s your picture? Is this fellow taking care not to exaggerate? I think I’d better have a look at it.”

“Not just yet, dear. He’s a very touchy gentleman.”

“They’re all that. I thought of going down West tomorrow to see where the Forsytes sprang from. I suppose you couldn’t take a rest and come?”

Fleur heard, without giving a sign of her relief.

“How long will you be away, Dad?”

“Back on the third day. ‘Tisn’t two hundred miles.”

“I’m afraid it would put my painter out.”

“Well, I didn’t think you’d care to. There’s no kudos there. But I’ve meant to for a long time; and the weather’s fine.”

“I’m sure it will be frightfully interesting, dear; you must tell me all about it. But what with the portrait and my Rest-House, I’m very tied, just now.”

“Well, then, I’ll look for you at the week-end. Your mother’s gone to some friends — they do nothing but play bridge; she’ll be away till Monday. I always want you, you know,” he added, simply. And to avoid his eyes she got up.

“I’ll just run up now, Dad, and change. Those Slum Committee Meetings always make me feel grubby. I don’t know why.”

“They’re a waste of time,” said Soames. “There’ll always be slums. Still, it’s something for you both to do.”

“Yes, Michael’s quite happy about it.”

“That old fool, Sir Timothy!” And Soames went up to the Fragonard. “I’ve hung that Morland. The Marquess is an amiable old chap. I suppose you know I’m leaving my pictures to the Nation? You’ve no use for them. You’ll have to live at that place Lippinghall some day. Pictures’d be no good there. Ancestors and stags’ horns and horses — that sort of thing. M’ff!”

A secret life and Lippinghall! Long, long might that conjunction be deferred!

“Oh, Bart will live for ever, Dad!’

“M’yes! He’s spry enough. Well, you run up!”

While she washed off powder and put it on again Fleur thought: ‘Dear Dad! Thank God! He’ll be far away!’

Now that her mind was thoroughly made up, it was comparatively easy to bluff, and keep her freshly-powdered face, smiling and serene, above the Chelsea dinner service.

“Where are you going to hang your portrait, when it’s done?” resumed Soames.

“Why! It’ll be yours, dear.”

“Mine? Well, of course; but you’ll hang it here; Michael’ll want it.”

Michael — unknowing! THAT gave her a twinge.

Well, she would be as good to him after, as ever. No old-fashioned squeamishness!

“Thank you, dear. I expect he’ll like it in the ‘parlour.’ The scheme IS silver and gold — my ‘Folly’ dress.”

“I remember it,” said Soames; “a thing with bells.”

“I think all that part of the picture’s very good.”

“What? Hasn’t he got your face?”

“Perhaps — but I don’t know that I approve of it frightfully.” After this morning’s sitting, indeed, she had wondered. Something avid had come into the face as if the Rafaelite had sensed the hardening of resolve within her.

“If he doesn’t do you justice I shan’t take it,” said Soames.

Fleur smiled. The Rafaelite would have something to say to that.

“Oh! I expect it’ll be all right. One never thinks one’s own effigies are marvellous, I suppose.”

“Don’t know,” said Soames, “never was painted.”

“You ought to be, dear.”

"Waste of time! Has he sent away the picture of that young woman?"

Fleur's eyes did not flinch.

"Jon Forsyte's wife? Oh! yes — long ago."

She expected him to say: "Seen anything of them?" But it did not come. And that disturbed her more than if it had come.

"I had your cousin Val to see me today."

Fleur's heart stood still. Had they been talking?

"His name's been forged."

Thank heaven!

"Some people have no moral sense at all," continued Soames. Involuntarily her white shoulder rose; but he wasn't looking. "Common honesty, I don't know where it is."

"I heard the Marquess say to-night that 'Honesty's the best policy' was a mere Victorianism, Dad."

"Well, he's ten years my senior, but I don't know where he got that from. Everything's twisted inside out, now-a-days."

"But if it's the best POLICY, there never was any particular virtue in it, was there?"

Soames took a sharp look at her smiling face.

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. These are Lippinghall partridges, Dad."

Soames sniffed. "Not hung quite long enough. You ought to be able to swear by the leg of a partridge."

"Yes, I've told cook, but she has her own views."

"And the bread sauce should have a touch more onion in it. Victorianism, indeed! I suppose he'd call ME a Victorian?"

"Well, aren't you, Dad? You had forty-six years of her."

"I've had twenty-five without her, and hope to have a few more."

"Many, many," said Fleur, softly.

"Can't expect that."

"Oh, yes! But I'm glad you don't consider yourself a Victorian; I don't like them. They wore too many clothes."

"Don't you be too sure of that."

"Well, tomorrow you'll be among Georgians, anyway."

"Yes," said Soames. "There's a graveyard there, they say. And that reminds me — I've bought that corner bit in the churchyard down at home. It'll do for me as well as any other. Your mother will want to go to France to be buried, I expect."

"Give Mr. Forsyte some sherry, Coaker."

Soames took a long sniff.

"This is some of your grandfather's. He lived to be ninety."

If she and Jon lived to be ninety — would nobody still know? . . . She left him at ten o'clock, brushing his nose with her lips.

"I'm tired, Dad; and you'll have a long day tomorrow. Good-night, dear!"

Thank God he would be among the Georgians tomorrow!

❦

Chapter VIII

Forbidden Fruit

Halting the car suddenly in the by-road between Gage's farm and the Robin Hill coppice, Fleur said:

"Jon, dear, I've got a whim. Let's get out and go in there. The potentate's in Scotland." He did not move, and she added: "I shan't see you again for a long time, now your picture's finished."

Jon got out, then, and she unlatched the footpath gate. They stood a minute within, listening for sounds of anyone to interrupt their trespass. The fine September afternoon was dying fast. The last "sitting" had been long, and it was late; and in the coppice of larch and birch the dusk was deepening. Fleur slid her hand within his arm.

"Listen! Still, isn't it? I feel as if we were back seven years, Jon. Do you wish we were? Babes in the wood once more?"

Gruffly he answered:

"No good looking back — things happen as they must."

"The birds are going to bed. Used there to be owls?"

"Yes; we shall hear one soon, I expect."

"How good it smells!"

"Trees and the cow-houses!"

"Vanilla and hay, as the poets have it. Are they close?"

"Yes."

"Don't let's go further, then."

"Here's the old log," said Jon. "We might sit down, and listen for an owl."

On the old log seat they sat down, side by side.

"No dew," said Fleur. "The weather will break soon, I expect. I love the scent of drought."

"I love the smell of rain."

"You and I never love the same thing, Jon. And yet — we've loved each other." Against her arm it was as if he shivered.

"There goes the old clock! It's awfully late, Fleur! Listen! The owl!"

Startlingly close through the thin-branched trees the call came. Fleur rose: "Let's see if we can find him."

She moved back from the old log.

"Aren't you coming? Just a little wander, Jon."

Jon got up and went along at her side among the larches.

"Up this way — wasn't it? How quickly it's got dark. Look! The birches are still white. I love birchtrees." She put her hand on a pale stem. "The smoothness, Jon. It's like skin." And, leaning forward, she laid her cheek against the trunk. "There! feel my cheek, and then the bark. Could you tell the difference, except for warmth?"

Jon reached his hand up. She turned her lips and touched it.

"Jon — kiss me just once."

"You know I couldn't kiss you 'just once,' Fleur."

"Then kiss me for ever, Jon."

"No, no! No, no!"

"Things happen as they must — you said so."

"Fleur — don't! I can't stand it."

She laughed — very low, softly.

"I don't want you to. I've waited seven years for this. No! Don't cover your face! Look at me! I take it all on myself. The woman tempted you. But, Jon, you were always mine. There! That's better. I can see your eyes. Poor Jon! Now, kiss me!" In that long kiss her very spirit seemed to leave her; she could not even see whether his eyes were open, or, like hers, closed. And again the owl hooted.

Jon tore his lips away. He stood there in her arms, trembling like a startled horse.

With her lips against his ear, she whispered:

"There's nothing, Jon; there's nothing." She could hear him holding-in his breath, and her warm lips whispered on: "Take me in your arms, Jon; take me!" The light had failed completely now; stars were out between the dark feathering of the trees, and low down, from where the coppice sloped up towards the east, a creeping brightness seemed trembling towards them through the wood from the moon rising. A faint rustle broke the silence, ceased, broke it again, Closer, closer — Fleur pressed against him.

"Not here, Fleur; not here. I can't — I won't —"

"Yes, Jon; here — now! I claim you."

* * * * *

The moon was shining through the tree stems when they sat again side by side on the log seat.

Jon's hands were pressed to his forehead, and she could not see his eyes.

"No one shall ever know, Jon."

He dropped his hands, and faced her.

"I must tell her."

"Jon!"

"I must!"

"You can't unless I let you, and I don't let you."

"What have we done? Oh, Fleur, what HAVE we done?"

"It was written. When shall I see you again, Jon?"

He started up.

"Never, unless she knows. Never, Fleur — never! I can't go on in secret!"

As quickly, too, Fleur was on her feet. They stood with their hands on each other's arms, in a sort of struggle. Then Jon wrenched himself free, and, like one demented, rushed back into the coppice.

She stood trembling, not daring to call. Bewildered, she stood, waiting for him to come back to her, and he did not come.

Suddenly, she moaned, and sank on her knees; and again she moaned. He must hear, and come back! He could not have left her at such a moment — he could not!

"Jon!" No sound. She rose from her knees, and stood peering into the brightened dusk. The owl hooted; and, startled, she saw the moon caught among the tree tops, like a presence watching her. A shivering sob choked in her throat, became a whimper, like a hurt child's. She stood, listening fearfully. No rustling; no footsteps; no hoot of owl — not a sound, save the distant whir of traffic on the London road! Had he gone to the car, or was he hiding from her in that coppice, all creepy now with shadows?

"Jon! Jon!" No answer! She ran towards the gate. There was the car — empty! She got into it, and sat leaning forward over the driving wheel, with a numb feeling in her limbs. What did it mean? Was she beaten in the very hour of victory? He could not — no, he could not mean to leave her thus? Mechanically she turned on the car's lights. A couple on foot, a man on a bicycle, passed. And Fleur still sat there, numbed. This — fulfilment! The fulfilment she had dreamed of? A few moments of hasty and delirious passion — and this! And, to her chagrin, her consternation, were added humiliation that, after such a moment, he could thus have fled from her; and the fear that in winning him she had lost him!

At last she started the engine, and drove miserably on, watching the road, hoping against hope to come on him. Very slowly she drove, and only when she reached the Dorking road did she quite abandon hope. How she guided the car for the rest of the drive, she hardly knew. Life seemed suddenly to have gone out.

Chapter IX

Aftermath

Jon, when he rushed back into the coppice, turned to the left, and, emerging past the pond, ran up through the field towards the house, as if it were still his own. It stood above its terrace and lawns unlighted, ghostly in the spreading moonlight. Behind a clump of rhododendrons, where as a little boy he had played hide and seek, or pursued the stag horn beetle with his bow and arrow, he sank down as if his legs had turned to water, pressing his fists against his cheeks, both burning hot. He had known and he had not known, had dreamed and never dreamed of this! Overwhelming, sudden, relentless! "It was written!" she had said. For her, every excuse, perhaps; but what excuse for him? Among those moonlit rhododendrons he could not find it. Yet the deed was done! Whose was he now? He stood up and looked at the house where he had been born, grown up, and played, as if asking for an answer. Whitened and lightless, it looked the ghost of a house, keeping secrets. "And I don't let you tell! . . . When shall I see you again?" That meant she claimed a secret lover. Impossible! The one thing utterly impossible. He would belong to one or to the other — not to both. Torn in every fibre of his being, he clung to the fixity of that. Behind the rhododendrons stretching along the far end of the lawn he walked, crouching, till he came to the wall of the grounds, the wall he had often scrambled over as a boy; and, pulling himself up, dropped into the top roadway. No one saw him, and he hurried on. He had a dumb and muddled craving to get back to Wansdon, though what he would do when he got there he could not tell. He turned towards Kingston.

All through that two hours' drive in a hired car Jon thought and thought. Whatever he did now, he must be disloyal to one or to the other. And with those passionate moments still rioting within him, he could get no grip on his position; and yet — he must!

He reached Wansdon at eleven, and, dismissing the car in the road, walked up to the house. Everyone had gone to bed, evidently assuming that he was staying the night at June's for a further sitting. There was a light in his and Anne's bedroom; and, at sight of it, the full shame of what he had done smote him. He could not bring himself to attract her attention, and he stole round the house, seeking for some way of breaking in. At last he spied a spare-room window open at the top, and fetching a garden ladder, climbed it and got in. The burglarious act restored some self-possession. He went down into the hall, and out of the house, replaced the ladder, came in again and stole upstairs. But outside their door he halted. No light, now, came from under. She must be in bed. And, suddenly, he could not face going in. He would feel like Judas, kissing her. Taking off his boots and carrying them, he stole downstairs again to the dining-room. Having had nothing but a cup of tea since lunch, he got himself some biscuits and a drink. They altered his mood — no man could have resisted Fleur's kisses in that moonlit coppice — no man! Must he, then, hurt one or the other so terribly? Why not follow Fleur's wish? Why not secrecy? By continuing her lover in secret, he would not hurt Fleur; by not telling Anne, he would not hurt Anne! Like a leopard in a cage, he paced the room. And all that was honest in him refused, and all that was sage. As if one could remain the husband of two women, when one of them knew! As if Fleur would stand that long! And lies, subterfuge! And — Michael Mont! — a decent chap! He had done him enough harm as it was! No! A clean cut one way or the other! He stopped by the hearth, and leaned his arms on the stone mantlepiece. How still! Only that old clock which had belonged to his grandfather, ticking away time — time that cured everything, that made so little of commotions, ticking men and things to their appointed ends. Just in front of him on the mantlepiece was a photograph of his grandfather, old Jolyon, taken in his eighties — the last record of that old face, its broad brow, and white moustache, its sunken cheeks, deep, steady eyes, and strong jaw. Jon looked at it long! "Take a course and stick to it!" the face, gazing back at him so deeply, seemed to say. He went to the bureau and sat down to write.

"I am sorry I rushed away to-night, but it was better, really. I had to think. I have thought. I'm only certain of one thing yet. To go on IN SECRET is impossible. I shan't say a word about tonight, of course, until you let me. But, Fleur, unless I can tell everything, it must end. You wouldn't wish it otherwise, would you? Please answer to the Post Office, Nettlefold.

"Jon."

He sealed this up, addressed it to her at Dorking, and, pulling on his boots, again stole out and posted it. When he got back he felt so tired, that, wrapped in an old coat, he fell asleep in an armchair. The moonlight played tricks through the half-drawn curtains, the old clock ticked, but Jon slept, dreamless.

He woke at daybreak, stole up to the bathroom, bathed and shaved noiselessly, and went out through a window, so as not to leave the front door unfastened. He walked up through the gap past the old chalk pit, on to the Downs, by the path he had taken with Fleur seven years ago. Till he had heard from her he did not know what to do; and he dreaded Anne's eyes, while his mind was still distraught. He went towards Chanctonbury Ring. There was a heavy dew, and the short turf was all spun over with it. All was infinitely beautiful, remote and stilly in the level sunlight. The beauty tore at his heart. He had come to love the Downs — they had a special loveliness, like no other part of the world that he had seen. Did this mean that he must now leave them, leave England again — leave everything, and cleave to Fleur? If she claimed him, if she decided on declaring their act of union, he supposed it did. And Jon walked in confusion of heart, such as he had not thought possible to man. From the Ring he branched away, taking care to avoid the horses at their early exercise. And this first subterfuge brought him face to face with immediate decision. What should he do till he had heard from Fleur? Her answer could not reach Nettlefold till the evening, or even next morning. He decided, painfully, to go back to breakfast, and tell them he had missed his train, and entered in the night burglariously so as not to disturb them.

That day, with its anxiety and its watchfulness of self, was one of the most wretched he had ever spent; and he could not free himself from the feeling that Anne was reading his thoughts. It was as if each passed the day looking at the other unobserved — almost unbearable! In the afternoon he asked for a horse to ride over to Green Hill Farm, and said he would be back late. He rode on into Nettlefold and went to the post-office. There was a telegram: "Must see you. Will be at Green Hill Farm tomorrow at noon. Don't fail me. — F."

Jon destroyed it, and rode homewards. Wretchedness and strain for another eighteen hours! Was there anything in the world worse than indecision? He rode slowly so as to have the less time at home, dreading the night. He stopped at a wayside inn to eat, and again went by way of Green Hill Farm to save at least the letter of his tale. It was nearly ten and full moonlight before he got back.

"It's a wonderful night," he said, when he came into the drawing-room. "The moonlight's simply marvellous." It was Holly who answered; Anne, sitting by the fire, did not even look up. 'She knows,' thought Jon, 'she knows something.' Very soon after, she said she was sleepy, and went up. Jon stayed, talking to Holly. Val had gone on from town to Newmarket, and would not be back till Friday. They sat one on each side of the wood fire. And, looking at his sister's face, charming and pensive, Jon was tempted. She was so wise, and sympathetic. It would be a relief to tell her everything. But Fleur's command held him back — it was not his secret.

"Well, Jon, is it all right about the farm?"

"I've got some new figures; I'm going into them to-night."

"I do wish it were settled, and we knew you were going to be near for certain. I shall be awfully disappointed if you're not."

"Yes; but I must make sure this time."

"Anne's very set on it. She doesn't say much, but she really is. It's such a charming old place."

"I don't want a better, but it must pay its way."

"Is that your real reason, Jon?"

"Why not?"

"I thought perhaps you were secretly afraid of settling again. But you're the head of the family, Jon — you ought to settle."

"Head of the family!"

"Yes, the only son of the only son of the eldest son right back to the primeval Jolyon."

"Nice head!" said Jon, bitterly.

"Yes — a nice head." And, suddenly rising, Holly bent over and kissed the top of it.

"Bless you! Don't sit up too late. Anne's rather in the dumps."

Jon turned out the lamp and stayed, huddled in his chair before the fire. Head of the family!

He had done them proud! And if —! Ha! That would, indeed, be illustrious! What would the old fellow whose photograph he had been looking at last night, think, if he knew? Ah, what a coil! For in his inmost heart he knew that Anne was more his mate, more her with whom he could live and work and have his being, than ever Fleur could be. Madness, momentary madness, coming on him from the past — the past, and the potency of her will to have and hold him! He got up, and drew aside the curtains. There, between two elm trees, the moon, mysterious and powerful, shone, and all was moving with its light up to the crest of the Downs. What beauty, what stillness! He threw the window up, and stepped out; like some dark fluid spilled on the whitened grass, the ragged shadow of one elm tree reached almost to his feet. From their window above a light shone. He must go up and face it. He had not been alone with her since —! If only he knew for certain what he was going to do! And he realised now that in obeying that impulse to rush away from Fleur he had been wrong; he ought to have stayed and threshed it out there and then. And yet, who could have behaved reasonably, sanely, feeling as he had felt? He stepped back to the window, and stopped with his heart in his mouth. There between firelight and moonlight stood Anne! Slender, in a light wrapper drawn close, she was gazing towards him. Jon closed the window and drew the curtain.

"Sorry, darling, you'll catch cold — the moonlight got me." She moved to the far side of the hearth, and stood looking at him.

"Jon, I'm going to have a child."

"You —!"

"Yes. I didn't tell you last month because I wanted to be sure."

"Anne!"

She was holding up her hand.

"Wait a minute!"

Jon gripped the back of a chair, he knew what was coming.

"Something's happened between you and Fleur."

Jon held his breath, staring at her eyes; dark, unflinching, startled, they stared back at him.

"Everything's happened, hasn't it?"

Jon bent his head.

"Yesterday? Don't explain, don't excuse yourself or her. Only — what does it mean?"

Without raising his head, Jon answered:

"That depends on you."

"On me?"

"After what you've just told me. Oh! Anne, why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"Yes; I kept it too long!"

He understood what she meant — she had kept it as a weapon of defence. And, seeming to himself unforgiveable, he said:

"Forgive me, Anne — forgive me!"

"Oh! Jon, I don't just know."

"I swear that I will never see her again."

He raised his eyes now, and saw that she had sunk on her knees by the fire, holding a hand out to it, as if cold. He dropped on his knees beside her.

"I think," he said, "love is the cruellest thing in the world."

"Yes."

She had covered her eyes with her hand; and it seemed hours that he knelt there, waiting for a movement, a sign, a word. At last she dropped her hand.

"All right. It's over. But don't kiss me — yet."

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CHAPTER X

BITTER APPLE

Life revived in Fleur while she went about her business in the morning. Standing in sunshine before the hollyhocks and sunflowers of the “rest-house” garden, she reviewed past and future with feverish vigour. Of course Jon was upset! She had taken him by storm! He was old-fashioned, conscientious; he couldn’t take things lightly. But since already he had betrayed his conscience, he would realise that what had happened outweighed what more could happen. It was the first step that counted! They had always belonged to each other. She felt no remorse; then why should he — when his confusion was over? It was for the best, perhaps, that he had run away from her till he could see the inexorability of his position. Her design was quite unshaken by the emotions she had been through. Jon was hers now, he could not betray their secret unless she gave him leave. He must and would conform to the one course possible — secrecy. Infidelity had been achieved — one act or many, what did it matter? Ah! But she would make up to him for the loss of self-respect with her love, and with her wisdom. She would make him a success. In spite of that American chit he should succeed with his farming, become important to his county, to his country, perhaps. She would be circumspection itself — for his sake, for her own, for Michael’s, Kit’s, her father’s.

With a great bunch of autumn flowers to which was clinging one bee, she went back into the house to put them in water. On the table in the hall were a number of little bags of bitter-apple prepared by her caretaker’s wife against the moth, which were all over a house that had been derelict for a year. She busied herself with stowing them in drawers. The second post brought her Jon’s letter.

She read it, and spots of burning colour became fixed in her cheeks. He had written this before he slept — it was all part of his confusion. But she must see him at once — at once! She got out the car, and, driving to a village where she was not known, sent a telegram to the post-office at Nettlefold. Dreadful to have to wait over the night! But she knew it might be evening or even next morning before he could call for it.

Never did time go so slowly. For now she was shaken again. Was she overestimating her power, relying too much on her sudden victory in a moment of passion, underestimating Jon’s strength after resolve taken? She remembered how in those old days she had failed to move him from renunciation. And, unable to keep still, she went up lonely on to Box Hill, and wandered among its yew trees and spindleberry bushes, till she was tired out and the sun was nearly down. With the sinking light the loneliness up there repelled her, for she was not a real nature-lover, and for an anxious heart Nature has little comfort. She was glad to be back, listening to the chatter of the supper-eating girls. It had no interest for her, but at least it was not melancholy like the space and shadows of the open. She suddenly remembered that she had missed her “sitting” and had sent no word. The Rafaelite would gnash his teeth; perhaps he had set her “Folly” dress up on a dummy, to paint the sound from its silver bells. Bells! Michael! Poor Michael! But was he to be pitied, who had owned her for years while at heart she belonged to another? She went up to bed early. If only she could sleep till it was time to start! This force that played with hearts, tore them open, left them quivering — made them wait and ache, and ache and wait! Had the Victorian Miss, whom they had taken to praising again, ever to go through what she had gone through since first she saw her fate in front of that grotesque Juno — or was it Venus? — in the gallery off Cork Street? The disciplined Victorian Miss? Admit — oh! freely — that she, Fleur Mont, was undisciplined; still, she hadn’t worn her heart upon her sleeve. She hadn’t kicked and screamed. Surely she deserved a spell of happiness! Not more than a spell — she wouldn’t ask for more than that! Things wore out, hearts wore out! But, to have the heart she wanted against her own, as last night, and then to lose it straightway? It could not be! And so at last she slept, and the moon that had watched over her victory came by, to look in through the curtain chinks, and make her dream.

She woke and lay thinking with the preternatural intensity of early morning thought. People would blame her if they knew; and was there any real possibility that they would not come to know? Suppose Jon remained immovably opposed to secrecy. What then? Was she prepared to give up all and follow him? It would mean more than in the ordinary case. It would mean isolation. For always, in the background, was the old barrier of the family feud; her father and his mother, and their abhorrence of union between her and Jon. And all the worldly sense in Fleur, brought to the edge of hard reality, shivered and recoiled. Money! It was not that they would lack money. But position, approval, appreciation, where in the world could they ever regain all that? And Kit? He would be lost to her. The Monts would claim him. She sat up in bed, seeing with utter clearness in the dark a truth she had never before seen naked — that the condition of conquest is sacrifice. Then she revolted. No! Jon would be reasonable, Jon would come round! In secret they would, they must, be happy, or if not happy, at least not starved. She would have to share him, he to share her; but they would each know that the other only pretended to belong elsewhere. But would it be pretence with him? Was he at heart all hers? Was he not, at least, as much his wife's? Horribly clear she could see that girl's face, its dark, eager eyes, with the something strange and so attractive in their setting. No! She would not think of her! It only weakened her power to win Jon over. Dawn opened a sleepy eye. A bird cheeped, and daylight crept in. She lay back, resigned again to the dull ache of waiting. She rose unrested. A fine morning, dry as ever — save for the dew on the grass! At ten she would start! It would be easier to wait in motion even if she had to drive dead slow. She gave her morning orders, got out the car, and left. She drove by the clock so as to arrive at noon. The leaves were turning already, it would be an early fall. Had she put on the right frock? Would he like this soft russet, the colour of gone-off apples? The red was prettier; but red caught the eye. And the eye must not be caught today. She drove the last mile at a foot's pace, and drew up in the wooded lane just where the garden of Green Hill Farm ended in orchard, and the fields began. Very earnestly she scrutinized her face in the small mirror of her vanity bag. Where had she read that one always looked one's worst in a mirror? If so, it was a mercy. She remembered that Jon had once said he hated the look of lip salve; and, not touching her lips, she put away the mirror and got out. She walked slowly towards the entrance gate. From there a lane divided the house from the straw yards and farm buildings sloping up behind it. In the fine autumn sunlight they ranged imposing, dry and deserted — no stock, not so much as a hen. Even Fleur's unlearned mind realised the stiff job before anyone who took this farm. Had she not often heard Michael say that farming was more of a man's job than any other in the England of today! She would let him take it, then that wretched conscience of his would be at rest on one score at least. She passed the gate and stood before the old house, gabled and red with Virginia creeper. Twelve had struck down in the village as she passed through. Surely he had not failed her! Five minutes she waited that seemed like five hours. Then, with her heart beating fast, she went up and rang the bell. It sounded far away in the empty house. Footsteps — a woman's!

"Yes, ma'am?"

"I was to meet Mr. Forsyte here at noon about the farm."

"Oh, yes, ma'am; Mr. Forsyte came early. He was very sorry he had to go away. He left this note for you."

"He's not coming back?"

"No, ma'am, he was very sorry, but he couldn't come back today."

"Thank you."

Fleur went back to the gate. She stood there, turning the note over and over. Suddenly she broke the seal and read:

"Last night Anne told me of her own accord that she knew what had happened. She told me, too, that she is to have a child. I have promised her not to see you again. Forgive me and forget me, as I must forget you.

"JON."

Slowly, as if not knowing, she tore the sheet of paper and the envelope into tiny fragments and buried them in the hedge. Then she walked slowly, as if not seeing, to her car, and got in. She sat there stonily, alongside the orchard with the sunlight on her neck and scent from wind-fallen rotting apples in her nostrils. For four months, since in the canteen she saw Jon's tired smile, he had been one long thought in her mind. And this was the end! Oh! Let her get away — away from here!

She started the car, and, once out of the lane, drove at a great pace. If she broke her neck, all the better! But Providence, which attends the drunk and desperate, was about her — spying out her ways; and she did not break her neck. For more than two hours she drove, hardly knowing where. At three in the afternoon she had her first sane impulse — a craving to smoke, a longing for tea. She got some at an inn, and turned her car towards Dorking. Driving more slowly now, she arrived between four and five. She had been at the wheel for nearly six hours. And the first thing she saw outside the "rest-house" was her father's car. He! What had HE come for? Why did people pester her? On the point of starting the engine again, she saw him come out of the front door, and stand looking up and down the road. Something groping in that look of his touched her, and, leaving the car, she walked towards him.

CHAPTER XI

"GREAT FORSYTE"

On the morning after the Slum Conversion Committee meeting Soames had started early. It was his intention to spend the night somewhere "down there," look at his roots the following morning, and motor part of the way home. On the day after, he would return to town and see if he couldn't carry Fleur back with him to Mapledurham for a long weekend. He reached a seaside hostel ten miles from his origin about six o'clock, ate a damp dinner, smoked his own cigar, and went to a bed in which, for insurance sake, he placed a camel's hair shawl.

He had thought things out, and was provided with an ordinance map on an inordinate scale. He meant to begin his investigation by seeing the church. For he had little to go by except a memory that his father James had once been down, and had returned speaking of a church by the sea, and supposing that there might be "parish entries and that, but it was a long time back and he didn't know."

After an early breakfast he directed Riggs towards the church. As James had said, it was close to the sea, and it was open. Soames went in. A little old grey church with funny pews, and a damp smell. There wouldn't be any tablets to his name, he supposed. There were not, and he went out again, to wander among the gravestones, overcome by a sense of unreality — everything underground, and each gravestone, older than the last century, undecipherable. He was about to turn away when he stumbled. Looking down in disapproval at a flat stone, he saw on the worn and lichened surface a capital F. He stood for a minute, scrutinizing, then went down on his knees with a sort of thrill. Two names — the first had an undoubted capital J, a y, and an n; the second name began with that capital F, and had what looked like an s in the middle, and the remains of a tall letter last but one! The date? By George — the date was legible! 1777. Scraping gingerly at the first name, he disinterred an o. Four letters out of the six in Jolyon; three letters out of Forsyte. There could hardly be a doubt that he had stumbled over his great-great-grandfather! Supposing the old chap had lived to the ordinary age of a Forsyte, his birth would be near the beginning of the eighteenth century! His eyes gimletted the stone with a hard grey glance as though to pierce to the bones beneath — clean as a whistle long since, no doubt! Then he rose from his knees and dusted them. He had a date now. And, singularly fortified, he emerged from the graveyard, and cast a suspicious look at Riggs. Had he been seen on his knees? But the fellow was seated, as usual, with his back to everything, smoking his eternal cigarette. Soames got into the car.

"I want the vicarage now, or whatever it is."

"Yes, sir."

He was always saying "Yes, sir," without having an idea of where places were.

"You'd better ask," he said, as the car moved up the rutted lane. Sooner than ask, the fellow would go back to London! Not that there was anyone to ask. Soames was impressed, indeed, by the extreme emptiness of this parish where his roots lay. It seemed terribly hilly, and full of space, with large fields, some woods in the coombe to the left, and a soil that you couldn't swear by — not red and not white and not brown exactly; the sea was blue, however, and the cliffs, so far as he could judge, streaky. The lane bent to the right, past a blacksmith's forge.

"Hi!" said Soames, "pull up!" He himself got out to ask. That fellow never made head or tail of what he was told.

The blacksmith was hammering at a wheel, and Soames waited till his presence was observed.

"Where's the vicarage?"

"Up the lane, third 'ouse on the right."

"Thank you," said Soames, and, looking at the man suspiciously, added:

"Is the name Forsyte known hereabouts nowadays?"

"What's that?"

"Have you ever heard the name Forsyte?"

"Farsyt? Noa."

Soames heard him with a disappointed relief, and resumed his seat. What if he'd said: "Yes, it's mine!"

A blacksmith's was a respectable occupation, but he felt that he could do without it in the family. The car moved on.

The vicarage was smothered in creeper. Probably the Vicar would be, too! He rang a rusty bell and waited. The door was opened by a red-cheeked girl. It was all very rustic.

"I want the Vicar," said Soames. "Is he in?"

"Yes, sir. What name?"

But at this moment a thin man in a thin suit and a thin beard came out from a doorway, saying:

"Am I wanted, Mary?"

"Yes," said Soames; "here's my card."

There ought — he felt — to be a way of enquiring about one's origin that would be distinguished; but, not finding it, he added simply:

"My family came from hereabouts some generations back; I just wanted to have a look at the place, and ask you a question or two."

"Forsyte?" said the Vicar, gazing at the card: "I don't know the name, but I daresay we shall find something."

His clothes were extremely well worn, and Soames had the impression that his eyes would have been glad if they could. 'Smells a fee,' he thought; 'poor devil!'

"Will you come in?" said the Vicar. "I've got some records and an old tythe map. We might have a look at them. The registers go back to 1580. I could make a search for you."

"I don't know if that's worth while," said Soames, following him into a room that impressed him as dismal beyond words.

"Do sit down," said the Vicar. "I'll get that map. Forsyte? I seem to remember the name now."

The fellow was agreeable, and looked as if he could do with an honest penny!

"I've been up to the church," said Soames: "it seems very close to the sea."

"Yes; they used to use the pulpit, I'm afraid, to hide their smuggled brandy."

"I got a date in the graveyard — 1777; the stones are very much let down."

"Yes," said the Vicar, who was groping in a cupboard; "one's difficulty is the sea air. Here's the map I spoke of"; and, unrolling a large and dingy map, he laid it on the table, weighting down the corners with a tin of tobacco, an inkstand, a book of sermons, and a dog whip. The latter was not heavy enough, and the map curled slowly away from Soames.

"Sometimes," said the Vicar, restoring the corner, and looking round for something to secure it, "we get very useful information from these old maps."

"I'll keep it down," said Soames, bending over the map. "I suppose you get a lot of Americans, fishing for ancestors?"

"Not a lot," said the Vicar, with a sideway glance that Soames did not quite like. "I can remember two. Ah! here," and his finger came down on the map, "I THOUGHT I remembered the name — it's unusual. Look! This field close to the sea is marked 'Great Forsyte!'"

Again Soames felt a thrill.

"What size is that field?"

"Twenty-four acres. There was the ruin of an old house, I remember, just there; they took the stones away in the war to make our shooting range. 'Great Forsyte'— isn't that interesting?"

"More interesting to me," said Soames, "if they'd left the stones."

"The spot is still marked with an old cross — the cattle use it for a rubbing stone. It's close to the hedge on the right hand side of the coombe."

"Could I get to it with the car?"

"Oh, yes; by going round the head of the coombe. Would you like me to come?"

"No, thanks," said Soames. The idea of being overlooked while inspecting his roots was unpleasant to him. "But if you'd kindly make a search in the register while I'm gone, I could call back after lunch and see the result. My great-grandfather, Jolyon Forsyte, died at Studmouth. The stone I found was Jolyon Forsyte, buried in 1777 — he'd be my great-great-grandfather, no doubt. I daresay you could pick up his birth, and perhaps HIS father's — I fancy they were a long-lived lot. The name Jolyon seems to have been a weakness with them."

"I could make a search at once. It would take some hours. What would you think reasonable?"

"Five guineas?" hazarded Soames.

"Oh! That would be generous. I'll make a very thorough search. Now, let me come and tell you how to get to it." With a slight pang Soames followed him — a gentleman in trousers shiny behind.

"You go up this road to the fork, take the left-hand branch past the post-office, and right on round the head of the coombe, always bearing to the left, till you pass a farm called 'Uphays.' Then on till the lane begins to drop; there's a gate on the right, and if you go through it you'll find yourself at the top of that field with the sea before you. I'm so pleased to have found something. Won't you have a little lunch with us when you come back?"

"Thank you," said Soames, "very good of you, but I've got my lunch with me," and was instantly ashamed of his thought. 'Does he think I'm going to make off without paying?' Raising his hat slightly, he got into the car, with his umbrella in his hand, so as to poke Riggs in the back when the fellow took his wrong turnings.

He sat, contented, using the umbrella gingerly now and then. So! To get baptized and buried, they used to cross the coombe. Twenty-four acres was quite a field. "Great Forsyte"; there must have been "Little Forsytes," too.

The farm the Vicar had spoken of appeared to be a rambling place of old buildings, pigs and poultry.

"Keep on," he said to Riggs, "until the lane drops, and go slow, I want a gate on the right."

The fellow was rushing along as usual, and the lane already dropping downhill.

"Hold hard! There it is!" The car came to a standstill at a rather awkward bend.

"You've overshot it!" said Soames, and got out. "Wait here! I may be some time."

Taking off his overcoat and carrying it on his arm, he went back to the gate, and passed through into a field of grass. He walked downwards to the hedge on the left, followed it round, and presently came in view of the sea, bright, peaceful, hazy, with a trail of smoke in the distance. The air beat in from the sea, fresh air, strong and salt. Ancestral! Soames took some deep breaths, savouring it, as one might an old wine. Its freshness went a little to his head, so impregnated with ozone or iodine, or whatever it was nowadays. And then, below him, perhaps a hundred yards away, above a hollow near the hedge he saw the stone, and again felt that thrill. He looked back. Yes! He was out of sight of the lane, and had his feelings to himself! And going up to the stone, he gazed down at the hollow between him and the hedge. Below it the field sloped to the beach, and what looked like the ghost of a lane ran up towards the hollow from the coombe. In that hollow then, the house had been; and there they'd lived, the old Forsytes, for generations, pickled in this air, without another house in sight — nothing but this expanse of grass in view and the sea beyond, and the gulls on that rock, and the waves beating over it. There they'd lived, tilling the land, and growing rheumatic, and crossing the coombe to church, and getting their brandy free, perhaps. He went up and examined the stone — upright, with another bit across the top — lintel of a barn, perhaps — nothing on it. Descending into the hollow, he poked about with his umbrella. During the war — the parson had said — they had removed the ruins. Only twelve years ago, but not a sign! Grassed over utterly, not even the shape visible. He explored up to the hedge. They'd made a clean sweep all right — nothing but grass now and a scrubble of fern and young gorse, such as would seize on a hollow for their growing. And, sitting on his overcoat with his back against the stone, Soames pondered. Had his forbears themselves built the house there in this lonely place — been the first to seat themselves on this bit of wind-swept soil? And something moved in him, as if the salty independence of that lonely spot were still in his bones. Old Jolyon and his own father and the rest of his uncles — no wonder they'd been independent, with this air and loneliness in their blood; and crabbed with the pickling of it — unable to give up, to let go, to die. For a moment he seemed to understand even himself. Southern spot, south aspect, not any of your northern roughness, but free, and salt, and solitary from sunrise to sunset, year in, year out, like that lonely rock with the gulls on it, for ever and for ever. And drawing the air deep into his lungs, he thought: 'I'm not surprised old Timothy lived to be a hundred!' A long time he sat there, nostalgically bemused, strangely unwilling to move. Never had he breathed anything quite like that air; or so, at least, it seemed to him. It had been the old England, when they lived down here — the England of pack-horses and very little smoke, of peat and wood fires, and wives who never left you, because they couldn't, probably. A static England, that dug and wove, where your parish was your world, and you were a churchwarden if you didn't take care. His own grandfather — begotten and born one hundred and fifty-six years ago, in the best bed, not two dozen paces from where he was sitting. What a change since then! For the better? Who could say? But here was this grass, and rock and sea, and the air and the gulls, and the old church over there beyond the coombe, precisely as they had been, only more so. If this field were in the market, he wouldn't mind buying it as a curiosity. Only, if he did, nobody would come and sit here! They'd want to play golf over it or something. And, uneasy at having verged on the sentimental, Soames put his hand down and felt the grass. But it wasn't damp, and he couldn't conscientiously feel that he was catching rheumatism; and still he sat there, with the sunlight warming his cheeks, and his eyes fixed on the sea. The ships went up and down, far out — steamers; no smugglers nowadays, and you paid the deuce of a price for brandy! In the old time here, without newspapers, with nothing from the outer world, you'd grow up without any sense of the State or that sort of thing. There'd be the church and your Bible, he supposed, and the market some miles away, and you'd work and eat and sleep and breathe the air and drink your cider and embrace your wife and watch your children, from June to June; and a good thing, too! What more did you do now that brought you any satisfaction? 'Change, it's all on the surface,' thought Soames; 'the roots are the same. You can't get beyond them — try as you will!' Progress, civilization, what were they for? Unless, indeed, to foster hobbies — collecting pictures, or what not? He didn't see how the old chaps down here could have had hobbies — except for bees, perhaps. Hobbies? Just for that — just to give people a chance to have hobbies? He'd had a lot of amusement out of his own; and but for progress would never have had it. No! He'd have been down here still, perhaps, shearing his sheep or following a plough, and his daughter would be a girl with sturdy ankles and one new hat. Perhaps it was just as well that you couldn't stop the clock! Ah! and it was time he was getting back to the lane before that chap came to look for him. And, getting up, Soames descended once more into the hollow. This time, close to the hedge, an object caught his eye, a very old boot — a boot so old that you could hardly swear by it. His lips became contorted in a faint smile. He seemed to hear his dead cousin George with his wry Forsytean humour cackling: "The ancestral boot! What ho, my wild ones! Let the portcullis fall!" Yes! They would laugh at him in the family if they knew he'd been looking at their roots. He shouldn't say anything about it. And suddenly he went up to the boot, and, hooking the point of his umbrella under what was left of the toecap, flung it pettishly over the hedge. It defiled the loneliness — the feeling he had known, drinking-in that air. And very slowly he went back to the lane, so as not to get hot, and have to sit all damp in the car. But at the gate he stood, transfixed. What was all this? Two large, hairy horses were attached tandem to the back of his car with ropes, and beside them were three men, one of whom was Riggs, and two dogs, one of whom was lame. Soames perceived at once that it was all "that fellow!" In trying to back up the hill, which he ought never to have gone down, he had jammed the car so that it couldn't move. He was always doing something! At this moment, however, "the fellow" mounted the car and moved the wheel; while one of the men cracked a whip. "Haup!" The hairy horses moved. Something in that slow, strong movement affected Soames. Progress! They had been obliged to fetch horses to drag Progress up the hill!

"That's a good horse!" he said, pointing to the biggest.

"Ah! We call 'im Lion —'e can pull, Haup!"

The car passed on to the level ground, and the horses were detached. Soames went up to the man who had said "Haup!"

"Are you from the farm back there?"

"Yes."

"Do you own this field?"

"I farm it."

"What do you call it?"

"Call it? The big field."

"It's marked 'Great Forsyte' on the tithe map. D'you know that name?"

"Farsyt? There's none of the name now. My grandmother was called Farsyt."

"Was she?" said Soames, and again felt the thrill.

"Ah!" said the farmer.

Soames controlled himself.

"And what's YOUR name, if I may ask?"

"Beer."

Soames looked at him rather long, and took out his note case.

"You must allow me," he said, "for your horses and your trouble." And he offered a pound note. The farmer shook his head.

"That's naught," he said; "you're welcome. We're always haulin' cars off this 'ill."

"I really can't take something for nothing," said Soames. "You'll oblige me!"

"Well," said the farmer, "I thank yeou," and he took the note. "Haup!"

The released horses moved forward and the men and dogs followed after them. Soames got into the car, and, opening his packet of sandwiches, began to eat.

"Drive back to the vicarage — slowly." And, while he ate, he wondered why he had felt a thrill on discovering that some of his own blood ran in a hard-bitten looking chap called Beer — if, indeed, that WAS his name.

It was two o'clock when he reached the vicarage, and the Vicar came to him with his mouth full.

"I find a great may entries, Mr. Forsyte; the name goes back to the beginning of the register. I shall have to take my time to give you the complete list. That Jolyon seems to have been born in 1710, son of Jolyon and Mary; he didn't pay his tithes in 1757. There was another Jolyon born in 1680, evidently the father — he was church-warden from 1715 on; described as 'Yeoman of Hays —' he married a Bere."

Soames gazed at him, and took out his note case. "How do you spell it?" he said.

"B-e-r-e."

"Oh! The farmer up there said that was his name, too. I thought he was gammoning me. It seems his grandmother was called Forsyte, and she was the last of them here. Perhaps you could send me the Bere entries, too, for an inclusive seven guineas?"

"Oh! Six will be ample."

"No. We'll make it seven. You've got my card. I saw the stone. A healthy spot, right away from everything." He laid the seven guineas on the table, and again had an impression, as of glad eyes. "I must be getting back to London now. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Forsyte. Anything I can find out I shall make a point of sending you."

Soames shook his hand and went out to the car with the feeling that his roots would be conscientiously pulled up. After all, it was something to be dealing with a parson.

"Go on," he said to Riggs; "we'll get the best part of the way home."

And, lying back in the car, thoroughly tired, he mused. Great Forsyte! Well! He was glad he had come down.

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CHAPTER XII

DRIVING ON

Soames spent the night at Winchester, a place he had often heard of but never seen. The Monts had been at school there, and Kit's name had been put down automatically. He himself would prefer his own Marlborough, or Harrow, perhaps — some school that played at Lords — but not Eton, where young Jolyon had been. But then one wouldn't be alive to see Kit play; so perhaps it didn't matter.

The town seemed an old place. There was something in a cathedral, too; and after breakfast he went to it. The chancel was in activity — some choir practice or other. He entered noiselessly, for his boots were rubbered against damp, and sat down at the point of balance. With chin uplifted, he contemplated the arches and the glass. The place was rather dark, but very rich — like a Christmas pudding! These old buildings certainly gave one a feeling. He had always had it with St. Paul's. One must admit at least a continuity of purpose somewhere. Up to a point — after that he wasn't sure. You had a great thing, like this, almost perfect; and then an earthquake or an air-raid, and down it went! Nothing permanent about anything, so far as he could see, not even about the best examples of ingenuity and beauty. The same with landscape! You had a perfect garden of a country, and then an ice-age came along. There was continuity, but it was always changing. That was why it seemed to him extremely unlikely that he would live after he was dead. He had read somewhere — though not in The Times — that life was just animated shape, and that when shape was broken it was no longer animated. Death broke your shape and there you were, he supposed. The fact was, people couldn't bear their own ends; they tried to dodge them with soft sawder. They were weak-minded. And Soames lowered his chin. They had lighted some candles up there in the chancel, insignificant in the daylight. Presently they would blow them out. There you were again, everything was blown out sooner or later. And it was no good pretending it wasn't. He had read the other day, again not in The Times, that the world was coming to an end in 1928, when the earth got between the moon and the sun — it had been predicted in the Pyramids — some such scientific humbug! Well, if it did, he, for one, wouldn't much mind. The thing had never been a great success, and if it were wiped out at one stroke there would be nothing left behind anyway; what was objectionable about death was leaving things that you were fond of behind. The moment, too, that the world came to an end, it would begin again in some other shape, anyway — that, no doubt, was why they called it "world without end, Amen." Ah! They were singing now. Sometimes he wished he had an ear. In spite of the lack, he could tell that this was good singing. Boys' voices! Psalms, too, and he knew the words. Funny! Fifty years since his church-going days, yet he remembered them as if it were yesterday! "He sendeth the springs into the rivers; which run among the hills." "All beasts of the fields drink thereof; and the wild asses quench their thirst." "Beside them shall the fowls of the air have their habitation; and sing among the branches." They were flinging the verses at each other across the aisle, like a ball. It was lively, and good, vigorous English, too. "So is the great and wide sea also, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts." "There go the ships, and there is that Leviathan, whom Thou hast made to take his pastime therein." Leviathan! That word used to please him. "Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour, until the evening." He certainly went forth, but whether he did any work, any labour, was the question, nowadays. "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will praise my God while I have my being." Would he? He wondered. "Praise thou the Lord, O my soul, praise the Lord." The singing ceased, and Soames again lifted up his chin. He sat very still — not thinking now; lost, as it were, among the arches, and the twilight of the roof. He was experiencing a peculiar sensation, not unpleasant. To be in here was like being within a jewelled and somewhat scented box. The world might roar and stink and buzz outside, strident and vulgar, childish and sensational, cheap and nasty — all jazz and cockney accent, but here — not a trace of it heard or felt or seen. This great box — God-box the Americans would call it — had been made centuries before the world became industrialised; it didn't belong to the modern world at all. In here everyone spoke and sang the King's English; it smelt faintly of age and incense; and nothing was unbeautiful. He sat with a sense of escape.

A verger passed, glancing at him curiously, as if unaccustomed to a raised chin; halting just behind, he made a little noise with his keys. Soames sneezed; and, reaching for his hat, got up. He had no intention of being taken round by that chap, and shown everything he didn't want to see, for half-a-crown. And with a "No, thank you; not today," he passed the verger, and went out to the car.

"You ought to have gone in," he said to Riggs; "they used to crown the kings of England there. To London now."

The opened car travelled fast under a bright sun, and not until he was in the new cut, leading to Chiswick, did Soames have the idea which caused him to say: "Stop at that house, 'The Poplars,' where you took us the other day."

It was not yet lunch time, and in all probability Fleur would still be "sitting"; so why not pick her up and take her straight away with him for the week-end? She had clothes down at "The Shelter." It would save some hours of fresh air for her. The foreign woman, however, who opened the door, informed him that the lady had not been to "sit" today or yesterday.

"Oh!" said Soames. "How's that?"

"Nobody did know, sir. She 'ave not sent any message. Mr. Blade is very decomposed."

Soames chewed his thoughts a moment.

"Is your mistress in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then ask her if she'll see me, please. Mr. Soames Forsyte."

"Will you in the meal room wait, sir."

Soames waited uneasily in that very little room. Fleur had said she could not come with him because of her "sittings"; and she had not "sat." Was she ill, then?

He was roused from disquiet contemplation of the poplar trees outside by the words:

"Oh! It's you. I'm not sorry you came."

The cordiality of this greeting increased his uneasiness, and stretching out his hand, he said:

"How are you, June? I called for Fleur. When did she come last?"

"Tuesday morning. I saw her late on Tuesday afternoon, too, in her car, outside —" Soames could see her eyes moving from side to side, and knew that she was about to say something unpleasant. It came. "She picked up Jon."

Feeling as if he had received a punch in his wind, Soames exclaimed:

"What! Your young brother? What was he doing here?"

"'Sitting,' of course."

"'Sitting'? What business —!" and, checking the words, "had he to 'sit,'" he stared at his cousin, who, flushing a deep pink, said:

"I told her she was not to see him here. I told Jon the same."

"Then she'd done it before?"

"Yes, twice. She's so spoiled, you see."

"Ah!" The reality of the danger had disarmed him. Antagonism seemed to him, thus faced with a sort of ruin, too luxurious.

"Where is she?"

"On Tuesday morning she said she was going down to Dorking."

"And she picked him up?" repeated Soames.

June nodded. "Yes, after his 'sitting.' His picture's finished. If you think that I want them to — any more than you —"

"No one in their senses could want them to —" said Soames, coldly. "But why did you make him 'sit,' while she was coming here?"

June flushed a deeper pink.

"YOU don't know how hard it is for real artists. I HAD to think of Harold. If I hadn't got Jon before he began his farming —"

"Farming!" said Soames. "For all we know they may —" but again he checked his words. "I've been expecting something of this sort ever since I heard he was back. Well! I'd better get on to Dorking. D'you know where his mother is?"

"In Paris."

Ah! But not this time would he have to beg that woman to let her son belong to his daughter? No! It would be to beg her to stop his belonging — if at all.

"Good-bye!" he said.

"Soames," said June, suddenly, "don't let Fleur — it's she who —"

"I'll hear nothing against her," said Soames.

June pressed her clenched hands to her flat breast.

"I like you for that," she said; "and I'm sorry if —"

"That's all right," muttered Soames.

"Good-bye!" said June. "Shake hands!"

Soames put his hand in one which gave it a convulsive squeeze, then dropped it like a cold potato.

"Down to Dorking," he said to Riggs, on regaining his car. The memory of Fleur's face that night at Nettlefold, so close to the young man's, so full of what he had never seen on her face before, haunted him the length of Hammersmith Bridge. Ah! What a wilful creature! Suppose — suppose she had flung her cap over the windmill! Suppose the worst! Good God! What should — what COULD he do, then? The calculating tenacity of her passion for this young man — the way she had kept it from him, from everyone, or tried to! Something deadly about it, and something that almost touched him, rousing the memory of his own pursuit of that boy's mother — memory of a passion that would not, could not let go; that had won its ends, and destroyed in winning. He had often thought she had no continuity, that, like all these "fizz-gig" young moderns, she was just fluttering without basic purpose or direction. And it was the irony of this moment that he perceived how she — when she knew what she wanted — had as much tenacity of will as himself and his generation.

It didn't do, it seemed, to judge by appearances! Beneath the surface passions remained what they had been, and in the draughty corridors and spaces there was the old hot stillness when they woke and breathed . . . .

That fellow was taking the Kingston road! Soon they would be passing Robin Hill. How all this part had changed since the day he went down with Bosinney to choose the site. Forty years — not more — but what a change! "Plus ca change —" Annette would say —"plus c'est la meme chose!" Love and hate — no end to that, anyway! The beat of life went on beneath the wheels and whirr of traffic and the jazzy music of the band. Fate on its drum, or just the human heart? God knew! God? Convenient word. What did one mean by it? He didn't know, and never would! In the cathedral that morning he had thought — and then — that verger! There were the poplars, and the stable clock-tower, just visible, of the house he had built and never inhabited. If he could have foreseen a stream of cars like this passing day after day, not a quarter of a mile off, he would not have built it, and that tragedy might never — And yet — did it matter what you did? — some way, somehow life took you up and put you where it would. He leaned forward and touched his chauffeur's back.

"Which way are you going?"

"Through Esher, sir, and off to the left."

"Well," said Soames, "it's all the same to me."

It was past lunch time, but he wasn't hungry. He wouldn't be hungry till he knew the worst. But that chap would be, he supposed.

"Better stop somewhere," he said, "and have a snack, and a cigarette."

"Yes, sir."

He wasn't long in stopping. Soames sat on in the car, gazing idly at the sign —"Red Lions, Angels and White Horses"— nothing killed them off. One of these days they'd try and bring in Prohibition, he shouldn't wonder; but that cock wouldn't fight in England — too extravagant! Treating people like children wasn't the way to make them grow up; as if they weren't childish enough as it was. Look at this coal strike, that went on and on — perfectly childish, hurting everybody and doing good to none! Weak-minded! To reflect on the weak-mindedness of his fellow-citizens was restful to Soames, faced with a future that might prove disastrous. For, in view of her infatuation, what could taking that young man about in her car mean — except disaster? What a time Riggs was! He got out, and walked up and down. Not that there was anything he could do — he supposed — when he did get there. No matter how much you loved a person, how anxious you were about her, you had no power — perhaps less power in proportion to your love. But he must speak his mind at last, if he had the chance. Couldn't let her go over the edge without putting out a hand! The sun struck on his face, and he lifted it a little blindly, as if grateful for the warmth. All humbug about the world coming to an end, of course, but he'd be glad enough for it to come before he was brought down in sorrow to the grave. He saw with hideous clearness how complete disaster must be. If Fleur ran off, there'd be nothing left to him that he really cared about, for the Monts would take Kit. He'd be stranded among his pictures and his cows, without heart for either, till he died. 'I won't have it,' he thought. 'If it hasn't happened, I won't have it.' Yes! But how prevent it? And with the futility of his own resolution staring him in the face, he went back to the car. There was the fellow, at last, smoking his cigarette.

"Let's start!" he said. "Push along!"

He arrived at three o'clock to hear that Fleur had gone out with the car at ten. It was an immense relief to learn that at least she had been there overnight. And at once he began to make trunk calls. They renewed his anxiety. She was not at home; nor at June's. Where, then, if not with that young man? But at least she had taken no things with her — this he ascertained, and it gave him strength to drink some tea, and wait. He had gone out into the road for the fourth time to peer up and down when at last he saw her coming towards him.

The expression on her face — hungry and hard and feverish — had the most peculiar effect on Soames; his heart ached, and leaped with relief at the same time. That was not the face of victorious passion! It was tragically unhappy, arid, wrenched. Every feature seemed to have sharpened since he saw her last. And, instinctively, he remained silent, poking his face forward for a kiss. She gave it — hard and parched.

"So you're back," she said.

"Yes; and when you've had your tea, I want you to come straight on with me to 'The Shelter'— Riggs'll put your car away."

She shrugged her shoulders and passed him into the house. It seemed to him that she did not care what he saw in her, or what he thought of her. And this was so strange in Fleur that he was confounded. Had she tried and failed? Could it mean anything so good? He searched his memory to recall how she had looked when he brought her back the news of failure six years ago. Yes! Only then she was so young, her face so round — not like this hardened, sharpened, burnt-up face, that frightened him. Get her away to Kit! Get her away, and quickly! And with that saving instinct of his where Fleur only was concerned, he summoned Riggs, told him to close the car and bring it round.

She had gone up to her room. He sent up a message presently that the car was ready. Soon she came down. She had coated her face with powder and put salve on her lips; and again Soames was shocked by that white mask with compressed red line of mouth, and the live and tortured eyes. And again he said nothing, and got out a map.

"That fellow will go wrong unless I sit beside him. It's cross country;" and he mounted the front of the car. He knew she couldn't talk, and that he couldn't bear to see her face. So they started. An immense time they travelled thus, it seemed to him. Once or twice only he looked round to see her sitting like something dead, so white and motionless. And, within him, the two feelings — relief and pity, continued to struggle. Surely it was the end — she had played her hand and lost! How, where, when — he felt would always be unknown to him; but she had lost! Poor little thing! Not her fault that she had loved this boy, that she couldn't get him out of her head — no more her fault than it had been his own for loving that boy's mother! Only everyone's misfortune! It was as if that passion, born of an ill-starred meeting in a Bournemouth drawing-room forty-six years before, and transmitted with his blood into her being, were singing its swan song of death, through the silent crimsoned lips of that white-faced girl behind him in the cushioned car. "Praise thou the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!" Um! How could one! They were crossing the river at Staines — from now on that fellow knew his road. When they got home, how should he bring some life into her face again! Thank goodness her mother was away! Surely Kit would be some use! And her old dog, perhaps. And yet, tired though he was after his three long days, Soames dreaded the moment when the car should stop. To drive on and on, perhaps, was the thing for her. Perhaps, for all the world, now. To get away from something that couldn't be got away from — ever since the war — driving on! When you couldn't have what you wanted, and yet couldn't let go; and drove, on and on, to dull the aching. Resignation — like painting — was a lost art; or so it seemed to Soames, as they passed the graveyard where he expected to be buried someday.

Close home now, and what was he going to say to her when they got out? Words were so futile. He put his head out of the window and took some deep breaths. It smelled better down here by the river than elsewhere, he always thought — more sap in the trees, more savour in the grass. Not the equal of the air on "Great Forsyte," but more of the earth, more cosy. The gables and the poplars, the scent of a wood fire, the last flight of the doves — here they were! And with a long sigh, he got out.

He went round to the stables and released her old dog. It might want a run before being let into the house; and he took it down towards the river. A thin daylight lingered though the sun had set some time, and while the dog freshened himself among the bushes, Soames stood looking at the water. The swans passed over to their islet while he gazed. The young ones were growing up — were almost white. Rather ghostly in the dusk, the flotilla passed — graceful things and silent. He had often thought of going in for a peacock or two, they put a finish on a garden, but they were noisy; he had never forgotten an early morning in Montpellier Square, hearing their cry, as of lost passion, from Hyde Park. No! The swan was better; just as graceful, and didn’t sing. That dog was ruining his dwarf arbutus.

“Come along to your mistress!” he said, and turned back towards the lighted house. He went up into the picture gallery. On the bureau were laid a number of letters and things to be attended to. For half an hour he laboured at them. He had never torn up things with greater satisfaction. Then the bell rang, and he went down to be lonely, as he supposed.

❦

CHAPTER XIII

FIRES

But Fleur came down again. And there began for Soames the most confused evening he had ever spent. For in his heart were great gladness and great pity, and he must not show a sign of either. He wished now that he had stopped to look at Fleur's portrait; it would have given him something to talk of. He fell back feebly on her Dorking house. "It seems a useful place," he said; "the girls —"

"I always feel they hate me. And why not? They have nothing, and I have everything."

Her laugh cut Soames to the quick.

She was only pretending to eat, too. But he was afraid to ask if she had taken her temperature. She would only laugh again. He began, instead, an account of how he had found a field by the sea where the Forsytes came from, and how he had visited Winchester Cathedral; and, while he went on and on, he thought: 'She hasn't heard a word.'

The idea that she would go up to bed consumed by this smouldering fire at which he could not get, distressed and alarmed him greatly. She looked as if — as if she might do something to herself! She had no veronal, or anything of that sort, he hoped. And all the time he was wondering what had happened. If the issue were still doubtful — if she were still waiting, she might be restless, feverish, but surely she would not look like this! No! It was defeat. But how? And was it final, and he freed for ever from the carking anxiety of these last months? His eyes kept questioning her face, where her fevered mood had crept through the coating of powder, so that she looked theatrical and unlike herself. Its expression, hard and hopeless, went to his heart. If only she would cry, and blurt everything out! But he recognised that in coming down at all, and facing him, she was practically saying, "NOTHING has happened!" And he compressed his lips. A dumb thing, affection — one couldn't put it into words! The more deeply he felt the more dumb he had always been. Those glib people who poured themselves out and got rid of the feelings they had in their chests, he didn't know how they could do it!

Dinner dragged to its end, with little bursts of talk from Fleur, and more of that laughter which hurt him, and afterwards they went to the drawing-room.

"It's hot to-night," she said, and opened the French window. The moon was just rising, low and far behind the river bushes; and a waft of light was already floating down the water.

"Yes, it's warm," said Soames, "but you oughtn't to be in the air if you've got a chill."

And, taking her arm, he led her within. He had a dread of her wandering outside to-night, so near the water.

She went over to the piano.

"Do you mind if I strum, Dad?"

"Not at all. Your mother's got some French songs there." He didn't mind what she did, if only she could get that look off her face. But music was emotional stuff, and French songs always about love! It was to be hoped she wouldn't light on the one Annette was for ever singing:

> "Aupres de ma blonde, il fait bon — fait bon — fait bon,
> Aupres de ma blonde, il fait bon dormir."

That young man's hair! In the old days, beside his mother! What hair SHE'D had! What bright hair and what dark eyes! And for a moment it was as if, not Fleur, but Irene sat there at the piano. Music! Mysterious how it could mean to anyone what it had meant to her. Yes! More than men and more than money — music! A thing that had never moved him, that he didn't understand! What a mischance! There she was, above the piano, as he used to see her in the little drawing-room in Montpellier Square; there, as he had seen her last in that Washington hotel. There she would sit until she died, he supposed, beautiful, he shouldn't wonder, even then. Music!

He came to himself.

Fleur's thin, staccato voice tickled his ears, where he sat in the fume of his cigar. Painful! She was making a brave fight. He wanted her to break down, and he didn't want her to. For if she broke down he didn't know what he would do!

She stopped in the middle of a song and closed the piano. She looked almost old — so she would look, perhaps, when she was forty. Then she came and sat down on the other side of the hearth. She was in red, and he wished she wasn't — the colour increased his feeling that she was on fire beneath that mask of powder on her face and neck. She sat there very still, pretending to read. And he who had The Times in his hand, tried not to notice her. Was there nothing he could do to divert her attention? What about his pictures? Which — he asked — was her favourite? The Constable, the Stevens, the Corot, or the Daumier?

"I'm leaving the lot to the Nation," he said. "But I shall want you to take your pick of four or so; and, of course, that copy of Goya's 'Vendimia' belongs to you." Then, remembering she had worn the 'Vendimia' dress at the dance in the Nettlefold hotel, he hurried on:

"With all this modern taste the Nation mayn't want them; in that case I don't know. Dumetrius might take them off your hands! he's had a good deal out of most of them already. If you chose the right moment, clear of strikes and things, they ought to fetch money in a good sale. They stand me in at well over seventy thousand pounds — they ought to make a hundred thousand at least."

She seemed to be listening, but he couldn't tell.

"In my belief," he went on, desperately, "there'll be none of this modern painting in ten years' time — they can't go on for ever juggling in the air. They'll be sick of experiments by then, unless we have another war."

"It wasn't the war."

"How d'you mean — not the war? The war brought in ugliness, and put everyone into a hurry. You don't remember before the war."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I won't say," continued Soames, "that it hadn't begun before. I remember the first shows in London of those post-impressionists and early Cubist chaps. But they ran riot with the war, catching at things they couldn't get."

He stopped. It was exactly what she —!

"I think I'll go to bed, Dad."

"Ah!" said Soames. "And take some aspirin. Don't you play about with a chill."

A chill! If only it were! He himself went again to the open window, and stood watching the moonlight. From the staff's quarters came the strains of a gramophone. How they loved to turn on that caterwauling, or the loud speaker! He didn't know which he disliked most.

Moving to the edge of the verandah, he held out his palm. No dew! Dry as ever — remarkable weather! A dog began howling from over the river. Some people would take that for a banshee, he shouldn't wonder! The more he saw of people the more weak-minded they seemed; for ever looking for the sensational, or covering up their eyes and ears. The garden was looking pretty in the moonlight — pretty and unreal. That border of sunflowers and Michaelmas daisies and the late roses in the little round beds, and the low wall of very old brick — he'd had a lot of trouble to get that brick! — even the grass — the moon-light gave them all a stage-like quality. Only the poplars queered the dream-like values, dark and sharply outlined by the moon behind them. Soames moved out on to the lawn. The face of the house, white and creepered, with a light in her bedroom, looked unreal, too, and as if powdered. Thirty-two years he'd been here. One had got attached to the place, especially since he'd bought the land over the river, so that no one could ever build and overlook him. To be overlooked, body or soul — on the whole he'd avoided that in life — at least, he hoped so.

He finished his cigar out there and threw the butt away. He would have liked to see her light go out before he went to bed — to feel that she was sleeping as when, a little thing, she went to bed with toothache. But he was very tired. Motoring was hard on the liver. Well! He'd go in and shut up. After all, he couldn't do any good by staying down, couldn't do any good in any way. The old couldn't help the young — nobody could help anyone, if it came to that, at least where the heart was concerned. Queer arrangement — the heart! And to think that everybody had one. There ought to be some comfort in that, and yet there wasn't. No comfort to him, when he'd suffered, night in, day out, over that boy's mother, that she had suffered, too! No satisfaction to Fleur now, that the young man and his wife, too, very likely, were suffering as well! And, closing the window, Soames went up. He listened at her door, but could hear nothing; and, having undressed, took up Vasari's "Lives of the Painters," and, propped against his pillows, began to read. Two pages of that book always sent him to sleep, and generally the same two, for he knew them so well that he never remembered where he had left off.

He was awakened presently by he couldn't tell what, and lay listening. It seemed that there was movement in the house. But if he got up to see he would certainly begin to worry again, and he didn't want to. Besides, in seeing to whether Fleur was asleep he might wake her up. Turning over, he dozed off, but again he woke, and lay drowsily thinking: 'I'm not sleeping well — I want exercise.' Moonlight was coming through the curtains not quite drawn. And, suddenly, his nostrils twitched. Surely a smell of burning! He sat up, sniffing. It WAS! Had there been a short circuit, or was the thatch of the pigeon-house on fire? Getting out of bed, he put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and went to the window.

A reddish, fitful light was coming from a window above. Great God! His picture gallery! He ran to the foot of the stairs that led up to it. A stealthy sound, a scent of burning much more emphatic, staggered him. He hurried up the stairs and pulled open the door. Heavens! The far end of the gallery, at the extreme left corner of the house, was on fire. Little red flames were licking round the wood-work; the curtains of the far window were already a blackened mass, and the waste paper basket, between them and his writing bureau, was a charred wreck! On the parquet floor he saw some cigarette ash. Someone had been up here smoking! The flames crackled as he stood there aghast. He rushed downstairs, and threw open the door of Fleur's room. She was lying on her bed asleep, but fully dressed! Fully dressed! Was it —? Had she —? She opened her eyes, staring up at him.

"Get up!" he said, "there's a fire in the picture gallery. Get Kit and the servants out at once — at once! Send for Riggs! Telephone to Reading for the engines — quick! Get everyone out of the house!" Only waiting to see her on her feet, he ran back to the foot of the gallery stairs and seized a fire extinguisher. He carried it up, a heavy, great thing. He knew vaguely that you dashed the knob on the floor and sprayed the flames. Through the open doorway he could see that they had spread considerably. Good God! They were licking at his Fred Walker, and the two David Coxes. They had caught the beam, too, that ran round the gallery, dividing the upper from the lower tier of pictures; yes, and the upper beam was on fire, also. The Constable! For a moment he hesitated. Should he rush at that, and save it, anyway? The extinguisher mightn't work! He dropped it, and, running the length of the gallery, seized the Constable just as the flames reached the woodwork above it. The hot breath of them scorched his face as he wrenched the picture from the wall, and, running back, flung open the window opposite the door, and placed it on the sill. Then, seizing the extinguisher again, he dashed it, knob down, against the floor. A stream of stuff came out, and, picking the thing up, he directed that stream against the flames. The room was full of smoke now, and he felt rather giddy. The stuff was good, and he saw with relief that the flames didn't like it. He was making a distinct impression on them. But the Walker was ruined — ah! and the Coxes! He had beaten the fire back to the window-wall, when the stream ceased, and he saw that the beams had broken into flame beyond where he had started spraying. The writing bureau, too, was on fire now — its papers had caught! Should he run down and get another of these things, all the way to the hall! Where was that fellow Riggs? The "Alfred Stevens"! By heaven! He was not going to lose his Stevens nor his Gauguins, nor his Corots!

And a sort of demon entered into Soames. His taste, his trouble, his money, and his pride — all consumed? By the Lord, no! And through the smoke he dashed again up to the far wall. Flame licked at his sleeve as he tore away the "Stevens"; he could smell the singed stuff when he propped the picture in the window beside the Constable.

A lick of flame crossed the Daubigny, and down came its glass with a clatter — there was the picture exposed and fire creeping and flaring over it! He rushed back and grasped at a "Gauguin"— a South Sea girl with nothing on. She wouldn't come away from the wall; he caught hold of the wire, but dropped it — red hot; seizing the frame he gave a great wrench. Away it came, and over he went, backwards. But he'd got it, his favourite Gauguin! He stacked that against the others, and ran back to the Corot nearest the flames. The silvery, cool picture was hot to his touch, but he got that, too! Now for the Monet! The engines would be twenty minutes at least. If that fellow Riggs didn't come soon —! They must spread a blanket down there, and he would throw the pictures out. And then he uttered a groan. The flames had got the other Corot! The poor thing! Wrenching off the Monet, he ran to the head of the stairs. Two frightened maids in coats over their nightgowns, and their necks showing, were half way up.

"Here!" he cried. "Take this picture, and keep your heads. Miss Fleur and the boy out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you telephoned?"

"Yes, sir."

"Get me an extinguisher; and all of you hold a blanket spread beneath the window down there, to catch the pictures as I throw them out. Don't be foolish — there's no danger! Where's Riggs?"

He went back into the gallery. Oh — h! There went his precious little Degas! And with rage in his heart Soames ran again at the wall, and snatched at his other Gauguin. If ever he had beaten Dumetrius, it was over that highly-coloured affair. As if grateful to him, the picture came away neatly in his scorched and trembling hands. He stacked it, and stood for a moment choked and breathless. So long as he could breathe up here in the draught between the opened door and window, he must go on getting them off the wall.

It wouldn't take long to throw them out. The Bonnington and the Turner — that fellow Turner wouldn't have been so fond of sunsets if he'd known what fire was like. Each time now that he went to the wall his lungs felt as if they couldn't stand another journey. But they must!

"Dad!"

Fleur with an extinguisher!

"Go down! Go out!" he cried. "D'you hear! Go out of the house! Get that blanket spread, and make them hold it tight."

"Dad! Let me! I must!"

"Go down!" cried Soames again, and pushed her to the stairs. He watched her to the bottom, then dashed the knob of the extinguisher on the floor and again sprayed the fire. He put out the bureau, and attacked the flames on the far wall. He could hardly hold the heavy thing, and when it dropped empty, he could barely see. But again he had gained on the fire. If only he could hold on!

And then he saw that his Harpignies was gone — such a beauty! That wanton loss gave him strength. And rushing up to the wall — the long wall now — he detached picture after picture. But the flames were creeping back again, persistent as hell itself. He couldn't reach the Sisley and the Picasso, high in the corner there, couldn't face the flames so close, for if he slipped against the wall he would be done. They must go! But he'd have the Daumier! His favourite — perhaps his very favourite. Safe! Gasping, and avidly drinking the fresher air, he could see from the window that they had the blanket down there now stretched between four maids, holding each a corner.

"Hold tight!" he cried; and tipped the Daumier out. He watched it falling. What a thing to do to a picture! The blanket dipped with the weight, but held.

"Hold it tighter!" he shouted. "Look out!" And over went the Gauguin South Sea Girl. Picture after picture, they took them from the blanket, and laid them on the grass. When he had tipped them all, he turned to take the situation in. The flames had caught the floor now, in the corner, and were spreading fast along the beams.

The engines would be in time to save the right hand wall. The left hand wall was hopeless, but most of the pictures there he'd saved. It was the long wall where the flames were beginning to get hold; he must go for that now. He ran as near to the corner as he dared, and seized the Morland. It was hot to his touch, but he got it — six hundred pounds' worth of white pony. He had promised it a good home! He tipped it from the window and saw it pitch headlong into the blanket.

"My word!"

Behind him, in the doorway, that fellow Riggs at last, in shirt and trousers, with two extinguishers, and an open mouth!

"Shut your mouth!" he gasped, "and spray that wall!"

He watched the stream and the flames recoiling from it. How he hated those inexorable red tongues. Ah! That was giving them pause!

"Now the other! Save the Courbet! Sharp!"

Again the stream spurted and the flames recoiled. Soames dashed for the Courbet. The glass had gone, but the picture was not harmed yet; he wrenched it away.

"That's the last of the bloomin' extinguishers, sir," he heard Riggs mutter.

"Here, then!" he called. "Pull the pictures off that wall and tip them out of the window one by one. Mind you hit the blanket. Stir your stumps!"

He, too, stirred his stumps, watching the discouraged flames regaining their lost ground. The two of them ran breathless to the wall, wrenched, ran back to the window, and back again — and the flames gained all the time.

"That top one," said Soames; "I must have that! Get on that chair. Quick! No, I'll do it. Lift me! — I can't reach!"

Uplifted in the grip of that fellow, Soames detached his James Maris, bought the very day the whole world broke into flames. “Murder of the Archduke!” he could hear them at it now. A fine day; the sunlight coming in at the window of his cab, and he lighthearted, with that bargain on his knee. And there it went, pitching down! Ah! What a way to treat pictures!

“Come on!” he gasped.

“Better go down, sir! It’s gettin’ too thick now.”

“No!” said Soames. “Come on!”

Three more pictures saived.

“If you don’t go down, sir, I’ll have to carry you — you been up ’ere too long.”

“Nonsense!” gasped Soames. “Come on!”

“’Ooray! The engines!”

Soames stood still; besides the pumping of his heart and lungs he could hear another sound. Riggs seized his arm.

“Come along, sir; when they begin to play there’ll be a proper smother.”

Soames pointed through the smoke.

“I must have that one,” he gasped. “Help me. It’s heavy.”

The “Vendimia” copy stood on an easel.

Soames staggered up to it. Half carrying and half dragging, he bore that Spanish effigy of Fleur towards the window.

“Now lift!” They lifted till it balanced on the sill.

“Come away there!” called a voice from the doorway.

“Tip!” gasped Soames, but arms seized him, he was carried to the door, down the stairs, into the air half-conscious. He came to himself in a chair on the verandah. He could see the helmets of firemen and hear a hissing sound. His lungs hurt him, his eyes smarted terribly, and his hands were scorched, but he felt drugged and drowsy and triumphant in spite of his aches and smarting.

The grass, the trees, the cool river under the moon! What a nightmare it had been up there among his pictures — his poor pictures! But he had saved them! The cigarette ash! The waste paper basket! Fleur! No doubt about the cause! What on earth had induced him to put his pictures into her head that evening of all others, when she didn’t know what she was doing? What awful luck! Mustn’t let her know — unless — unless she did know? The shock — however! The shock might do her good! His Degas! The Harpignies! He closed his eyes to listen to the hissing of the water. Good! A good noise! They’d save the rest! It might have been worse! Something cold was thrust against his drooped hand. A dog’s nose. They shouldn’t have let him out. And, suddenly, it seemed to Soames that he must see to things again. They’d go the wrong way to work with all that water! He staggered to his feet. He could see better now. Fleur! Ah! There she was, standing by herself — too near the house! And what a mess on the lawn — firemen — engines — maids, that fellow Riggs — the hose laid to the river — plenty of water, anyway! They mustn’t hurt the pictures with that water! Fools! He knew it! Why! They were squirting the untouched wall. Squirting through both windows. There was no need of that? The right hand window only — only! He stumbled up to the fireman.

“Not that wall! Not that! That wall’s all right. You’ll spoil my pictures! Shoot at the centre!” The fireman shifted the angle of his arm, and Soames saw the jet strike the right-hand corner of the sill. The Vendimia! There went its precious —! Dislodged by the stream of water, it was tilting forward! And Fleur! Good God! Standing right under, looking up. She must see it, and she wasn’t moving! It flashed through Soames that she wanted to be killed.

“It’s falling!” he cried. “Look out! Look out!” And, just as if he had seen her about to throw herself under a car, he darted forward, pushed her with his outstretched arms, and fell.

The thing had struck him to the earth.

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CHAPTER XIV

HUSH

Old Gradman, off the Poultry, eating his daily chop, took up the early edition of the evening paper, brought to him with that collation:

“FIRE IN A PICTURE GALLERY.”

“WELL-KNOWN CONNOISSEUR SEVERELY INJURED.”

“A fire, the cause of which is unknown, broke out last night in the picture gallery of Mr. Soames Forsyte’s house at Mapledurham. It was extinguished by fire engines from Reading, and most of the valuable pictures were saved. Mr. Forsyte, who was in residence, fought the fire before the firemen were on the spot, and, single-handed, rescued many of the pictures, throwing them out of the window of the gallery into a blanket which was held stretched out on the lawn below. Unfortunately, after the engines had arrived, he was struck on the head by the frame of a picture falling from the window of the gallery, which is on the second floor, and rendered unconscious. In view of his age and his exertions during the fire, very little hope is entertained of his recovery. Nobody else was injured, and no other part of the mansion was reached by the flames.”

Laying down his fork, old Gradman took his napkin, and passed it over a brow which had grown damp. Replacing it on the table, he pushed away his chop, and took up the paper again. You never knew what to believe, nowadays, but the paragraph was uncommonly sober; and he dropped it with a gesture singularly like the wringing of hands.

‘Mr. Soames,’ he thought. ‘Mr. Soames!’ His two wives, his daughter, his grandson, the Forsyte family, himself! He stood up, grasping the table. An accidental thing like that! Mr. Soames! Why — he was a young man, comparatively! But perhaps they’d got hold of the wrong stick! Mechanically he went to the telephone. He found the number with difficulty, his eyes being misty.

“Is that Mrs. Dartie’s — Gradman speaking. Is it true, ma’am. . . . Not ‘opeless, I do trust? Aow! Saving Miss Fleur’s life? You don’t say! You’re goin’ down? I think I’d better, too. Everything’s in order, but he might want something, if he comes to. . . . Dear, dear! . . . Ah! I’m sure. . . . Dreadful shock — dreadful!” He hung up the receiver, and stood quite still. Who would look after things now? There wasn’t one of the family with any sense of business, compared with Mr. Soames, not one who remembered the old days, and could handle house property as they used to, then. No, he couldn’t relish any more chop — that was flat! Miss Fleur! Saving her life? Well, what a thing! She’d always been first with him. What must she be feelin’! He remembered her as a little girl; yes, and at her wedding. To think of it. She’d be a rich woman now. He took his hat. Must go home first and get some things — might have to wait there days! But for a full three minutes he still stood, as if stunned — a thick-set figure with a puggy face, in a round grey beard — confirming his uneasy grief. If the Bank of England had gone he couldn’t have felt it more. That he couldn’t.

When he reached “The Shelter” in a station fly, with a bag full of night things and papers, it was getting on for six o’clock. He was met in the hall by that young man, Mr. Michael Mont, whom he remembered as making jokes about serious things — it was to be hoped he wouldn’t do it now!

“Ah! Mr. Gradman; so good of you to come! No! They hardly expect him to recover consciousness; it was a terrible knock. But if he does, he’s sure to want to see you, even if he can’t speak. We’ve got your room ready. Will you have some tea?”

Yes, he could relish a cup of tea — he could indeed! “Miss Fleur?”

The young man shook his head, his eyes looked distressed.

“He saved her life.”

Gradman nodded. “So they say. Tt, tt! To think that he —! His father lived to be ninety, and Mr. Soames was always careful. Dear, dear!”

He had drunk a nice hot cup of tea when he saw a figure in the doorway — Miss Fleur herself. Why! What a face! She came forward and took his hand. And, almost unconsciously, old Gradman lifted his other hand and imprisoned hers between his two.

“My dear,” he said, “I feel for you. I remember you as a little girl.”

She only answered: “Yes, Mr. Gradman,” and it seemed to him funny. She took him to his room, and left him there. He had never been in such a pleasant bedroom, with flowers and a nice smell, and a bathroom all to himself — really quite unnecessary. And to think that two doors off Mr. Soames was lying as good as gone!

“Just breathing,” she had said, passing the door. “They daren’t operate. My mother’s there.”

What a face she had on her — so white, so hurt-looking — poor young thing! He stood at the open window, gazing out. It was warm — very warm for the end of September. A pleasant air — a smell of grass. It must be the river down there. Peaceful — and to think —! Moisture blurred the river out; he winked it away. Only the other day they’d been talking about something happening; and now it hadn’t happened to him, but to Mr. Soames himself. The ways of Providence! For Jesus Christ’s sake — Our Lord! Dear, dear! To think of it! He would cut up a very warm man. Richer than his father. There were some birds out there on the water — geese or swans or something — ye-es! Swans! What a lot! In a row, floating along. He hadn’t seen a swan since he took Mrs. G. to Golder’s Hill Park the year after the war. And they said — hopeless! A dreadful thing — sudden like that, with no time to say your prayers. Lucky the Will was quite straightforward. Annuity to Mrs. F., and the rest to his daughter for life, remainder to her children in equal shares. Only one child at present, but there’d be others, no doubt, with all that money. Dear! What a sight of money there was in the family altogether, and yet, of the present generation, Mr. Soames was the only warm man. It was all divided up now, and none of the young ones seemed to make any. He would have to keep a tight hand on the estates, or they’d be wanting their capital out, and Mr. Soames wouldn’t approve of that! To think of outliving Mr. Soames! And something incorruptibly faithful within that puggy face and thick figure, something that for two generations had served and never expected more than it had got, so moved old Graham that he subsided on the window seat with the words: “I’m quite upset!”

He was still sitting there with his head on his hand, and darkness thickening outside, when, with a knock on the door, that young man said:

“Mr. Gradman, will you come down for dinner, or would you like it up here?”

“Up here, if it’s all the same to you. Cold beef and pickles or anything there is, and a glass of stout, if it’s quite convenient.”

The young man drew nearer.

“You must feel it awfully, Mr. Gradman, having known him so long. Not an easy man to know, but one felt —”

Something gave way in Gradman and he spoke:

“Ah! I knew him from a little boy — took him to his first school — taught him how to draw a lease — never knew him to do a shady thing; very reserved man, Mr. Soames, but no better judge of an investment, except his uncle Nicholas. He had his troubles, but he never said anything of them; good son to his father — good brother to his sisters — good father to his child, as you know, young man.”

“Yes, indeed! And very good to me.”

“Not much of a church-goer, I’m afraid, but straight as a die. Never one to wear his ’eart on his sleeve; a little uncomfortable sometimes, maybe, but you could depend on him. I’m sorry for your young wife, young man — I am that! ‘Ow did it ‘appen?”

“She was standing below the window when the picture fell, and didn’t seem to realise. He pushed her out of the way, and it hit him instead.”

“Why! What a thing!”

“Yes. She can’t get over it.”

Gradman looked up at the young man’s face in the twilight.

“You mustn’t be down-‘earted,” he said. “She’ll come round. Misfortunes will happen. The family’s been told, I suppose. There’s just one thing, Mr. Michael — his first wife, Mrs. Irene, that married Mr. Jolyon after; she’s still living, they say; she might like to send a message that byegones were byegones, in case he came round.”

“I don’t know, Mr. Gradman, I don’t know.”

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass —‘e was greatly attached to ‘er at one time.”

"So I believe, but there are things that —. Still, Mrs. Dartie knows her address, if you like to ask her. She's here, you know."

"I'll turn it over. I remember Mrs. Irene's wedding — very pale she was; a beautiful young woman, too."

"I believe so."

"The present one — being French, I suppose, she shows her feelings. However — if he's unconscious —" It seemed to him that the young man's face looked funny, and he added: "I've never heard much of her. Not very happy with his wives, I'm afraid, he hasn't been."

"Some men aren't, you know, Mr. Gradman. It's being too near, I suppose."

"Ah!" said Gradman: "It's one thing or the other, and that's a fact. Mrs. G. and I have never had a difference — not to speak of, in fifty-two years, and that's going back, as the saying is. Well, I mustn't keep you from Miss Fleur. She'll need cossetting. Just cold beef and a pickle. You'll let me know if I'm wanted — any time, day or night. And if Mrs. Dartie'd like to see me I'm at her service."

The talk had done him good. That young man was a nicer young fellow than he'd thought. He felt that he could almost relish a pickle. After he had done so a message came: Would he go to Mrs. Dartie in the drawing room?

"Wait for me, my dear," he said to the maid; "I'm strange here."

Having washed his hands and passed a towel over his face, he followed her down the stairs of the hushed house. What a room to be sure! Rather empty, but in apple-pie order, with its cream-coloured panels, and its china, and its grand piano. Winifred Dartie was sitting on a sofa before a wood fire. She rose and took his hand.

"Such a comfort to see you, Gradman," she said. "You're the oldest friend we have."

Her face looked strange, as if she wanted to cry and had forgotten how. He had known her as a child, as a fashionable young woman, had helped to draw her marriage settlement, and shaken his head over her husband many a time — the trouble he'd had in finding out exactly what that gentleman owed, after he fell down the staircase in Paris and broke his neck! And every year still he prepared her income tax return.

"A good cry," he said, "would do you good, and I shouldn't blame you. But we mustn't say 'die'; Mr. Soames has a good constitution, and it's not as if he drank; perhaps he'll pull round after all."

She shook her head. Her face had a square grim look that reminded him of her old Aunt Ann. Underneath all her fashionableness she'd borne a lot — she had, when you came to think of it.

"It struck him here," she said; "a slanting blow on the right of the head. I shall miss him terribly; he's the only —" Gradman patted her hand.

"Ye-es, ye-es! But we must look on the bright side. If he comes round, I shall be there." What exact comfort he thought this was, he could not have made clear. "I did wonder whether he would like Mrs. Irene told. I don't like the idea of his going with a grudge on his mind. It's an old story, of course, but at the Judgment Day —"

A faint smile was lost in the square lines round Winifred's mouth.

"We needn't bother him with that, Gradman; it's out of fashion."

Gradman emitted a sound, as though, within him, faith and respect for the family he had served for sixty years had bumped against each other.

"Well, you know best," he said, "I shouldn't like him to go with anything on his conscience."

"On HER conscience, Gradman."

Gradman stared at a Dresden shepherdess.

"In a case of forgivin', you never know. I wanted to speak to him too, about his steel shares; they're not all they might be. But we must just take our chance, I suppose. I'm glad your father was spared, Mr. James WOULD have taken on. It won't be like the same world again, if Mr. Soames —"

She had put her hand up to her mouth and turned away. Fashion had dropped from her thickened figure. Much affected, Gradman turned to the door.

"Shan't leave my clothes off, in case I'm wanted. I've got everything here. Good-night!"

He went upstairs again, tiptoeing past the door, and, entering his room, switched on the light. They had taken away the pickles; turned his bed down, laid his flannel nightgown out. They took a lot of trouble! And, sinking on his knees, he prayed in a muffled murmur, varying the usual words, and ending: “And for Mr. Soames, O Lord, I specially commend him body and soul. Forgive him his trespasses, and deliver him from all ‘ardness of ’eart and impurities, before he goes ‘ence, and make him as a little lamb again, that he may find favour in Thy sight. They faithful servant. Amen.” And, for some time after he had finished, he remained kneeling on the very soft carpet, breathing-in the familiar reek of flannel and old times. He rose easier in his mind. Removing his boots, laced and square-toed, and his old frock coat, he put on his Jaeger gown, and shut the window, to keep out the night air. Then taking the eiderdown, he placed a large handkerchief over his bald head, and, switching off the light, sat down in the armchair, with the eiderdown over his knees.

What an ‘ush after London, to be sure, so quiet you could hear yourself think! For some reason he thought of Queen Victoria’s first Jubilee, when he was a youngster of forty, and Mr. James had given him and Mrs. G. two seats. They had seen the whole thing — first chop! — the Guards and the procession, the carriages, the horses, the Queen and the Royal family. A beautiful summer day — a real summer that; not like the summers lately. And everything going on, as if it’d go on for ever, with three per cents at nearly par if he remembered, and all going to church regular. And only that same year, a bit later, Mr. Soames had had his first upset. And another memory came. Queer he should remember that to-night, with Mr. Soames lying there — must have been quite soon after the Jubilee, too! Going with a lease that wouldn’t bear to wait to Mr. Soames’s private house, Montpellier Square, and being shown into the dining-room, and hearing some one singing and playing on the “pianner.” He had opened the door to listen. Why — he could remember the words now! About “laying on the grass,” “I die, I faint, I fail,” “the champaign odours,” something “on your cheek” and something “pale.” Fancy that! And, suddenly, the door had opened and out she’d come — Mrs. Irene — in a frock — ah!

“Are you waiting for Mr. Forsyte? Won’t you come in and have some tea?” And he’d gone in and had tea, sitting on the edge of a chair that didn’t look too firm, all gilt and spindley. And she on the sofa in that frock, pouring it out, and saying:

“Are you fond of music, then, Mr. Gradman?” Soft, a soft look, with her dark eyes and her hair — not red and not what you’d call gold — but like a turned leaf — um? — a beautiful young woman, sad and sort of sympathetic in the face. He’d often thought of her — he could see her now! And then Mr. Soames coming in, and her face all closing up like — like a book. Queer to remember that to-night! . . . Dear me! . . . How dark and quiet it was! That poor young daughter, that it was all about! It was to be ‘oped she’d sleep! Ye-es! And what would Mrs. G. say if she could see HIM sitting in a chair like this, with his teeth in, too. Ah! Well — she’d never seen Mr. Soames, never seen the family — Maria hadn’t! But what an ‘ush! And slowly but surely old Gradman’s mouth fell open, and he broke the hush.

Beyond the closed window the moon rode up, a full and brilliant moon, so that the stilly darkened country dissolved into shape and shadow, and the owls hooted, and, far off, a dog bayed; and flowers in the garden became each a little presence in a night-time carnival graven into stillness; and on the gleaming river every fallen leaf that drifted down carried a moonbeam; while, above, the trees stayed, quiet, measured and illumined, quiet as the very sky, for the wind stirred not.

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CHAPTER XV

SOAMES TAKES THE FERRY

There was only just life in Soames. Two nights and two days they had waited, watching the unmoving bandaged head. Specialists had come, given their verdict: “Nothing to be done by way of operation”; and gone again. The doctor who had presided over Fleur’s birth was in charge. Though never quite forgiven by Soames for the anxiety he had caused on that occasion, “the fellow” had hung on, attending the family. By his instructions they watched the patient’s eyes; at any sign, they were to send for him at once.

Michael, from whom Fleur seemed inconsolably caught away, gave himself up to Kit, walking and talking and trying to keep the child unaware. He did not visit the still figure, not from indifference, but because he felt an intruder there. He had removed all the pictures left in the gallery, and, storing them with those which Soames had thrown from the window, had listed them carefully. The fire had destroyed eleven out of the eighty-four.

Annette had cried, and was feeling better. The thought of life without Soames was for her strange and — possible; precisely, in fact, like the thought of life with him. She wished him to recover, but if he didn’t she would live in France.

Winifred, who shared the watches, lived much and sadly in the past. Soames had been her mainstay throughout thirty-four years chequered by Montague Dartie, had continued her mainstay in the thirteen unchequered years since. She did not see how things could ever be cosy again. She had a heart, and could not look at that still figure without trying to remember how to cry. Letters came to her from the family worded with a sort of anxious astonishment that Soames should have had such a thing happen to him.

Gradman, who had taken a bath, and changed his trousers to black, was deep in calculations and correspondence with the Insurance firm. He walked, too, in the kitchen garden, out of sight of the house; for he could not get over the fact that Mr. James had lived to be ninety, and Mr. Timothy a hundred, to say nothing of the others. And, stopping mournfully before the seakail or the Brussels sprouts he would shake his head.

Smither had come down to be with Winifred, but was of little use, except to say: “Poor Mr. Soames! Poor dear Mr. Soames! To think of it! And he so careful of himself, and everybody!”

For that was it! Ignorant of the long and stealthy march of passion, and of the state to which it had reduced Fleur; ignorant of how Soames had watched her, seen that beloved young part of his very self fail, reach the edge of things and stand there balancing; ignorant of Fleur’s reckless desperation beneath that falling picture, and her father’s knowledge thereof — ignorant of all this everybody felt aggrieved. It seemed to them that a mere bolt from the blue, rather than the inexorable secret culmination of an old, old story, had striken one who of all men seemed the least liable to accident. How should they tell that it was not so accidental as all that!

But Fleur knew well enough that her desperate mood had destroyed her father, just as surely as if she had flung herself into the river and he had been drowned in saving her. Only too well she knew that on that night she had been capable of slipping down into the river, of standing before a rushing car, of anything not too deliberate and active, that would have put her out of her aching misery. She knew well enough that she had recklessly stood rooted when the picture toppled above her. And now, sobered to the very marrow by the shock, she could not forgive herself.

With her mother, her aunt and the two trained nurses she divided the watches, so that there were never less than two, of whom she was nearly always one, in Annette’s bedroom where Soames lay. She would sit hour after hour, almost as still as her father, with her eyes wistful and dark-circled, fixed on his face. Passion and fever had quite died out of her. It was as if, with his infallible instinct where she was concerned, Soames had taken the one step that could rid her of the fire which had been consuming her. Jon was remote from her in that room darkened by sun blinds and her remorse.

Yes! She had meant to be killed by that picture, ironically that of the Goya girl whose dress she had worn when she visited Jon’s room at Wansdon, and when she danced with him at Nettlefold! Distraught that desperate night, she did not even now realise that she had caused the fire, by a cigarette flung down still lighted, not even perhaps that she had smoked up there. But only too well she realised that because she had wanted to die, had stood welcoming sudden extinction, her father was now lying there so nearly dead. How good he had always been to her! Incredible that he should die and take that goodness away, that she should never hear his flat-toned voice again, or feel the touch of his moustache on her cheeks or forehead. Incredible that he should never give her a chance to show that she had really loved him — yes really, beneath all the fret and self-importance of her life. While watching him now, the little rather than the great things came back to her. How he would pitch a new doll down in the nursery and say: “Well, I don’t know if you’ll care for this one; I just picked her up.” How once, after her mother had whipped her, he had come in, taken her hand and said: “There, there. Let’s go and see if there are some raspberries!” How he had stood on the stairs at Green Street after her wedding, watching, pale and unobtrusive, above the guests clustered in the hall, for a turn of her head and her last look back. Unobtrusive! That was the word — unobtrusive, always! Why, if he went, there would be no portrait — hardly even a photograph, to remember him by! Just one of him as a baby, in his mother’s arms; one as a little boy, looking sceptically at his velvet knickers; one in ‘76 as a young man in a full-tailed coat and short whiskers; and a snapshot or two taken unawares. Had any man ever been less photographed? He had never seemed to wish to be appreciated, or even remembered, by any one. To Fleur, so avid of appreciation, it seemed marvellously strange. What secret force within that spare form, lying there inert, had made him thus self-sufficing? He had been brought up as luxuriously as herself, had never known want or the real need for effort, but somehow had preserved a sort of stoic independence of others, and what they thought of him. And yet, as none knew better than herself, he had longed to be loved. This hurt her most, watching him. He had longed for her affection, and she had not shown him enough. But she had felt it — really felt it all the time. Something in him had repelled feeling, dried up his manifestation. There had been no magnet in his “makeup.” And stealing to the bed — her mother’s bed where she herself had been conceived and born — she would stand beside that almost deserted body and drawn dun face, feeling so hollow and miserable that she could hardly restrain herself.

So the days and nights passed. On the third day about three o’clock, while she stood there beside him, she saw the eyes open — a falling apart of the lids, indeed, rather than an opening, and no speculation in the gaps; but her heart beat fast. The nurse, summoned by her finger, came, looked, and went quickly out to the telephone. And Fleur stood there with her soul in her eyes, trying to summon his. It did not come, the lids drooped again. She drew up a chair and sat down, not taking her eyes off his face. The nurse came back to say that the doctor was on his rounds; as soon as he came in he would be sent to them post-haste. As her father would have said: “Of course, ‘the fellow’ wasn’t in when he was wanted!” But it would make no difference. They knew what to do. It was nearly four when again the lids were raised, and this time something looked forth. Fleur could not be sure he saw anything particular, recognised her or any other object, but there was something there, some flickering light, trying for focus. Slowly it strengthened, then went out again between the lids. They gave him stimulant. And again she sat down to watch. In half an hour his eyes reopened. This time he SAW! And for torturing minutes Fleur watched a being trying to BE, a mind striving to obey the mandate of instinctive will power. Bending so that those eyes, which she now knew recognised her, should have the least possible effort, she waited with her lips trembling, as if in a kiss. The extraordinary tenacity of that struggle to come back terrified her. He MEANT to be a mind, he MEANT to know and hear and speak. It was as if he must die from the sheer effort of it. She murmured to him. She put her hand under his cold hand, so that if he made the faintest pressure she would feel it. She watched his lips desperately. At last that struggle for coherence ceased, the half-blank, half-angry look yielded to something deeper, the lips moved. They said nothing, but they moved, and the faintest tremor passed from his finger into hers.

“You know me, darling?”

His eyes said: “Yes.”

“You remember?”

Again his eyes said: “Yes.”

His lips were twitching all the time, as if rehearsing for speech, and the look in his eyes deepening. She saw his brows frown faintly, as if her face were too close; drew back a little and the frown relaxed.

“Darling, you are going to be all right.”

His eyes said: “No”; and his lips moved, but she could not distinguish the sound. For a moment she lost control, and said with a sob:

“Dad, forgive me!”

His eyes softened; and this time she caught what sounded like:

“Forgive? Nonsense!”

"I love you so."

He seemed to abandon the effort to speak then, and centred all the life of him in his eyes. Deeper and deeper grew the colour and the form and the meaning in them, as if to compel something from her. And suddenly, like a little girl, she said:

"Yes, Dad; I will be good!"

A tremor from his finger passed into her palm; his lips seemed trying to smile, his head moved as if he had meant to nod, and always that look deepened in his eyes.

"Gradman is here, darling, and Mother, and Aunt Winifred, and Kit and Michael. Is there anyone you would like to see?"

His lips shaped: "No — you!"

"I am here all the time." Again she felt the tremor from his fingers, saw his lips whispering:

"That's all."

And suddenly, his eyes went out. There was nothing there! For some time longer he breathed, but before "that fellow" came, he had lost hold — was gone.

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CHAPTER XVI

FULL CLOSE

In accordance with all that was implicit in Soames there was no fuss over his funeral. For a long time now, indeed, he had been the only one of the family at all interested in obsequies.

It was then, a very quiet affair, only men attending.

Sir Lawrence had come down, graver than Michael had ever known him.

“I respected old Forsyte,” he said to his son, while they returned on foot from the churchyard, where, in the corner selected by himself, Soames now lay, under a crab-apple tree: “He dated, and he couldn’t express himself; but there was no humbug about him — an honest man. How is Fleur bearing up?”

Michael shook his head. “It’s terrible for her to think that he —”

“My dear boy, there’s no better death than dying to save the one you’re fondest of. As soon as you can, let us have Fleur at Lippinghall — where her father and her family never were. I’ll get Hilary and his wife down for a holiday — she likes THEM.”

“I’m very worried about her, Dad — something’s broken.”

“That happens to most of us, before we’re thirty. Some spring or other goes; but presently we get our second winds. It’s what happened to the Age — something broke and it hasn’t yet got its second wind. But it’s getting it, and so will she. What sort of a stone are you going to put up?”

“A cross, I suppose.”

“I think he’d prefer a flat stone with that crab-apple at the head and yew trees round, so that he’s not overlooked. No ‘Beloved’ or ‘Regretted.’ Has he got the freehold of that corner? He’d like to belong to his descendants in perpetuity. We’re all more Chinese than you’d think, only with them it’s the ancestors who do the owning. Who was the old chap who cried into his hat?”

“Old Mr. Gradman — sort of business nurse to the family.”

“Faithful old dog! Well! I certainly never thought Forsyte would take the ferry before me. He looked permanent, but it’s an ironical world. Can I do anything for you and Fleur? Talk to the Nation about the pictures? The Marquess and I could fix that for you. He had quite a weakness for old Forsyte, and his Morland’s saved. By the way, that must have been a considerable contest between him and the fire up there all alone. It’s the sort of thing one would never have suspected him of.”

“Yes,” said Michael: “I’ve been talking to Riggs. He’s full of it.”

“He saw it, then?”

Michael nodded. “Here he comes!”

They slackened their pace, and the chauffeur, touching his hat, came alongside.

“Ah! Riggs,” said Sir Lawrence, “you were up there at the fire, I’m told.”

“Yes, Sir Lawrence. Mr. Forsyte was a proper wonder — went at it like a two-year old, we fair had to carry him away. So particular as a rule about not getting his coat wet or sitting in a draught, but the way he stuck it — at his age . . . . ‘Come on!’ he kept saying to me all through that smoke — a proper champion! Never so surprised in all my life, Sir Lawrence — nervous gentleman like him. And what a bit o’ luck! If he hadn’t insisted on saving that last picture, it’d never have fallen and got ’im.”

“How did the fire begin?”

“Nobody knows, Sir Lawrence, unless Mr. Forsyte did, and he never said nothing. Wish I’d got there sooner, but I was puttin’ the petrol out of action. What that old gentleman did by ‘imself up there; and after the day we’d had! Why! We came from Winchester that morning to London, on to Dorking, picked up Mrs. Mont, and on here. And now he’ll never tell me I’ve gone wrong again.”

A grimace passed over his thin face, seamed and shadowed by traffic and the insides of his car; and, touching his hat, he left them at the gate.

"'A proper champion,'" Sir Lawrence repeated, softly: "You might almost put that on the stone. Yes, it's an ironical world!"

In the hall they parted, for Sir Lawrence was going back to Town by car. He took Gradman with him, the provisions of the will having been quietly disclosed. Michael found Smither crying and drawing up the blinds, and in the library Winifred and Val, who had come, with Holly, for the funeral, dealing with condolences, such as they were. Annette was with Kit in the nursery. Michael went up to Fleur in the room she used to have as a little girl — a single room, so that he had been sleeping elsewhere.

She was lying on her bed, graceful, and as if without life.

The eyes she turned on Michael seemed to make of him no less, but no more, than they were making of the ceiling. It was not so much that the spirit behind them was away somewhere, as that there was nowhere for it to go. He went up to the bed, and put his hand on hers.

"Dear Heart!"

Fleur turned her eyes on him again, but of the look in them he could make nothing.

"The moment you wish, darling, we'll take Kit home."

"Any time, Michael."

"I know exactly how you feel," said Michael, knowing well that he did not: "Riggs has been telling us how splendid your father was, up there with the fire."

"Don't!"

There was that in her face which baffled him completely — something not natural, however much she might be mourning for her father. Suddenly she said:

"Give me time, Michael. Nothing matters, I suppose, in the long run. And don't worry about me — I'm not worth it."

More conscious than he had ever been in his life that words were of no use, Michael put his lips to her forehead and left her lying there.

He went out and down to the river and stood watching it flow, tranquil and bright in this golden autumn weather, which had lasted so long. Soames's cows were feeding opposite. They would come under the hammer, now; all that had belonged to him would come under the hammer, he supposed. Annette was going to her mother in France, and Fleur did not wish to keep it on. He looked back at the house, still marked and dishevelled by fire and water. And melancholy brooded in his heart, as if the dry grey spirit of its late owner were standing beside him looking at the passing away of his possessions, of all that on which he had lavished so much time and trouble. 'Change,' thought Michael, 'there's nothing but change. It's the one constant. Well! Who wouldn't have a river rather than a pond!' He went towards the flower border under the kitchen garden wall. The hollyhocks and sunflowers were in bloom there, and he turned to them as if for warmth. In the little summer-house at the corner he saw some one sitting. Mrs. Val Dartie! Holly — a nice woman! And, suddenly, in Michael, out of the bafflement he had felt in Fleur's presence, the need to ask a question shaped itself timidly, ashamedly at first, then boldly, insistently. He went up to her. She had a book, but was not reading.

"How is Fleur?" she said.

Michael shook his head and sat down.

"I want to ask you a question. Don't answer if you don't want; but I feel I've got to ask. Can you — will you tell me: How are things between your young brother and her? I know what there was in the past. Is there anything in the present? I'm asking for her sake — not my own. Whatever you say shan't hurt her."

She looked straight at him, and Michael searched her face. There was that in it from which he knew that whatever she did say, if indeed she said anything, would be the truth.

"Whatever there has been between them," she said, at last, "and there HAS been something since he came back, is over for good. I know that for certain. It ended the day before the fire."

"I see," said Michael, very still: "Why do you say it is over FOR GOOD?"

"Because I know my young brother. He has given his wife his word never to see Fleur again. He must have blundered into something, I know there has been a crisis; but once Jon gives his word — nothing — NOTHING will make him go back on it. Whatever it was is over for good, and Fleur knows it."

And again Michael said: "I see." And then, as if to himself: "Whatever it was."

She put out her hand and laid it on his.

"All right," he said: "I shall get my second wind in a minute. You needn't be afraid that I shall go back on my word, either. I know I've always played second fiddle. It shan't hurt her."

The pressure on his hand increased; and, looking up, he saw tears in her eyes.

"Thank you very much," he said; "I understand now. It's when you don't understand that you feel such a dud. Thank you very much."

He withdrew his hand gently and got up. Looking down at her still sitting there with tears in her eyes, he smiled.

"It's pretty hard sometimes to remember that it's all comedy; but one gets there, you know."

"Good luck!" said Holly. And Michael answered: "Good luck to all of us!" . . .

That evening when the house was shuttered, he lit his pipe and stole out again. He had got his second wind. Whether he would have, but for Soames's death, he did not know. It was as if, by lying in that shadowy corner under a crab-apple tree, 'old Forsyte' were still protecting his beloved. For her, Michael felt nothing but compassion. The bird had been shot with both barrels, and still lived; no one with any sporting instinct could hurt it further. Nothing for it but to pick her up and mend the wings as best he could. Something strong in Michael, so strong that he hadn't known of its existence, had rallied to his aid. Sportsmanship — chivalry? No! It was nameless; it was an instinct, a feeling that there was something beyond self to be considered, even when self was bruised and cast down. All his life he had detested the ebullient egoism of the 'crime passionel', the wronged spouse, honour, vengeance, "all that tommy-rot and naked savagery." To be excused from being a decent man! One was never excused from that. Otherwise life was just where it was in the reindeer age, the pure tragedy of the primeval hunters, before civilisation and comedy began.

Whatever had been between those two — and he felt it had been all — it was over, and she, 'down and out.' He must stand by her and keep his mouth shut. If he couldn't do that now, he ought never to have married her, lukewarm as he had known her to be. And, drawing deeply at his pipe, he went down the dark garden to the river.

The sky was starry, and with the first touch of cold, a slight mist was rising, filming the black water so that it scarcely seemed to move. Now and then in the stillness he could hear the drone of a distant car, and somewhere a little beast squeaking. Starlight, and the odour of bushes and the earth, the hoot of an owl, bats flitting, and those tall poplar shapes, darker than the darkness — what better setting for his mood just then!

An ironical world, his father had said! Yes, queerly ironical, with shape melting into shape, mood into mood, sound into sound, and nothing fixed anywhere, unless it were that starlight, and the instinct within all living things which said: "Go on!"

A drift of music came down the river. There would be a party at some house. They were dancing probably, as he had seen the gnats dancing that afternoon! And then something out of the night seemed to catch him by the throat. God! It was beautiful, amazing! Breathing, in this darkness, as many billion shapes as there were stars above, all living, and all different! What a world! The Eternal Mood at work! And if you died, like that old boy, and lay forever beneath a crab-apple tree — well, it was the Mood resting a moment in your still shape — no! not even resting, moving on in the mysterious rhythm that one called Life. Who could arrest the moving Mood — who wanted to? And if some pale possessor like that poor old chap, tried and succeeded for a moment, the stars twinkled just a little more when he was gone. To have and to hold! As though you could!

And Michael drew in his breath. A sound of singing came down the water to him, trailing, distant, high, and sweet. It was as if a swan had sung!

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MAID IN WAITING
CHAPTER 1

The Bishop of Porthminster was sinking fast; they had sent for his four nephews, his two nieces and their one husband. It was not thought that he would last the night.

He who had been 'Cuffs' Cherrell (for so the name Charwell is pronounced) to his cronies at Harrow and Cambridge in the 'sixties, the Reverend Cuthbert Cherrell in his two London parishes, Canon Cherrell in the days of his efflorescence as a preacher, and Cuthbert Porthminster for the last eighteen years, had never married. For eighty-two years he had lived and for fifty-five, having been ordained rather late, had represented God upon certain portions of the earth. This and the control of his normal instincts since the age of twenty-six had given to his face a repressed dignity which the approach of death did not disturb. He awaited it almost quizzically, judging from the twist of his eyebrow and the tone in which he said so faintly to his nurse:

"You will get a good sleep tomorrow, nurse. I shall be punctual, no robes to put on."

The best wearer of robes in the whole episcopacy, the most distinguished in face and figure, maintaining to the end the dandyism which had procured him the nickname 'Cuffs,' lay quite still, his grey hair brushed and his face like ivory. He had been a bishop so long that no one knew now what he thought about death, or indeed about anything, except the prayer book, any change in which he had deprecated with determination. In one never remarkable for expressing his feelings the ceremony of life had overlaid the natural reticence, as embroidery and jewels will disguise the foundation stuff of vestment.

He lay in a room with mullion windows, an ascetic room in a sixteenth-century house, close to the Cathedral, whose scent of age was tempered but imperfectly by the September air coming in. Some zinnias in an old vase on the window-sill made the only splash of colour, and it was noticed by the nurse that his eyes scarcely left it, except to dose from time to time. About six o'clock they informed him that all the family of his long-dead elder brother had arrived.

"Ah! See that they are comfortable. I should like to see Adrian."

When an hour later he opened his eyes again, they fell on his nephew Adrian seated at the foot of the bed. For some minutes he contemplated the lean and wrinkled brownness of a thin bearded face, topped with grizzling hair, with a sort of faint astonishment, as though finding his nephew older than he had expected. Then, with lifted eyebrows and the same just quizzical tone in his faint voice, he said:

"My dear Adrian! Good of you! Would you mind coming closer? Ah! I haven't much strength, but what I have I wanted you to have the benefit of; or perhaps, as you may think, the reverse. I must speak to the point or not at all. You are not a Churchman, so what I have to say I will put in the words of a man of the world, which once I was myself, perhaps have always been. I have heard that you have an affection, or may I say infatuation, for a lady who is not in a position to marry you — is that so?"

The face of his nephew, kindly and wrinkled, was gentle with an expression of concern.

"It is, Uncle Cuthbert. I am sorry if it troubles you."

"A mutual affection?"

His nephew shrugged.

"My dear Adrian, the world has changed in its judgments since my young days, but there is still a halo around marriage. That, however, is a matter for your conscience and is not my point. Give me a little water."

When he had drunk from the glass held out, he went on more feebly:

"Since your father died I have been somewhat in loco parentis to you all, and the chief repository, I suppose, of such traditions as attach to our name. I wanted to say to you that our name goes back very far and very honourably. A certain inherited sense of duty is all that is left to old families now; what is sometimes excused to a young man is not excused to those of mature age and a certain position like your own. I should be sorry to be leaving this life knowing that our name was likely to be taken in vain by the Press, or bandied about. Forgive me for intruding on your privacy, and let me now say good-bye to you all. It will be less painful if you will give the others my blessing for what it is worth — very little, I'm afraid. Good-bye, my dear Adrian, good-bye!"

The voice dropped to a whisper. The speaker closed his eyes, and Adrian, after standing a minute looking down at the carved waxen face, stole, tall and a little stooping, to the door, opened it gently and was gone.

The nurse came back. The Bishop's lips moved and his eyebrows twitched now and then, but he spoke only once:

"I shall be glad if you will kindly see that my neck is straight, and my teeth in place. Forgive these details, but I do not wish to offend the sight . . ."

Adrian went down to the long panelled room where the family was waiting.

"Sinking. He sent his blessing to you all."

Sir Conway cleared his throat. Hilary pressed Adrian's arm. Lionel went to the window. Emily Mont took out a tiny handkerchief and passed her other hand into Sir Lawrence's. Wilmet alone spoke:

"How does he look, Adrian?"

"Like the ghost of a warrior on his shield."

Again Sir Conway cleared his throat.

"Fine old boy!" said Sir Lawrence, softly.

"Ah!" said Adrian.

They remained, silently sitting and standing in the compulsory discomfort of a house where death is visiting. Tea was brought in, but, as if by tacit agreement, no one touched it. And, suddenly, the bell tolled. The seven in that room looked up. At one blank spot in the air their glances met and crossed, as though fixed on something there and yet not there.

A voice from the doorway said:

"Now please, if you wish to see him."

Sir Conway, the eldest, followed the bishop's chaplain; the others followed Sir Conway.

In his narrow bed jutting from the centre of the wall opposite the mullion windows the bishop lay, white and straight and narrow, with just the added dignity of death. He graced his last state even more than he had graced existence. None of those present, not even his chaplain, who made the eighth spectator, knew whether Cuthbert Porthminster had really had faith, except in that temporal dignity of the Church which he had so faithfully served. They looked at him now with all the different feelings death produces in varying temperaments, and with only one feeling in common, aesthetic pleasure at the sight of such memorable dignity,

Conway — General Sir Conway Cherrell — had seen much death. He stood with his hands crossed before him, as if once more at Sandhurst in the old-time attitude of 'stand at ease.' His face was thin-templed and ascetic, for a soldier's; the darkened furrowed cheeks ran from wide cheek-bones to the point of a firm chin, the dark eyes were steady, the nose and lips thin; he wore a little close grizzly dark moustache — his face was perhaps the stillest of the eight faces, the face of the taller Adrian beside him, the least still. Sir Lawrence Mont had his arm through that of Emily his wife, the expression on his thin twisting countenance was as of one saying: "A very beautiful performance — don't cry, my dear."

The faces of Hilary and Lionel, one on each side of Wilmet, a seamed race and a smooth face, both long and thin and decisive, wore a sort of sorry scepticism, as if expecting those eyes to open. Wilmet had flushed deep pink; her lips were pursed. She was a tall thin woman. The chaplain stood with bent head, moving his lips as though telling over internal beads. They stayed thus perhaps three minutes, then as it were with a single indrawn breath filed to the door. They went each to the room assigned.

They met again at dinner, thinking and speaking once more in terms of life. Uncle Cuthbert, except as a family figure-head, had never been very near to any one of them. The question whether he was to be buried with his fathers at Condaford or here in the Cathedral was debated. Probably his Will would decide. All but the General and Lionel, who were the executors, returned to London the same evening.

The two brothers, having read through the Will, which was short, for there was nothing much to leave, sat on in the library, silent, till the General said:

"I want to consult you, Lionel. It's about my boy, Hubert. Did you read that attack made on him in the House before it rose?"

Lionel, sparing of words, and now on the eve of a Judgeship, nodded.

"I saw there was a question asked, but I don't know Hubert's version of the affair."

"I can give it you. The whole thing is damnable. The boy's got a temper, of course, but he's straight as a die. What he says you can rely on. And all I can say is that if I'd been in his place, I should probably have done the same."

Lionel nodded. "Go ahead."

"Well, as you know, he went straight from Harrow into the War, and had one year in the R.A.F. under age, got wounded, went back and stayed on in the army after the war. He was out in Mespot, then went on to Egypt and India. He got malaria badly, and last October had a year's sick leave given him, which will be up on October first. He was recommended for a long voyage. He got leave for it and went out through the Panama Canal to Lima. There he met that American professor, Hallorsen, who came over here some time ago and gave some lectures, it appears, about some queer remains in Bolivia; he was going to take an expedition there. This expedition was just starting when Hubert got to Lima, and Hallorsen wanted a transport officer. Hubert was fit enough after his voyage and jumped at the chance. He can't bear idleness. Hallorsen took him on; that was in December last. After a bit Hallorsen left him in charge of his base camp with a lot of half-caste Indian mule men. Hubert was the only white man, and he got fever badly. Some of those half-caste Indian fellows are devils, according to his account; no sense of discipline and perfect brutes with animals. Hubert got wrong with them — he's a hot-tempered chap, as I told you, and, as it happens, particularly fond of animals. The half-castes got more and more out of hand, till finally one of them, whom he'd had to have flogged for ill-treating mules and who was stirring up mutiny, attacked him with a knife. Luckily Hubert had his revolver handy and shot him dead. And on that the whole blessed lot of them, except three, cleared out, taking the mules with them. Mind you, he'd been left there alone for nearly three months without support or news of any kind from Hallorsen. Well, he hung on somehow, half dead, with his remaining men. At last Hallorsen came back, and instead of trying to understand his difficulties, pitched into him. Hubert wouldn't stand for it; gave him as good as he got, and left. He came straight home, and is down with us at Condaford. He's lost the fever, luckily, but he's pretty well worn out, even now. And now that fellow Hallorsen has attacked him in his book; practically thrown the blame of failure on him, implies he was tyrannical and no good at handling men, calls him a hot-tempered aristocrat — all that bunkum that goes down these days. Well, some Service member got hold of this and asked that question about it in Parliament. One expects Socialists to make themselves unpleasant, but when it comes to a Service member alluding to conduct unbecoming to a British officer, it's another matter altogether. Hallorsen's in the States. There's nobody to bring an action against: besides, Hubert could get no witnesses. It looks to me as if the thing has cut right across his career."

Lionel Cherrell's long face lengthened.

"Has he tried Headquarters?"

"Yes, he went up on Wednesday. They were chilly. Any popular gup about high-handedness scares them nowadays. I daresay they'd come round if no more were said, but how's that possible? He's been publicly criticised in that book, and practically accused in Parliament of violent conduct unbecoming to an officer and gentleman. He can't sit down under that; and yet — what can he do?"

Lionel drew deeply at his pipe.

"D'you know," he said, "I think he'd better take no notice."

The General clenched his fist. "Damn it, Lionel, I don't see that!"

"But he admits the shooting and the flogging. The public has no imagination, Con — they'll never see his side of the thing. All they'll swallow is that on a civilian expedition he shot one man and flogged others. You can't expect them to understand the conditions or the pressure there was."

"Then you seriously advise him to take it lying down?"

"As a man, no; as a man of the world, yes."

"Good Lord! What's England coming to? I wonder what old Uncle Cuffs would have said? He thought a lot of our name."

"So do I. But how is Hubert to get even with them?"

The General was silent for a little while and then said:

"This charge is a slur on the Service, and yet his hands seem tied. If he handed in his Commission he could stand up to it, but his whole heart's in the Army. It's a bad business. By the way, Lawrence has been talking to me about Adrian. Diana Ferse was Diana Montjoy, wasn't she?"

"Yes, second cousin to Lawrence — very pretty woman, Con. Ever see her?"

"As a girl, yes. What's her position now, then?"

"Married widow — two children, and a husband in a Mental Home."

"That's lively. Incurable?"

Lionel nodded. "They say so. But of course, you never know."

"Good Lord!"

"That's just about it. She's poor and Adrian's poorer; it's a very old affection on Adrian's part, dates from before her marriage. If he does anything foolish, he'll lose his curatorship."

"Go off with her, you mean? Why, he must be fifty!"

"No fool like an — She's an attractive creature. Those Montjoys are celebrated for their charm. Would he listen to you, Con?"

The General shook his head.

"More likely to Hilary."

"Poor old Adrian — one of the best men on earth. I'll talk to Hilary, but his hands are always full."

The General rose. "I'm going to bed. We don't smell of age at the Grange like this place — though the Grange is older."

"Too much original wood here. Good-night, old man."

The brothers shook hands, and, grasping each a candle, sought their rooms.

❦

Chapter 2

Condaford Grange had passed from the de Campforts (whence its name) into possession of the Cherrells in 1217, when their name was spelt Kerwell and still at times Keroual, as the spirit moved the scribe. The story of its passing was romantic, for the Kerwell who got it by marrying a de Campfort had got the de Campfort by rescuing her from a wild boar. He had been a landless wight whose father, a Frenchman from Guienne, had come to England after Richard's crusade; and she had been the heiress of the landed de Campforts. The boar was incorporated on the family 'shield,' and some doubted whether the boar on the shield did not give rise to the story, rather than the story to the boar. In any case parts of the house were certified by expert masons to go back to the twelfth century. It had undoubtedly been moated; but under Queen Anne a restorative Cherrell, convinced of the millennium perhaps, and possibly inconvenienced by insects, had drained off the water, and there was now little sign that a moat had ever been.

The late Sir Conway, elder brother of the bishop, knighted in 1901 on his appointment to Spain, had been in the diplomatic service. He had therefore let the place down badly. He had died in 1904, at his post, and the letting-down process had been continued by his eldest son, the present Sir Conway, who, continually on Service, had enjoyed only spasmodic chances of living at Condaford till after the Great War. Now that he did live there, the knowledge that folk of his blood had been encamped there practically since the Conquest had spurred him to do his best to put it in order, so that it was by now unpretentiously trim without and comfortable within, and he was almost too poor to live in it. The estate contained too much covert to be profitable, and, though unencumbered, brought in but a few hundreds a year of net revenue. The pension of a General and the slender income of his wife (by birth the Honourable Elizabeth Frensham) enabled the General to incur a very small amount of supertax, to keep two hunters, and live quietly on the extreme edge of his means. His wife was one of those Englishwomen who seem to count for little, but for that very reason count for a good deal. She was unobtrusive, gentle, and always busy. In a word, she was background; and her pale face, reposeful, sensitive, a little timid, was a continual reminder that culture depends but slightly on wealth or intellect. Her husband and her three children had implicit confidence in her coherent sympathy. They were all of more vivid nature, more strongly coloured, and she was a relief.

She had not accompanied the General to Porthminster and was therefore awaiting his return. The furniture was about to come out of chintz, and she was standing in the tea room wondering whether that chintz would last another season, when a Scotch terrier came in, followed by her eldest daughter Elizabeth — better known as 'Dinny.' Dinny was slight and rather tall; she had hair the colour of chestnuts, an imperfect nose, a Botticellian mouth, eyes cornflower blue and widely set, and a look rather of a flower on a long stalk that might easily be broken off, but never was. Her expression suggested that she went through life trying not to see it as a joke. She was, in fact, like one of those natural wells, or springs, whence one cannot procure water without bubbles: 'Dinny's bubble and squeak,' her uncle Sir Lawrence Mont called it. She was by now twenty-four.

"Mother, do we have to go into black edging for Uncle Cuffs?"

"I don't think so, Dinny; or very slight."

"Is he to be planted here?"

"I expect in the Cathedral, but Father will know."

"Tea, darling? Scaramouch, up you come, and don't bob your nose into the Gentleman's Relish."

"Dinny, I'm so worried about Hubert."

"So am I, dear; he isn't Hubert at all, he's like a sketch of himself by Thom the painter, all on one side. He ought never to have gone on that ghastly expedition, Mother. There's a limit to hitting it off with Americans, and Hubert reaches it sooner than almost anybody I know. He never could get on with them. Besides, I don't believe civilians ever ought to have soldiers with them."

"Why, Dinny?"

"Well, soldiers have the static mind. They know God from Mammon. Haven't you noticed it, dear?"

Lady Cherrell had. She smiled timidly, and asked:

"Where is Hubert? Father will be home directly."

"He went out with Don, to get a leash of partridges for dinner. Ten to one he'll forget to shoot them, and anyway they'll be too fresh. He's in that state of mind into which it has pleased God to call him; except that for God read the devil. He broods over that business, Mother. Only one thing would do him good, and that's to fall in love. Can't we find the perfect girl for him? Shall I ring for tea?"

"Yes, dear. And this room wants fresh flowers."

"I'll get them. Come along, Scaramouch!"

Passing out into September sunshine, Dinny noted a green woodpecker on the lower lawn, and thought: 'If seven birds with seven beaks should peck for half a term, do you suppose, the lady thought, that they could find a worm?' It WAS dry! All the same the zinnias were gorgeous this year; and she proceeded to pick some. They ran the gamut in her hand from deepest red through pink to lemon-yellow — handsome blossoms, but not endearing. 'Pity,' she thought, 'we can't go to some bed of modern maids and pick one for Hubert.' She seldom showed her feelings, but she had two deep feelings not for show — one for her brother, the other for Condaford, and they were radically entwined. All the coherence of her life belonged to Condaford; she had a passion for the place which no one would have suspected from her way of talking of it, and she had a deep and jealous desire to bind her only brother to the same devotion. After all, she had been born there while it was shabby and run-down, and had survived into the period of renovation. To Hubert it had only been a holiday and leave-time perch. Dinny, though the last person in the world to talk of her roots, or to take them seriously in public, had a private faith in the Cherrells, their belongings and their works, which nothing could shake. Every Condaford beast, bird and tree, even the flowers she was plucking, were a part of her, just as were the simple folk around in their thatched cottages, and the Early-English church, where she attended without belief to speak of, and the grey Condaford dawns which she seldom saw, the moonlit, owl-haunted nights, the long sunlight over the stubble, and the scents and the sounds and the feel of the air. When she was away from home she never said she was homesick, but she was; when she was at home she never said she revelled in it, but she did. If Condaford should pass from the Cherrells, she would not moan, but would feel like a plant pulled up by its roots. Her father had for it the indifferent affection of a man whose active life had been passed elsewhere; her mother the acquiescence of one who had always done her duty by what had kept her nose to the grindstone and was not exactly hers; her sister treated it with the matter-of-fact tolerance of one who would rather be somewhere more exciting; and Hubert — what had Hubert? She really did not know. With her hands full of zinnias and her neck warm from the lingering sunshine, she returned to the drawing-room.

Her mother was standing by the tea table.

"The train's late," she said. "I do wish Clare wouldn't drive so fast."

"I don't see the connection, darling." But she did. Mother was always fidgety when Father was behind time.

"Mother, I'm all for Hubert sending his version to the papers."

"We shall see what your Father says — he'll have talked to your Uncle Lionel."

"I hear the car now," said Dinny.

The General was followed into the room by his younger daughter. Clare was the most vivid member of the family. She had dark fine shingled hair and a pale expressive face, of which the lips were slightly brightened. The eyes were brown, with a straight and eager glance, the brow low and very white. Her expression was old for a girl of twenty, being calm and yet adventurous. She had an excellent figure and walked with an air.

"This poor dear has had no lunch, Mother," she said.

"Horrible cross-country journey, Liz. Whisky-and-soda and a biscuit's all I've had since breakfast."

"You shall have an egg-nogg, darling," said Dinny, and left the room. Clare followed her.

The General kissed his wife. "The old boy looked very fine, my dear, though, except for Adrian, we only saw him after. I shall have to go back for the funeral. It'll be a swell affair, I expect. Great figure — Uncle Cuffs. I spoke to Lionel about Hubert; he doesn't see what can be done. But I've been thinking."

"Yes, Con?"

"The whole point is whether or not the Authorities are going to take any notice of that attack in the House. They might ask him to send in his commission. That'd be fatal. Sooner than that he'd better hand it in himself. He's due for his medical on October the first. Can we pull any strings without his knowing? — the boy's proud. I can go and see Topsham and you could get at Follanby, couldn't you?"

Lady Cherrell made wry her face.

"I know," said the General, "it's rotten; but the real chance would be Saxenden, only I don't know how to get at him."

"Dinny might suggest something."

"Dinny? Well, I suppose she HAS more brains than any of us, except you, my dear."

"I," said Lady Cherrell, "have no brains at all."

"Bosh! Oh! Here she is."

Dinny advanced, bearing a frothy liquor in a glass.

"Dinny, I was saying to your mother that we want to get into touch with Lord Saxenden about Hubert's position. Can you suggest any way?"

"Through a country neighbour, Dad. Has he any?"

"His place marches with Wilfred Bentworth's."

"There it is, then. Uncle Hilary or Uncle Lawrence."

"How?"

"Wilfred Bentworth is Chairman of Uncle Hilary's Slum Conversion Committee. A little judicious nepotism, dear."

"Um! Hilary and Lawrence were both at Porthminster — wish I'd thought of that."

"Shall I talk to them for you, Father?"

"By George, if you would, Dinny! I hate pushing our affairs."

"Yes, dear. It's a woman's job, isn't it?"

The General looked at his daughter dubiously — he never quite knew when she was serious.

"Here's Hubert," said Dinny, quickly.

❦

Chapter 3

Hubert Cherrell, followed by a spaniel dog and carrying a gun, was crossing the old grey flagstones of the terrace. Rather over middle height, lean and erect, with a head not very large and a face weathered and seamed for so young a man, he wore a little darkish moustache cut just to the edge of his lips, which were thin and sensitive, and hair with already a touch of grey at the sides. His browned cheeks were thin too, but with rather high cheek-bones, and his eyes hazel, quick and glancing, set rather wide apart over a straight thin nose under gabled eyebrows. He was, in fact, a younger edition of his father. A man of action, forced into a state of thought, is unhappy until he can get out of it; and, ever since his late leader had launched that attack on his conduct, he had chafed, conscious of having acted rightly, or rather, in accordance with necessity. And he chafed the more because his training and his disposition forbade him giving tongue. A soldier by choice, not accident, he saw his soldiering imperilled, his name as an officer, and even as a gentleman, aspersed, and no way of hitting back at those who had aspersed it. His head seemed to him to be in Chancery for anyone to punch, most galling of experiences to anyone of high spirit. He came in through the French window, leaving dog and gun outside, aware that he was being talked about. He was now constantly interrupting discussions on his position, for in this family the troubles of one were the troubles of all. Having taken a cup of tea from his mother, he remarked that birds were getting wild already, covert was so sparse, and there was silence.

“Well, I’m going to look at my letters,” said the General, and went out followed by his wife.

Left alone with her brother, Dinny hardened her heart, and said:

“Something must be done, Hubert.”

“Don’t worry, old girl; it’s rotten, but there’s nothing one can do.”

“Why don’t you write your own account of what happened, from your diary? I could type it, and Michael will find you a publisher, he knows all those sort of people. We simply can’t sit down under this.”

“I loathe the idea of trotting my private feelings into the open; and it means that or nothing.”

Dinny wrinkled her brows.

“I loathe letting that Yank put his failure on to you. You owe it to the British Army, Hubert.”

“Bad as that? I went as a civilian.”

“Why not publish your diary as it is?”

“That’d be worse. You haven’t seen it.”

“We could expurgate, and embroider, and all that. You see, the Dad feels this.”

“Perhaps you’d better read the thing. It’s full of ‘miserable Starkey.’ When one’s alone like that, one lets oneself go.”

“You can cut out what you like.”

“It’s no end good of you, Dinny.”

Dinny stroked his sleeve.

“What sort of man is this Hallorsen?”

“To be just, he has lots of qualities: hard as nails, plenty of pluck, and no nerves; but it’s Hallorsen first with him all the time. It’s not in him to fail, and when he does, someone else has to stand the racket. According to him, he failed for want of transport: and I was his transport officer. But if he’d left the Angel Gabriel as he left me, he’d have done no better. He just miscalculated, and won’t admit it. You’ll find it all in my diary.”

“Have you seen this?” She held up a newspaper cutting, and read:

“‘We understand that action will be taken by Captain Charwell, D.S.O., to vindicate his honour in face of the statements made in Professor Hallorsen’s book on his Bolivian Expedition, the failure of which he attributed to Captain Charwell’s failure to support him at the critical moment.’ Someone’s trying to get a dog-fight out of it, you see.”

“Where was that?”

“In the Evening Sun.”

“Steps!” said Hubert bitterly; “what steps? I’ve nothing but my word, he took care of that when he left me alone with all those dagoes.”

“It’s the diary then, or nothing.”

“I’ll get you the damned thing . . . .”

That night Dinny sat at her window reading ‘the damned thing.’ A full moon rode between the elm trees and there was silence as of the grave. Just one sheep-bell tinkled from a fold on the rise; just one magnolia flower bloomed close to her window. All seemed unearthly, and now and then she stopped reading to gaze at the unreality. So had some ten thousand full moons ridden since her forebears received this patch of ground; the changeless security of so old a home heightened the lonely discomfort, the tribulation in the pages she was reading. Stark notes about stark things — one white man among a crew of half-caste savages, one animal-lover among half-starved animals and such men as knew not compassion. And with that cold and settled loveliness out there to look upon, she read and grew hot and miserable.

“That lousy brute Castro has been digging his infernal knife into the mules again. The poor brutes are thin as rails, and haven’t half their strength. Warned him for the last time. If he does it again, he’ll get the lash. . . . Had fever.”

“Castro got it good and strong this morning — a dozen; we’ll see if that will stop him. Can’t get on with these brutes; they don’t seem human. Oh! for a day on a horse at Condaford and forget these swamps and poor ghastly skeletons of mules . . .”

“Had to flog another of these brutes — their treatment of the mules is simply devilish, blast them! . . . Fever again . . .”

“Hell and Tommy to pay — had mutiny this morning. They laid for me. Luckily Manuel had warned me — he’s a good boy. As it was, Castro nearly had his knife through my gizzard. Got my left arm badly. Shot him with my own hand. Now perhaps they’ll toe the mark. Nothing from Hallorsen. How much longer does he expect me to hold on in this dump of hell? My arm is giving me proper gee-up . . . .”

“The lid is on at last, those devils stampeded the mules in the dark while I was asleep, and cleared out. Manuel and two other boys are all that’s left. We trailed them a long way — came on the carcases of two mules, that’s all; the beggars have dispersed and you might as well look for a star in the Milky Way. Got back to camp dead beat. . . . Whether we shall ever get out of this alive, goodness knows. My arm very painful, hope it doesn’t mean blood-poisoning . . .”

“Meant to trek today as best we could. Set up a pile of stones and left despatch for Hallorsen, telling him the whole story in case he ever does send back for me; then changed my mind. I shall stick it out here till he comes or till we’re dead, which is on the whole more likely . . .”

And so on through a tale of struggle to the end. Dinny laid down the dim and yellowed record and leaned her elbow on the sill. The silence and the coldness of the light out there had chilled her spirit. She no longer felt in fighting mood. Hubert was right. Why show one’s naked soul, one’s sore finger, to the public? No! Better anything than that. Private strings — yes, they should be pulled; and she would pull them for all she was worth.

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CHAPTER 4

Adrian Cherrell was one of those confirmed countrymen who live in towns. His job confined him to London, where he presided over a collection of anthropological remains. He was poring over a maxilla from New Guinea, which had been accorded a very fine reception in the Press, and had just said to himself: 'The thing's a phlizz. Just a low type of Homo Sapiens,' when his janitor announced:

"Young lady to see you, sir — Miss Cherrell, I think."

"Ask her in, James"; and he thought: 'If that's Dinny, where did I put my wits?'

"Oh! Dinny! Canrobert says that this maxilla is pre-Trinil. Mokley says Paulo-post-Piltdown; and Eldon P. Burbank says propter Rhodesian. I say Sapiens; observe that molar."

"I do, Uncle Adrian."

"Too human altogether. That man had toothache. Toothache was probably the result of artistic development. Altamiran art and Cromagnon cavities are found together. Homo Sapiens, this chap."

"No toothache without wisdom — how cheery! I've come up to see Uncle Hilary and Uncle Lawrence, but I thought if I had lunch with you first, I should feel stronger."

"We shall," said Adrian, "therefore go to the Bulgarian café."

"Why?"

"Because for the moment we shall get good food there. It's the latest propaganda restaurant, my dear, so we are probably safe at a moderate price. Do you want to powder your nose?"

"Yes."

"In here, then."

While she was gone Adrian stood and stroked his goatee and wondered exactly what he could order for eighteen and sixpence; for, being a public servant without private means, he rarely had more than a pound in his pocket.

"What," said Dinny, when they were seated before an omelette Bulgarienne, "do you know about Professor Hallorsen, Uncle Adrian?"

"The man who set out to discover the sources of civilisation in Bolivia?"

"Yes; and took Hubert with him."

"Ah! But left him behind, I gather?"

"Did you ever meet him?"

"I did. I met him in 1920, climbing the 'Little Sinner' in the Dolomites."

"Did you like him?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Well, he was so aggressively young, he beat me to the top, and — he reminded me of baseball. Did you ever see baseball played?"

"No."

"I saw it once in Washington. You insult your opponent so as to shake his nerve. You call him doughboy and attaboy, and President Wilson and Old Man Ribber, and things like that, just when he's going to hit the ball. It's ritual. The point is to win at any cost."

"Don't you believe in winning at any cost?"

"Nobody says they do, Dinny."

"And we all try to when it comes to the point?"

"I have known it occur, even with politicians, Dinny."

"Would you try to win at any cost, Uncle?"

“Probably.”

“You wouldn’t. I should.”

“You are very kind, my dear; but why this local disparagement?”

“Because I feel as bloodthirsty as a mosquito about Hubert’s case. I spent last night reading his diary.”

“Woman,” said Adrian, slowly, “has not yet lost her divine irresponsibility.”

“Do you think we’re in danger of losing it?”

“No, because whatever your sex may say, you never will annihilate man’s innate sense of leading you about.”

“What is the best way to annihilate a man like Hallorsen, Uncle Adrian?”

“Apart from a club, ridicule.”

“His notion about Bolivian civilisation was absurd, I suppose?”

“Wholly. There are, we know, some curious and unexplained stone monsters up there, but his theory, if I understand it, won’t wash at all. Only, my dear, Hubert would appear to be involved in it.”

“Not scientifically; he just went as transport officer.” And Dinny levelled a smile at her Uncle’s eyes. “It wouldn’t do any harm, would it, to hold up a stunt like that to ridicule? You could do it so beautifully, Uncle.”

“Serpent!”

“But isn’t it the duty of serious scientists to ridicule stunts?”

“If Hallorsen were an Englishman — perhaps; but his being an American brings in other considerations.”

“Why? I thought Science paid no regard to frontiers.”

“In theory. In practice we close the other eye. Americans are very touchy. You remember a certain recent attitude towards Evolution; if we had let out our shout of laughter over that, there might almost have been a war.”

“But most Americans laughed at it too.”

“Yes; but they won’t stand for outsiders laughing at their kith and kin. Have some of this soufflé Sofia?”

They ate in silence, each studying sympathetically the other’s face. Dinny was thinking: ‘I love his wrinkles, and it’s a nice little beard for a beard.’ Adrian was thinking: ‘I’m glad her nose turns up a little. I have very engaging nieces and nephews.’ At last she said:

“Well, Uncle Adrian, will you try and think of any way of strafing that man for the scurvy way he’s treated Hubert?”

“Where is he?”

“Hubert says in the States.”

“Have you considered, my dear, that nepotism is undesirable?”

“So is injustice, Uncle; and blood is thicker than water.”

“And this wine,” said Adrian, with a grimace, “is thicker than either. What are you going to see Hilary about?”

“I want to scrounge an introduction to Lord Saxenden.”

“Why?”

“Father says he’s important.”

“So you are out to ‘pull strings,’ as they say?”

Dinny nodded.

“No sensitive and honest person can pull strings successfully, Dinny.”

Her eyebrows twitched and her teeth, very white and even, appeared in a broad smile.

“But I’m neither, dear.”

“We shall see. In the meantime these cigarettes are really tiptop propaganda. Have one?”

Dinny took a cigarette, and, with a long puff, said:

“You saw great-Uncle ‘Cuffs’, didn’t you, Uncle Adrian?”

“Yes. A dignified departure. He died in amber, as you might say. Wasted on the Church; he was the perfect diplomat, was Uncle ‘Cuffs.’”

“I only saw him twice. But do you mean to say that HE couldn’t get what he wanted, without loss of dignity, by pulling strings?”

“It wasn’t exactly pulling strings with him, my dear; it was suavity and power of personality.”

“Manners?”

“Manner — the Grand; it about died with him.”

“Well, Uncle, I must be going; wish me dishonesty and a thick skin.”

“And I,” said Adrian, “will return to the jawbone of the New Guinean with which I hope to smite my learned brethren. If I can help Hubert in any decent way, I will. At all events I’ll think about it. Give him my love, and good-bye, my dear!”

They parted, and Adrian went back to his museum. Regaining his position above the maxilla, he thought of a very different jawbone. Having reached an age when the blood of spare men with moderate habits has an even-tempered flow, his ‘infatuation’ with Diana Ferse, dating back to years before her fatal marriage, had a certain quality of altruism. He desired her happiness before his own. In his almost continual thoughts about her the consideration ‘What’s best for her?’ was ever foremost. He had done without her for so long that importunity (never in his character) was out of the question where she was concerned. But her face, oval and dark-eyed, delicious in lip and nose, and a little sad in repose, constantly blurred the outlines of maxillae, thighbones, and the other interesting phenomena of his job. She and her two children lived in a small Chelsea house on the income of a husband who for four years had been a patient in a private Mental Home, and was never expected to recover his equilibrium. She was nearly forty, and had been through dreadful times before Ferse had definitely toppled over the edge. Of the old school in thought and manner, and trained to a coherent view of human history, Adrian accepted life with half-humorous fatalism. He was not of the reforming type, and the position of his lady love did not inspire him with a desire for the scalp of marriage. He wanted her to be happy, but did not see how in the existing circumstances he could make her so. She had at least peace and the sufficient income of him who had been smitten by Fate. Moreover, Adrian had something of the superstitious regard felt by primitive men for those afflicted with this particular form of misfortune. Ferse had been a decent fellow till the taint began to wear through the coatings of health and education, and his conduct for the two years before his eclipse was only too liberally explained by that eclipse. He was one of God’s afflicted; and his helplessness demanded of one the utmost scrupulosity. Adrian turned from the maxilla and took down a built-up cast of Pithecanthropus, that curious being from Trinil, Java, who for so long has divided opinion as to whether he shall be called man-ape or ape-man. What a distance from him to that modern English skull over the mantelpiece! Ransack the authorities as one might, one never received an answer to the question: Where was the cradle of Homo Sapiens, the nest where he had developed from Trinil, Piltdown, Neanderthal man, or from some other undiscovered collateral of those creatures? If Adrian had a passion, indeed, except for Diana Ferse, it was a burning desire to fix that breeding spot. They were toying now with the idea of descent from Neanderthal man, but he felt it wouldn’t do. When specialisation had reached a stage so definite as that disclosed by those brutish specimens, it did not swerve to type so different. As well expect development of red-deer from elk! He turned to that huge globe whereon were marked all discoveries of moment concerning the origin of modern Man, annotated in his own neat handwriting with notes on geological changes, time and climate. Where — where to look? It was a detective problem, soluble only in the French fashion by instinctive appreciation of the inherently probable locality, ratified by research at the selected spot — the greatest detective problem in the world. The foothills of the Himalayas, the Fayoum, or somewhere now submerged beneath the sea? If, indeed, it were under the sea, then it would never be established to certainty. Academic — the whole thing? Not quite, for with it was conjoined the question of man’s essence, the real primitive nature of the human being, on which social philosophy might and should be founded — a question nicely revived of late: Whether, indeed, man was fundamentally decent and peaceful, as examination into the lives of animals and some so-called savage peoples seemed to suggest, or fundamentally aggressive and restless, as that lugubrious record, History, seemed to assert? Find the breeding nest of Homo Sapiens, and there would emerge perhaps some evidence to decide whether he was devil-angel or angel-devil. To one with Adrian’s instincts there was great attraction in this revived thesis of the inherent gentleness of man, but his habit of mind refused to subscribe easily or wholesale to any kind of thesis. Even gentle beasts and birds lived by the law of self-preservation; so did primitive man; the devilries of sophisticated man began naturally with the extension of his activities and the increase of his competitions — in other words, with the ramifications of self-preservation induced by so-called civilised life. The uncomplicated existence of uncivilised man might well afford less chance to the instinct of self-preservation to be sinister in its manifestations, but you could hardly argue anything from that. Better to accept modern man as he was and try to curb his opportunities for mischief. Nor would it do to bank too much on the natural gentleness of primitive peoples. Only last night he had read of an elephant hunt in Central Africa, wherein the primitive negroes, men and women, who were beating for the white hunters, had fallen upon the carcasses of the slain elephants, torn them limb from limb, flesh from flesh, eaten it all dripping and raw, then vanished into the woods, couple by couple, to complete their orgy. After all, there was something in civilisation! But at this moment his janitor announced:

"A Professor 'Allorsen to see you, sir. He wants to look at the Peruvian skulls."

"Hallorsen!" said Adrian, startled. "Are you sure? I thought he was in America, James."

"'Allorsen was the name, sir; tall gentleman, speaks like an American. Here's his card."

"H'm! I'll see him, James." And he thought: 'Shade of Dinny! What am I going to say?'

The very tall and very good-looking man who entered seemed about thirty-eight years old. His clean-shaven face was full of health, his eyes full of light, his dark hair had a fleck or two of premature grey in it. A breeze seemed to come in with him. He spoke at once:

"Mr. Curator?"

Adrian bowed.

"Why! Surely we've met; up a mountain, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Adrian.

"Well, well! My name's Hallorsen — Bolivian expedition. I'm told your Peruvian skulls are bully. I brought my little Bolivian lot along; thought I'd like to compare them with your Peruvians right here. There's such a lot of bunk written about skulls by people who haven't seen the originals."

"Very true, Professor. I shall be delighted to see your Bolivians. By the way, you never knew my name, I think. This is it."

Adrian handed him a card. Hallorsen took it.

"Gee! Are you related to the Captain Charwell who's got his knife into me?"

"His uncle. But I was under the impression that it was your knife that was into him."

"Well, he let me down."

"I understand he thinks you let him down."

"See here, Mr. Charwell —"

"We pronounce the name Cherrell, if you don't mind."

"Cherrell — yes, I remember now. But if you hire a man to do a job, Mr. Curator, and that job's too much for him, and because it's too much for him you get left, what do you do — pass him a gold medal?"

"You find out, I think, whether the job you hired him to do was humanly possible, before you take out your knife, anyway."

"That's up to the man who takes the job. And what was it? Just to keep a tight rein on a few dagoes."

"I don't know very much about it, but I understand he had charge of the transport animals as well."

"He surely did; and let the whole thing slip out of his hand. Well, I don't expect you to side against your nephew. But can I see your Peruvians?"

"Certainly."

"That's nice of you."

During the mutual inspection which followed Adrian frequently glanced at the magnificent specimen of Homo Sapiens who stood beside him. A man so overflowing with health and life he had seldom seen. Natural enough that any check should gall him. Sheer vitality would prevent him from seeing the other side of things. Like his nation, matters must move his way, because there was no other way that seemed possible to his superabundance.

'After all,' he thought, 'he can't help being God's own specimen — Homo transatlanticus superbus'; and he said slyly: "So the sun is going to travel West to East in future, Professor?"

Hallorsen smiled, and his smile had an exuberant sweetness.

"Well, Mr. Curator, we're agreed, I guess, that civilisation started with agriculture. If we can show that we raised Indian corn on the American continent way back, maybe thousands of years before the old Nile civilisation of barley and wheat, why shouldn't the stream be the other way?"

"And can you?"

"Why, we have twenty to twenty-five types of Indian corn. Hrwdlicka claims that some twenty thousand years was necessary to differentiate them. That puts us way ahead as the parents of agriculture, anyway."

"But alas! no type of Indian corn existed in the old world till after the discovery of America."

"No, sir; nor did any old-world type cereal exist in America till after that. Now, if the old-world culture seeped its way across the Pacific, why didn't it bring along its cereals?"

"But that doesn't make America the light-bringer to the rest of the world, does it?"

"Maybe not; but if not, she just developed her own old civilisations out of her own discovery of cereals; and they were the first."

"Are you an Atlantean, Professor?"

"I sometimes toy with the idea, Mr. Curator."

"Well, well! May I ask if you are quite happy about your attack on my nephew?"

"Why, I certainly had a sore head when I wrote it. Your nephew and I didn't click."

"That, I should think, might make you all the more doubtful as to whether you were just."

"If I withdrew my criticism, I wouldn't be saying what I really thought."

"You are convinced that you had no hand in your failure to reach your objective?"

The frown on the giant's brow had a puzzled quality, and Adrian thought: 'An honest man, anyway.'

"I don't see what you're getting at," said Hallorsen, slowly,

"You chose my nephew, I believe?"

"Yes, out of twenty others."

"Precisely. You chose the wrong man, then?"

"I surely did."

"Bad judgment?"

Hallorsen laughed.

"That's very acute, Mr. Curator. But I'm not the man to advertise my own failings."

"What you wanted," said Adrian, dryly, "was a man without the bowels of compassion; well, I admit, you didn't get him."

Hallorsen flushed.

"We shan't agree about this, sir. I'll just take my little lot of skulls away. And I thank you for your courtesy."

A few minutes later he was gone.

Adrian was left to tangled meditation. The fellow was better than he had remembered. Physically a splendid specimen, mentally not to be despised, spiritually — well, typical of a new world where each immediate objective was the most important thing on earth till it was attained, and attainment more important than the methods of attainment employed. 'Pity,' he thought, 'if there's going to be a dog-fight. Still, the fellow's in the wrong; one ought to be more charitable than to attack like that in public print. Too much ego in friend Hallorsen.' So thinking, he put the maxilla into a drawer.

❦

Chapter 5

Dinny pursued her way towards St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads. On that fine day the poverty of the district she was entering seemed to her country-nurtured eyes intensely cheerless. She was the more surprised by the hilarity of the children playing in the streets. Asking one of them the way to the Vicarage, she was escorted by five. They did not leave her when she rang the bell, and she was forced to conclude that they were actuated by motives not entirely connected with altruism. They attempted, indeed, to go in with her, and only left when she gave them each a penny. She was ushered into a pleasant room which looked as though it would be glad if someone had the time to enter it some day, and was contemplating a reproduction of the Castelfranco Francesca, when a voice said:

"Dinny!" and she saw her Aunt May. Mrs. Hilary Cherrell had her usual air of surmounting the need for being in three places at once; she looked leisurely, detached, and pleased — not unnaturally, for she liked her niece.

"Up for shopping, dear?"

"No, Aunt May, I've come to win an introduction off Uncle Hilary."

"Your Uncle's in the Police Court."

A bubble rose to Dinny's surface.

"Why, what's he done, Aunt May?"

Mrs. Hilary smiled.

"Nothing at present, but I won't answer for him if the magistrate isn't sensible. One of our young women has been charged with accosting."

"Not Uncle Hilary?"

"No, dear, hardly that. Your uncle is a witness to her character."

"And is there really a character to witness to, Aunt May?"

"Well, that's the point. Hilary says so; but I'm not so sure."

"Men are very trustful. I've never been in a Police Court. I should love to go and catch Uncle there."

"Well, I'm going in that direction. We might go together as far as the Court."

Five minutes later they issued, and proceeded by way of streets ever more arresting to the eyes of Dinny, accustomed only to the picturesque poverty of the countryside.

"I never quite realised before," she said, suddenly, "that London was such a bad dream."

"From which there is no awakening. That's the chilling part of it. Why on earth, with all this unemployment, don't they organise a national Slum Clearance Scheme? It would pay for itself within twenty years. Politicians are marvels of energy and principle when they're out of office, but when they get in, they simply run behind the machine."

"They're not women, you see, Auntie."

"Are you chaffing, Dinny?"

"Oh! no. Women haven't the sense of difficulty that men have; women's difficulties are physical and real, men's difficulties are mental and formal, they always say: 'It'll never do!' Women never say that. They act, and find out whether it will do or not."

Mrs. Hilary was silent a moment.

"I suppose women ARE more actual; they have a fresher eye, and less sense of responsibility."

"I wouldn't be a man for anything."

"That's refreshing; but on the whole they get a better time, my dear, even now."

"They think so, but I doubt it. Men are awfully like ostriches, it seems to me. They can refuse to see what they don't want to, better than we can; but I don't think that's an advantage."

"If you lived in the Meads, Dinny, you might."

"If I lived in the Meads, dear, I should die."

Mrs. Hilary contemplated her niece by marriage. Certainly she looked a little transparent and as if she could be snapped off, but she also had a look of 'breeding,' as if her flesh were dominated by her spirit. She might be unexpectedly durable, and impermeable by outside things.

"I'm not so sure, Dinny; yours is a toughened breed. But for that your uncle would have been dead long ago. Well! Here's the Police Court. I'm sorry I can't spare time to come in. But everybody will be nice to you. It's a very human place, if somewhat indelicate. Be a little careful about your next-door neighbours."

Dinny raised an eyebrow: "Lousy, Aunt May?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say not. Come back to tea, if you can."

She was gone.

The exchange and mart of human indelicacy was crowded, for with the infallible flair of the Public for anything dramatic, the case in which Hilary was a witness to character had caught on, since it involved the integrity of the Police. Its second remand was in progress when Dinny took the last remaining fifteen square inches of standing room. Her neighbours on the right reminded her of the nursery rhyme: 'The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker.' Her neighbour on the left was a tall policeman. Many women were among the throng at the back of the Court. The air was close and smelled of clothes. Dinny looked at the magistrate, ascetic and as if pickled, and wondered why he did not have incense fuming on his desk. Her eyes passed on to the figure in the dock, a girl of about her own age and height, neatly dressed, with good features except that her mouth was perhaps more sensuous than was fortunate for one in her position. Dinny estimated that her hair was probably fair. She stood very still, with a slight fixed flush on her pale cheeks, and a frightened restlessness in her eyes. Her name appeared to be Millicent Pole. Dinny gathered that she was alleged by a police constable to have accosted two men in the Euston Road, neither of whom had appeared to give evidence. In the witness-box a young man who resembled a tobacconist was testifying that he had seen the girl pass twice or three times — had noticed her specially as a 'nice bit'; she had seemed worried, as if looking for something.

For somebody, did he mean?

That or the other, how should he know? No, she wasn't looking on the pavement; no, she didn't stop, she passed HIM, anyway, without a look. Had he spoken to her? No fear! Doing? Oh, he was just outside his shop for a breath of air after closing. Did he see her speak to anyone? No, he didn't, but he wasn't there long.

"The Reverend Hilary Charwell."

Dinny saw her uncle rise from a bench and step up under the canopy of the witness box. He looked active and unclerical, and her eyes rested with pleasure on his long firm face, so wrinkled and humorous.

"Your name is Hilary Charwell?"

"Cherrell, if you don't mind."

"Quite. And you are the incumbent of St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads?"

Hilary bowed.

"For how long?"

"Thirteen years."

"You are acquainted with the defendant?"

"Since she was a child."

"Tell us, please, Mr. Cherrell, what you know of her?"

Dinny saw her uncle turn more definitely to the magistrate.

"Her father and mother, sir, were people for whom I had every respect; they brought up their children well. He was a shoemaker — poor, of course; we're all poor in my parish. I might almost say they died of poverty five and six years ago, and their two daughters have been more or less under my eye since. They work at Petter and Poplin's. I've never heard anything against Millicent here. So far as I know, she's a good honest girl."

"I take it, Mr. Cherrell, your opportunities of judging of her are not very great?"

"Well, I visit the house in which she lodges with her sister. If you saw it, sir, you would agree that it requires some self-respect to deal as well as they do with the conditions there."

"Is she a member of your congregation?"

A smile came on her uncle's lips, and was reflected on the magistrate's.

"Hardly, sir. Their Sundays are too precious to young people nowadays. But Millicent is one of the girls who goes for her holidays to our Rest House near Dorking. They are always very good girls down there. My niece by marriage, Mrs. Michael Mont, who runs the house, has reported well of her. Shall I read what she says?

"'DEAR UNCLE HILARY,

"'You ask about Millicent Pole. She has been down three times, and the matron reports that she is a nice girl and not at all flighty. My own impression of her is the same.'"

"Then it comes to this, Mr. Cherrell: in your view a mistake has been made in this case?"

"Yes, sir; I am convinced of it."

The girl in the dock put her handkerchief to her eyes. And Dinny felt, suddenly, indignant at the extreme wretchedness of her position. To stand there before all those people, even if she had done as they said! And why shouldn't a girl ask a man for his companionship? He wasn't obliged to give it.

The tall policeman stirred, looked down at her, as if scenting unorthodoxy, and cleared his throat.

"Thank you, Mr. Cherrell."

Hilary stepped out of the witness box and in doing so caught sight of his niece and waved a finger. Dinny became aware that the case was over, the magistrate making up his mind. He sat perfectly silent, pressing his finger-tips together and staring at the girl, who had finished mopping her eyes and was staring back at him. Dinny held her breath. On the next minute — a life, perhaps, hung in the balance! The tall policeman changed his feet. Was his sympathy with his fellow in the force, or with that girl? All the little noises in the Court had ceased, the only sound was the scratching of a pen. The magistrate held his finger-tips apart and spoke:

"I am not satisfied that this case has been made out. The defendant will be dismissed. You may go."

The girl made a little choking sound. To her right the candlestick-maker uttered a hoarse: "'Ear! 'ear!"

"'Ush!" said the tall policeman. Dinny saw her uncle walking out beside the girl; he smiled as he passed.

"Wait for me, Dinny — shan't be two minutes!"

Slipping out behind the tall policeman, Dinny waited in the lobby. The nature of things around gave her the shuddery feeling one had turning up the light in a kitchen at night; the scent of Condy's Fluid assailed her nostrils; she moved nearer to the outer door. A police sergeant said:

"Anything I can do for you, Miss?"

"Thank you, I'm waiting for my uncle; he's just coming."

"The reverend gentleman?"

Dinny nodded.

"Ah! He's a good man, is the Vicar. That girl got off?"

"Yes."

"Well! Mistakes will 'appen. Here he is, Miss."

Hilary came up and put his arm through Dinny's.

"Ah! Sergeant," he said, "how's the Missis?"

"Prime, Sir. So you pulled her out of it?"

"Yes," said Hilary; "and I want a pipe. Come along, Dinny." And, nodding to the sergeant, he led her into the air.

"What brought YOU into this galley, Dinny?"

"I came after you, Uncle. Aunt May brought me. Did that girl really not do it?"

"Ask me another. But to convict her was the surest way to send her to hell. She's behind with her rent, and her sister's ill. Hold on a minute while I light up." He emitted a cloud of smoke and resumed her arm. "What do you want of me, my dear?"

"An introduction to Lord Saxenden."

"Snubby Bantham? Why?"

“Because of Hubert.”

“Oh! Going to vamp him?”

“If you’ll bring us together.”

“I was at Harrow with Snubby, he was only a baronet then — I haven’t seen him since.”

“But you’ve got Wilfred Bentworth in your pocket, Uncle, and their estates march.”

“Well, I daresay Bentworth will give me a note to him for you.”

“That’s not what I want. I want to meet him socially.”

“Um! Yes, you can hardly vamp him without. What’s the point, exactly?”

“Hubert’s future. We want to get at the fountain-head before worse befalls.”

“I see. But look here, Dinny, Lawrence is your man. He has Bentworth going to them at Lippinghall on Tuesday next week, for partridge driving. You could go too.”

“I thought of Uncle Lawrence, but I couldn’t miss the chance of seeing you, Uncle.”

“My dear,” said Hilary, “attractive nymphs mustn’t say things like that. They go to the head. Well, here we are! Come in and have tea.”

In the drawing room of the Vicarage Dinny was startled to see again her Uncle Adrian. He was sitting in a corner with his long legs drawn in, surrounded by two young women who looked like teachers. He waved his spoon, and presently came over to her.

“After we parted, Dinny, who should appear but the man of wrath himself, to see my Peruvians.”

“Not Hallorsen?”

Adrian held out a card: ‘Professor Edward Hallorsen,’ and in pencil, ‘Piedmont Hotel.’

“He’s a much more personable bloke than I thought when I met him husky and bearded in the Dolomites; and I should say he’s no bad chap if taken the right way. And what I was going to say to you was: Why not take him the right way?”

“You haven’t read Hubert’s diary, Uncle.”

“I should like to.”

“You probably will. It may be published.”

Adrian whistled faintly.

“Perpend, my dear. Dog-fighting is excellent for all except the dogs.”

“Hallorsen’s had his innings. It’s Hubert’s turn to bat.”

“Well, Dinny — no harm in having a look at the bowling before he goes in. Let me arrange a little dinner. Diana Ferse will have us at her house, and you can stay the night with her for it. So what about Monday?”

Dinny wrinkled her rather tip-tilted nose. If, as she intended, she went to Lippinghall next week, Monday WOULD be handy. It might, after all, be as well to see this American before declaring war on him.

“All right, Uncle, and thank you very much. If you’re going West may I come with you? I want to see Aunt Emily and Uncle Lawrence. Mount Street’s on your way home.”

“Right! When you’ve had your fill, we’ll start.”

“I’m quite full,” said Dinny, and got up.

❦

Chapter 6

Her luck held, and she flushed her third Uncle contemplating his own house in Mount Street, as if he were about to make an offer for it.

"Ah! Dinny, come along; your Aunt's moulting, and she'll be glad to see you. I miss old Forsyte," he added in the hall. "I was just considering what I ought to ask for this house if we let it next season. You didn't know old Forsyte — Fleur's father: he was a character."

"What is the matter with Aunt Em, Uncle Lawrence?"

"Nothing, my dear. I think the sight of poor old Uncle 'Cuffs' has made her dwell on the future. Ever dwell on the future, Dinny? It's a dismal period, after a certain age."

He opened a door.

"My dear, here's Dinny."

Emily, Lady Mont, was standing in her panelled drawing-room flicking a feather brush over a bit of Famille Verte, with her parakeet perched on her shoulder. She lowered the brush, advanced with a far-away look in her eyes, said "Mind, Polly," and kissed her niece. The parakeet transferred itself to Dinny's shoulder and bent its head round enquiringly to look in her face.

"He's such a dear," said Lady Mont; "you won't mind if he tweaks your ear? I'm so glad you came, Dinny; I've been so thinking of funerals. Do tell me your idea about the hereafter."

"Is there one, Auntie?"

"Dinny! That's so depressing."

"Perhaps those who want one have it."

"You're like Michael. He's so mental. Where did you pick Dinny up, Lawrence?"

"In the street."

"That sounds improper. How is your father, Dinny? I hope he isn't any the worse for that dreadful house at Porthminster. It did so smell of preserved mice."

"We're all very worried about Hubert, Aunt Em."

"Ah! Hubert, yes. You know, I think he made a mistake to flog those men. Shootin' them one can quite understand, but floggin' is so physical and like the old Duke."

"Don't you feel inclined to flog carters when they lash overloaded horses up-hill, Auntie?"

"Yes, I do. Was that what they were doin'?"

"Practically, only worse. They used to twist the mules' tails and stick their knives into them, and generally play hell with the poor brutes."

"Did they? I'm so glad he flogged them; though I've never liked mules ever since we went up the Gemmi. Do you remember, Lawrence?"

Sir Lawrence nodded. On his face was the look, affectionate but quizzical, which Dinny always connected with Aunt Em.

"Why, Auntie?"

"They rolled on me; not they exactly, but the one I was ridin'. They tell me it's the only time a mule has ever rolled on anybody — surefooted."

"Dreadful taste, Auntie!"

"Yes; and most unpleasant — so internal. Do you think Hubert would like to come and shoot partridges at Lippinghall next week?'

"I don't think you could get Hubert to go anywhere just now. He's got a terrible hump. But if you have a cubby-hole left for me, could *I* come?"

"Of course. There'll be plenty of room. Let's see: just Charlie Muskham and his new wife, Mr. Bentworth and Hen, Michael and Fleur, and Diana Ferse, and perhaps Adrian because he doesn't shoot, and your Aunt Wilmet. Oh! ah! And Lord Saxenden."

"What!" cried Dinny.

"Why? Isn't he respectable?"

"But, Auntie — that's perfect! He's my objective."

"What a dreadful word; I never heard it called that before. Besides, there's a Lady Saxenden, on her back somewhere."

"No, no, Aunt Em. I want to get at him about Hubert. Father says he's the nod."

"Dinny, you and Michael use the oddest expressions. What nod?"

Sir Lawrence broke the petrified silence he usually observed in the presence of his wife.

"Dinny means, my dear, that Saxenden is a big noise behind the scenes in military matters."

"What is he like, Uncle Lawrence?"

"Snubby? I've known him many years — quite a lad."

"This is very agitatin'," said Lady Mont, resuming the parakeet.

"Dear Auntie, I'm quite safe."

"But is Lord — er — Snubby? I've always tried to keep Lippin'hall respectable. I'm very doubtful about Adrian as it is, but"— she placed the parakeet on the mantelpiece —"he's my favourite brother. For a favourite brother one does things."

"One does," said Dinny.

"That'll be all right, Em," put in Sir Lawrence. "I'll watch over Dinny and Diana, and you can watch over Adrian and Snubby."

"Your uncle gets more frivolous every year, Dinny; he tells me the most dreadful stories." She stood still alongside Sir Lawrence and he put his hand through her arm.

Dinny thought: 'The Red King and the White Queen.'

"Well, good-bye, Dinny," said her Aunt, suddenly; "I have to go to bed. My Swedish masseuse is takin' me off three times a week. I really am reducin'." Her eyes roved over Dinny: "I wonder if she could put you on a bit!"

"I'm fatter than I look, Auntie."

"So am I— it's distressin'. If your uncle wasn't a hop-pole I shouldn't mind so much." She inclined her cheek, and Dinny gave it a smacking kiss.

"What a nice kiss!" said Lady Mont. "I haven't had a kiss like that for years. People do peck so! Come, Polly!" and, with the parakeet upon her shoulder, she swayed away.

"Aunt Em looks awfully well."

"She is, my dear. It's her mania — getting stout; she fights it tooth and nail. We live on the most variegated cookery. It's better at Lippinghall, because Augustine leads us by the nose, and she's as French as she was thirty-five years ago when we brought her back from our honeymoon. Cooks like a bird, still. Fortunately nothing makes me fat."

"Aunt Em isn't fat."

"M-no."

"And she carries herself beautifully. We don't carry ourselves like that."

"Carriage went out with Edward," said Sir Lawrence; "it was succeeded by the lope. All you young women lope as if you were about to spring on to something and make a get-away. I've been trying to foresee what will come next. Logically it should be the bound, but it may quite well revert and be the languish."

"What sort of man is Lord Saxenden, really, Uncle Lawrence?"

"One of those who won the war by never having his opinion taken. You know the sort of thing: 'Went down for week-end to Cooquers. The Capers were there, and Gwen Blandish; she was in force and had much to say about the Polish front. I had more. Talked with Capers; he thinks the Boches have had enough. I disagreed with him; he is very down on Lord T. Arthur Prose came over on Sunday; he estimates that the Russians now have two million rifles but no bullets. The war, he says, will be over by January. He is appalled by our losses. If he only knew what I know! Lady Thripp was there with her son, who has lost his left foot. She is most engaging; promised to go and see her hospital and tell her how to run it. Very pleasant dinner on Sunday — everybody in great form; we played at comfits. Alick came in after; he says we lost forty thousand men in the last attack, but the French lost more. I expressed the opinion that it was very serious. No one took it.'"

Dinny laughed. "Were there such people?"

"Were there not, my dear! Most valuable fellows; what we should have done without them — the way they kept their ends up and their courage and their conversation — the thing had to be seen to be believed. And almost all of them won the war. Saxenden was especially responsible. He had an active job all the time."

"What job?"

"Being in the know. He was probably more in the know than anybody else on earth, judging by what he says. Remarkable constitution, too, and lets you see it: great yachtsman."

"I shall look forward to him."

"Snubby," sighed her uncle, "is one of those persons at whom it is better to look back. Would you like to stay the night, Dinny, or are you going home?"

"Oh, I must go back to-night. My train's at eight from Paddington."

"In that case I'll lope you across the Park, give you a snack at Paddington, and put you into the train."

"Oh! don't bother about me, Uncle Lawrence."

"Let you cross the Park without me, and miss the chance of being arrested for walking with a young female! Never! We might even sit, and try our luck. You're just the type that gets the aged into trouble. There's something Botticellian about you, Dinny. Come along."

It was seven o'clock of the September evening when they debouched into Hyde Park, and, passing under the plane trees, walked on its withered grass.

"Too early," said Sir Lawrence, "owing to Daylight Saving. Indecorum isn't billed till eight. I doubt if it will be any use to sit, Dinny. Can you tell a disguised copper when you see him? It's very necessary. The bowler hat — for fear of being hit on the head too suddenly; they always fall off in books; tendency to look as if he weren't a copper; touch of efficiency about the mouth — they complete their teeth in the force; eyes a trifle on the ground when they're not on you; the main man dwelling a little on both feet, and looking as if he had been measured for something. Boots of course — proverbial."

Dinny gurgled.

"I tell you what we might do, Uncle Lawrence. Stage an accost. There'll be a policeman at the Paddington Gate. I'll loiter a little, and accost you as you come up. What ought I to say?"

Sir Lawrence wrinkled up an eyebrow.

"So far as I can recollect, something like: 'How do, ducky? Your night out?'"

"I'll go on, then, and let that off on you under the policeman's nose."

"He'd see through it, Dinny."

"You're trying to back out."

"Well, no one has taken a proposition of mine seriously for so long. Besides, 'Life is real, life is earnest, and the end is not the gaol'!"

"I'm disappointed in you, Uncle."

"I'm used to that, my dear. Wait till you're grave and reverend, and see how continually you will disappoint youth."

"But think: we could have whole columns of the newspapers devoted to us for days. 'Paddington Gate accosting incident: Alleged Uncle.' Don't you hanker to be an alleged uncle and supersede the affairs of Europe? Don't you even want to get the Police into trouble? Uncle, it's pusillanimous."

"Soit!" said Sir Lawrence: "One uncle in the Police Court per day is enough. You're more dangerous than I thought, Dinny."

"But, really, why should those girls be arrested? That all belongs to the past, when women WERE under-dogs."

"I am entirely of your way of thinking, Dinny, but the Nonconformist conscience is still with us, and the Police must have something to do. Without adding to unemployment it's impossible to reduce their numbers. And an idle police force is dangerous to cooks."

“Do be serious, Uncle!”

“Not that, my dear! Whatever else life holds for us — not that! But I do foresee the age when we shall all be free to accost each other, limited only by common civility. Instead of the present Vulgate, there will be revised versions for men and women. ‘Madam, will you walk?’ ‘Sir, do you desire my company?’ It will be an age not perhaps of gold, but at least of glitter. This is Paddington Gate. Could you have had the heart to spoof that noble-looking copper? Come along, let’s cross.”

“Your Aunt,” he resumed, as they entered Paddington Station, “won’t rise again, so I’ll dine with you in the buffet. We’ll have a spot of the ‘boy,’ and for the rest, if I know our railway stations, oxtail soup, white fish, roast beef, greens, browned potatoes, and plum tart — all good, if somewhat English.”

“Uncle Lawrence,” said Dinny, when they had reached the roast beef, “what do YOU think of Americans?”

“No patriotic man, Dinny, speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, on that subject. Americans, however, like Englishmen, may be divided into two classes — Americans and Americans. In other words, some are nice and some are nasty.”

“Why don’t we get on better with them?”

“That’s an easy one. The nasty English don’t get on better with them because they have more money than we have. The nice English don’t get on as well as they ought with them, because Americans are so responsive and the tone of the American voice is not pleasing to the English ear. Or take it the other way round. The nasty Americans don’t get on well with the English because the tone of the English voice is unpleasing to them. The nice Americans don’t get on as well with us as they should, because we’re so unresponsive and sniffy.”

“Don’t you think they want to have things their own way too much?”

“So do we. It isn’t that. It’s manner, my dear, that divides us, manner and language.”

“How?”

“Having what used to be the same language is undoubtedly a snare. We must hope for such a development of the American lingo as will necessitate our both learning each other’s.”

“But we always talk about the link of a common tongue.”

“Why this curiosity about Americans?”

“I’m to meet Professor Hallorsen on Monday.”

“The Bolivian bloke. A word of advice then, Dinny: Let him be in the right, and he’ll feed out of your hand. Put him in the wrong, and you’ll not feed out of his.”

“Oh! I mean to keep my temper.”

“Keep your left up, and don’t rush in. Now, if you’ve finished, my dear, we ought to go; it’s five minutes to eight.”

He put her into her carriage and supplied her with an evening paper. As the train moved out, he added:

“Give him the Botticellian eye, Dinny. Give him the Botticellian eye!”

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Chapter 7

Adrian brooded over Chelsea as he approached it on Monday evening. It was not what it used to be. Even in late Victorian days he remembered its inhabitants as somewhat troglodytic — persons inclined to duck their heads, with here and there a high light or historian. Charwomen, artists hoping to pay their rent, writers living on four-and-sevenpence a day, ladies prepared to shed their clothes at a shilling an hour, couples maturing for the Divorce Court, people who liked a draught, together with the worshippers of Turner, Carlyle, Rossetti, and Whistler; some publicans, not a few sinners, and the usual sprinkling of those who eat mutton four times a week. Behind a river façade hardening into the palatial, respectability had gradually thickened, till it was now lapping the incurable King's Road and emerging even there in bastions of Art and Fashion.

Diana's house was in Oakley Street. He could remember it as having no individuality whatever, and inhabited by a family of strict mutton-eaters; but in the six years of Diana's residence it had become one of the charming nests of London. He had known all the pretty Montjoy sisters scattered over Society, but of them all Diana was the youngest, the prettiest, most tasteful, and wittiest — one of those women who, without money to speak of or impeachment of virtue, contrive that all about them shall be elegant to the point of exciting jealousy. From her two children and her Collie dog (almost the only one left in London), from her harpsichord, four-poster, Bristol glass, and the stuff on her chairs and floors, taste always seemed to him to radiate and give comfort to the beholder. She, too, gave comfort, with her still perfect figure, dark eyes clear and quick, oval face, ivory complexion, and little crisp trick of speech. All the Montjoy sisters had that trick, it came from their mother, of Highland stock, and had undoubtedly in the course of thirty years made a considerable effect on the accent of Society, converting it from the g-dropping yaw-yaw of the 'nineties into a rather charming r — and 1-pinching dialect. When he considered why Diana, with her scant income and her husband in a Mental Home, was received everywhere in Society, Adrian was accustomed to take the image of a Bactrian camel. That animal's two humps were like the two sections of Society (with the big S) joined by a bridge, seldom used after the first crossing. The Montjoys, a very old landed family in Dumfriesshire innumerably allied in the past with the nobility, had something of an hereditary perch on the foremost hump — a somewhat dull position from which there was very little view, because of the camel's head — and Diana was often invited to great houses where the chief works were hunting, shooting, hospitals, Court functions, and giving debutantes a chance. As Adrian well knew, she seldom went. She was far more constantly seated on the second hump, with its wide and stimulating view over the camel's tail. Ah! They were a queer collection on that back hump! Many, like Diana herself, crossed from the first hump by the bridge, others came up the camel's tail, a few were dropped from Heaven, or — as people sometimes called it — America. To qualify for that back hump Adrian, who had never qualified, knew that you needed a certain liveliness on several fronts; either a first-rate memory so that anything you read or listened to could be retailed with ready accuracy; or a natural spring of wit. If you had neither of these you might appear on the hump once, but never again. Personality of course, you must have, though without real eccentricity; but it must not be personality which hid its light under a bushel. Eminence in some branch of activity was desirable, but not a sine quâ non. Breeding again was welcome, but not if it made you dull. Beauty was a passport, but it had to be allied with animation. Money was desirable, but money alone wouldn't get you a seat. Adrian had noted that knowledge of Art, if vocal, was of greater value than the power to produce it; and directive ability acceptable if it were not too silent or too dry. Then, again, some people seemed to get there out of an aptitude for the 'coulisses,' and for having a finger in every pie. But first and last the great thing was to be able to talk. Innumerable strings were pulled from this back hump, but whether they guided the camel's progress at all he was never sure, however much those who pulled them thought so. Diana, he knew, had so safe a seat among this heterogeneous group, given to constant meals, that she might have fed without expense from Christmas to Christmas, nor need ever have passed a week-end in Oakley Street. And he was the more grateful in that she so constantly sacrificed all that to be with her children and himself. The war had broken out just after her marriage with Ronald Ferse, and Sheila and Ronald had not been born till after his return from it. They were now seven and six, and, as Adrian was always careful to tell her, 'regular little Montjoys.' They certainly had her looks and animation. But he alone knew that the shadow on her face in repose was due more to the fear that she ought not to have had them than to anything else in her situation. He, too, alone knew that the strain of living with one unbalanced as Ferse had become had so killed sex impulse in her that she had lived these four years of practical widowhood without any urge towards love. He believed she had for himself a real affection, but he knew that so far it stopped short of passion.

He arrived half an hour before dinner time, and went up to the schoolroom at the top of the house, to see the children. They were receiving bed-time rusks and milk from their French governess, welcomed him with acclamation and clamoured for him to go on with the story he was telling them. The French governess, who knew what to expect, withdrew. Adrian sat down opposite the two small sparkling faces, and began where he had left off: “So the man who had charge of the canoes was a tremendous fellow, brown all over, who had been selected for his strength, because of the white unicorns which infested that coast.’

“Boo! Uncle Adrian — unicorns are imaginative.”

“Not in those days, Sheila.”

“Then what’s become of them?”

“There is only about one left, and he lives where white men cannot go, because of the ‘Bu-bu’ fly.”

“What is the ‘Bu-bu’ fly?”

“The ‘Bu-bu’ fly, Ronald, is remarkable for settling in the calf of the leg and founding a family there.”

“Oh!”

“Unicorns — as I said before I was interrupted — which infested that coast. His name was Mattagor, and this was his way with unicorns. After luring them down to the beach with crinibobs —”

“What are crinibobs?”

“They look like strawberries and taste like carrots — crinibobs — he would steal up behind them —”

“If he was in front of them with the crinibobs, how could he steal up behind them?”

“He used to thread the crinibobs through a string made out of fibre, and hang them in a row between two charm trees. As soon as the unicorns were nibbling, he would emerge from the bush where he would be hiding, and, making no noise with his bare feet, tie their tails together two by two.”

“But they would feel their tails being tied!”

“No, Sheila; white unicorns don’t feel with their tails. Then he would retire to the bush, and click his tongue against his teeth, and the unicorns would dash forward in wild confusion.”

“Did their tails ever come out?”

“Never. That was the great thing, because he was very fond of animals.”

“I expect the unicorns never came again?”

“Wrong, Ronny. Their love of crinibobs was too great.”

“Did he ever ride on them?”

“Yes; sometimes he would leap lightly on to two of their backs and ride off into the jungle with one foot on each back, laughing drily to himself. So under his charge, as you may imagine, the canoes were safe. It was not the wet season, so that the landsharks would not be so numerous, and the expedition was about to start when —”

“When what, Uncle Adrian? It’s only Mummy.”

“Go on, Adrian.”

But Adrian remained silent, with his eyes fixed on the advancing vision. Then, averting from it his eyes and fixing them on Sheila, he proceeded:

“I must now pause to tell you why the moon was so important. They could not start the expedition till the half-moon was seen advancing towards them through the charm trees.”

“Why not?”

“That is what I am going to tell you. In those days people, and especially this tribe of Phwatabhoys, paid a great deal of attention to what was beautiful — things like Mummy, or Christmas carols, or little new potatoes, had a great effect on them. And before they did anything they had to have an omen.”

“What is an omen?”

“You know what an amen is — it comes at the end: well, an omen comes at the beginning, to bring luck. And the omen had to be beautiful. Now the half-moon was considered to be the most beautiful thing in the dry season, so they had to wait till it came advancing to them through the charm trees, as you saw Mummy just now walking towards us through the door."

"But the moon hasn't got feet."

"No; she floats. And one fine evening she came floating, like nothing else on earth, so lovely and so slim, and with such an expression in her eyes that they all knew their expedition was bound to be successful; and they abased themselves before her, saying: 'Omen! if thou wilt be with us, then shall we pass over the wilderness of the waters and the sands with thee in our eyes, and be happy in the happiness that comes with thee for ever and ever. Amen!' And when they had put it like that, they got into the canoes, Phwatabhoy by Phwatabhoy and Phwatanymph by Phwatanymph, till they were all in. And the half-moon stayed there at the edge of the charm trees and blessed them with her eyes. But one man stopped behind. He was an old Phwatabhoy who wished for the half-moon so much that he forgot everything, and started crawling towards her, hoping to touch her feet."

"But she hadn't feet!"

"He thought she had, for to him she was like a woman made of silver and ivory. And he crawled in and out of the charm trees, but never could he quite reach her, because she was the half-moon."

Adrian paused, and there was for a moment no sound; then he said: "To be continued in our next," and went out. Diana joined him in the hall.

"Adrian, you are corrupting the children. Don't you know that fables and fairy-tales are no longer to be allowed to interfere with their interest in machines? After you'd gone Ronald said: 'Does Uncle Adrian really believe you are the half-moon, Mummy?'"

"And you answered?"

"Diplomatically. But they're as sharp as squirrels."

"Well! Sing me 'Waterboy' before Dinny and her swain come."

And while she sat and sang, Adrian gazed and worshipped. Her voice was good and she sang well that strange and haunting song. The last 'Waterboy' had barely died away when the maid announced:

"Miss Cherrell. Professor Hallorsen."

Dinny came in with her head held high, and Adrian augured but poorly from the expression of her eyes. He had seen schoolboys look like that when they were going to 'roast' a new-comer. After her came Hallorsen, immensely tall in that small drawing-room, his eyes swimming with health. He bowed low when presented to Dinny. "Your daughter, I presume, Mr. Curator?"

"No, my niece; a sister of Captain Hubert Cherrell."

"Is that so? I am honoured to make your acquaintance, Ma'am."

Adrian, noting that their eyes, having crossed, seemed to find it difficult to disengage, said:

"How are you liking the Piedmont, Professor?"

"The cooking's fine, but there are too many of us Americans."

"Perching just now like the swallows?"

"Ah! In a fortnight we'll all have flitted."

Dinny had come brimful of Anglo-femininity, and the contrast between Hallorsen's overpowering health and Hubert's haggard looks had at once sharpened the edge of her temper. She sat down beside that embodiment of the conquering male with the full intention of planting every dart she could in his epidermis. He was, however, at once engaged in conversation by Diana, and she had not finished her soup (clear, with a prune in it) before, stealing a look round at him, she revised her plan. After all, he was a stranger and a guest, and she was supposed to be a lady; there were other ways of killing a cat beside hanging it. She would not plant darts, she would 'charm him with smiles and soap'; that would be more considerate towards Diana and her uncle, and more effective warfare in the long run. With a cunning worthy of her cause, she waited till he was in deep water over British politics, which he seemed to regard as serious manifestations of human activity; then, turning on him the Botticellian eye, she said:

"We should treat American politics just as seriously, Professor. But surely they're not serious, are they?"

"I believe you are right, Miss Cherrell. There's just one rule for politicians all over the world: Don't say in Power what you say in Opposition; if you do, you only have to carry out what the other fellows have found impossible. The only real difference, I judge, between Parties is that one Party sits in the National 'Bus, and the other Party strap-hangs."

"In Russia, what's left of the other Party lies under the seat, doesn't it?"

"So it does in Italy," said Diana.

"And what about Spain?" added Adrian.

Hallorsen uttered his infectious laugh. "Dictatorships aren't politics. They're jokes."

"NO jokes, Professor."

"Bad jokes, Professor."

"How do you MEAN— jokes, Professor?"

"Bluff. Just one long assumption that human nature's on the mark the Dictator makes for it. The moment his bluff's called — Why! Wump!"

"But," said Diana, "suppose a majority of the people approve of their dictator, isn't that democracy, or government by consent of the governed?"

"I would say no, Mrs. Ferse, unless he was confirmed by majority every year."

"Dictators get things done," said Adrian.

"At a price, Mr. Curator. But look at Diaz in Mexico. For twenty years he made it the Garden of Eden, but see what it's been ever since he went. You can't get out of a people for keeps what isn't yet in them."

"The fault," replied Adrian, "in our political system and in yours, Professor, is that a whole lot of reforms latent in the common-sense of the people don't get a chance of being carried out because our short-term politicians won't give a lead, for fear of losing the power they haven't got."

"Aunt May," Dinny murmured, "was saying: Why not cure Unemployment by a National Slum Clearance effort, and kill the two birds with one stone?"

"My! But that's a mighty fine idea!" said Hallorsen, turning on her the full of his brimming face.

"Vested interests," said Diana, "slum landlordism and the building trades are too strong for that."

Adrian added: "And there's the cash required."

"Why! that's all easy. Your Parliament could take what powers they need for a big national thing like that; and what's wrong with a Loan, anyway? — the money would come back; it's not like a Loan for war, all shot away in powder. What do you pay in doles?"

No one could answer him.

"I judge the saving would pay the interest on a pretty big Loan."

"It just, in fact," said Dinny, sweetly, "needs simple faith. That's where you Americans beat us, Professor Hallorsen."

A look slid over the American's face as though he were saying: 'Cats!'

"Well, we certainly had a pieful of simple faith when we came over to fight in France. But we ate the lot. It'll be the home fires we keep burning next time."

"Was your faith so simple even last time?"

"I fear it was, Miss Cherrell. Not one in twenty of us ever believed the Germans could get a cinch on us away over there."

"I sit rebuked, Professor."

"Why! Not at all! You judge America by Europe."

"There was Belgium, Professor," said Diana; "even we had some simple faith at the start."

"Pardon me, but did the case of Belgium really move you, Ma'am?"

Adrian was drawing circles with a fork; he looked up.

"Speaking for onself, yes. I don't suppose it made any difference to the Army people, Navy people, big business people, or even to a large section of Society, political and otherwise. They all knew that if war came we were practically committed to France. But to simple folk like myself and some two-thirds of the population not in the know, to the working classes, in fact, generally, it made all the difference. It was like seeing What's-his-name — the Man Mountain — advancing on the smallest Flyweight in the ring, who was standing firm and squaring up like a man."

"Mighty well put, Mr. Curator."

Dinny flushed. Was there generosity in this man? Then, as if conscious of treachery to Hubert, she said acidly:

"I've read that the sight even ruffled Roosevelt."

"It ruffled quite a few of us, Miss Cherrell; but we're a long way off over there, and things have to be near before they stir the imagination."

"Yes, and after all, as you said just now, you did come in at the end."

Hallorsen looked fixedly at her ingenuous face, bowed and was silent.

Bet when, at the end of that peculiar evening, he was saying good-night, he added:

"I fear you've gotten a grouch against me, Miss Cherrell."

Dinny smiled, without reply.

"All the same, I hope I may meet you again."

"Oh! But why?"

"Well, I kind of have the feeling that I might change the view you have of me."

"I am very fond of my brother, Professor Hallorsen."

"I still think I've more against your brother than he has against me."

"I hope you may be right before long."

"That sounds like trouble."

Dinny tilted her head.

She went up to bed, biting her lip with vexation. She had neither charmed nor assailed the enemy; and instead of clean-cut animosity, she had confused feelings about him.

His inches gave him a disconcerting domination. 'He's like those creatures in hairy trousers on the films,' she thought, 'carrying off the semi-distressed cow-girls — looks at one as if he thought one was on his pillion.' Primitive Force in swallow-tails and a white waistcoat! A strong but not a silent man.

Her room looked over the street, and from her window she could see the plane trees on the Embankment, the river, and the wide expanse of starry night.

"Perhaps," she said to herself, aloud, "you won't leave England so soon as you thought."

"Can I come in?"

She turned to see Diana in the doorway.

"Well, Dinny, what think you of our friend the enemy?"

"Tom Mix, mixed with the Giant that Jack killed."

"Adrian likes him."

"Uncle Adrian lives too much with bones. The sight of red blood goes to his head."

"Yes; this is the sort of 'he-man' women are supposed to fall for. But you behaved well, Dinny, though your eyes looked very green at first."

"They feel greener now I've let him go without a scratch."

"Never mind! You'll have other chances. Adrian's got him asked to Lippinghall tomorrow."

"What!"

"You've only to embroil him with Saxenden there, and Hubert's trick is done. Adrian didn't tell you, for fear your joy might show itself. The Professor wants to sample British 'hunting.' The poor man doesn't in the least realise that he's walking into a lioness's den. Your Aunt Em will be delicious with him."

"Hallorsen!" murmured Dinny: "He must have Scandinavian blood."

"He says his mother was old New England, but married out of the direct succession. Wyoming's his State. Delightful word, Wyoming."

"'The great open spaces.' What is there about the expression 'he-man' which infuriates me, Diana?"

"Well, it's like being in a room with a burst of sunflowers. But 'he-men' aren't confined to the great open spaces; you'll find Saxenden one."

"Really!"

"Yes. Good-night, my dear. And may no 'he-men' come to you in dreams!"

When Dinny had disrobed, she again took out the diary and re-read a passage she had turned down. It ran thus: "Feel very low to-night — as if all my sap had run out. Can only keep my pecker up by thinking of Condaford. Wonder what old Foxham would say if he could see me doctoring the mules! The stuff I've invented for their colic would raise hair on a billiard ball, but it stops the thing all right. God was in luck when He planned the inside of a mule. Dreamed last night I was standing at the end of the home spinney with pheasants coming over in a stream, and for the life of me I couldn't pull my trigger; ghastly sort of paralysis. Keep thinking of old Haddon and his: 'Go it, Master Bertie. Stick your 'eels in and take 'old of 'is 'ead!' Good old Haddon! He was a character. The rain's stopped. Dry — first time for ten days. And the stars are out.

'A ship, an isle, a sickle moon,
With few but with how splendid stars.'

If only I could sleep! . . ."

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Chapter 8

That essential private irregularity, room by room, which differentiates the old English from every other variety of country house, was patent at Lippinghall Manor. People went into rooms as if they meant to stay there, and while there inhaled an atmosphere and fitted into garniture different from those in any of the other rooms; nor did they feel that they must leave the room as they found it, if indeed they knew how that was. Fine old furniture stood in careless partnership with fill-up stuff acquired for the purposes of use or ease. Portraits of ancestors, dark or yellow, confronted Dutch or French landscapes still more yellow or dark, with here and there delightful old prints, and miniatures not without charm. In two rooms at least were beautiful old fireplaces, defiled by the comfort of a fender which could be sat on. Staircases appeared unexpectedly in the dark. The position of a bedroom was learned with difficulty and soon forgotten. In it would be, perhaps, a priceless old chestnut wood wardrobe and a four-poster bed of an excellent period; a window-seat with cushions, and some French prints. To it would be conjoined a small room with narrow bed; and bathroom that might or might not need a stroll, but would have salts in it. One of the Monts had been an Admiral; queer old charts, therefore, with dragons lashing the seas, lurked in odd corners of the corridors; one of the Monts, Sir Lawrence's grandfather, seventh baronet, had been a racing man, and the anatomy of the thoroughbred horse, and jockey of his period (1860-1883) could be studied on the walls. The sixth baronet, who, being in politics, had lived longer than the rest, had left imprints of the earlier Victorian period, his wife and daughters in crinolines, himself in whiskers. The outside of the house was Carolean, tempered here and there by Georgian, and even Victorian fragments where the sixth baronet had given way to his feeling for improvement. The only thing definitely modern was the plumbing.

When Dinny came down to breakfast on the Wednesday morning — the shoot being timed to start at ten — three of the ladies and all the men except Hallorsen were already sitting or wandering to the side-tables. She slipped into a chair next to Lord Saxenden, who rose slightly with the word:

"Morning!"

"Dinny," called Michael from a sideboard, "coffee, cocoatina or ginger beer?"

"Coffee and a kipper, Michael."

"There are no kippers."

Lord Saxenden looked up: "No kippers?" he muttered, and resumed his sausage.

"Haddock?" said Michael.

"No, thank you."

"Anything for you, Aunt Wilmet?"

"Kedgeree."

"There is no kedgeree. Kidneys, bacon, scrambled eggs, haddock, ham, cold partridge pie."

Lord Saxenden rose. "Ah! Ham!" and went over to the side table.

"Well, Dinny?"

"Just some jam, please, Michael."

"Goose-gog, strawberry, black currant, marmalade."

"Gooseberry."

Lord Saxenden resumed his seat with a plate of ham, and began reading a letter as he ate. She did not quite know what to make of his face, because she could not see his eyes, and his mouth was so full. But she seemed to gather why he had been nicknamed 'Snubby.' He was red, had a light moustache and hair, both going grey, and a square seat at table. Suddenly he turned to her and said:

"Excuse my reading this. It's from my wife. She's on her back, you know."

"I'm so sorry."

"Horrible business! Poor thing!"

He put the letter in his pocket, filled his mouth with ham, and looked at Dinny. She saw that his eyes were blue, and that his eyebrows, darker than his hair, looked like clumps of fish-hooks. His eyes goggled a little, as though he were saying: “I’m a lad — I’m a lad.” But at this moment she noticed Hallorsen coming in. He stood uncertain, then, seeing her, came to the empty seat on her other side.

“Miss Cherrell,” he said, with a bow, “can I sit right here?”

“Of course: the food is all over there, if you’re thinking of any.”

“Who’s that fellow?” said Lord Saxenden, as Hallorsen went foraging: “He’s an American.”

“Professor Hallorsen.”

“Oh! Ah! Wrote a book on Bolivia? What!”

“Yes.”

“Good-looking chap.”

“A he-man.”

He looked round at her with surprise.

“Try this ham. I used to know an uncle of yours at Harrow, I think.”

“Uncle Hilary!” said Dinny. “He told me.”

“I once laid him three strawberry mashes to two on myself in a race down the Hill steps to the Gym.”

“Did you win, Lord Saxenden?”

“No; and I never paid your uncle.”

“Why not?”

“He sprained his ankle and I put my knee out. He hopped to the Gym door; but I couldn’t move. We were both laid up till the end of term, and then I left.” Lord Saxenden chuckled. “So I still owe him three strawberry mashes.”

“I thought we had ‘some’ breakfast in America, but it’s nil to this,” said Hallorsen, sitting down.

“Do you know Lord Saxenden?”

“Lord Saxenden,” repeated Hallorsen with a bow.

“How de do? You haven’t got our partridge in America, have you?”

“Why, no, I believe not. I am looking forward to hunting that bird. This is mighty fine coffee, Miss Cherrell.”

“Yes,” said Dinny. “Aunt Em prides herself on her coffee.”

Lord Saxenden squared his seat. “Try this ham. I haven’t read your book.”

“Let me send it you; I’ll be proud to have you read it.”

Lord Saxenden ate on.

“Yes, you ought to read it, Lord Saxenden,” said Dinny; “and I’ll send you another book that bears on the same subject.”

Lord Saxenden glared.

“Charming of you both,” he said. “Is that strawberry jam?” and he reached for it.

“Miss Cherrell,” said Hallorsen, in a low voice, “I’d like to have you go through my book and mark the passages you think are prejudicial to your brother. I wrote that book when I had a pretty sore head.”

“I’m afraid that I don’t see what good that would do now.”

“So I could get them cut out, if you wish, for the second edition.”

“That’s very good of you,” said Dinny, icily, “but the harm is done, Professor.”

Hallorsen said, still lower: “I’m just terribly sorry to have hurt you.”

A sensation, perhaps only to be summed up in the words: ‘You are — are you!’ flushed Dinny from top to toe with anger, triumph, calculation, humour.

“It’s my brother you’ve hurt.”

“Maybe that could be mended if we could get together about it.”

“I wonder.” And Dinny rose.

Hallorsen stood up too, and bowed as she passed.

‘Terribly polite,’ she thought.

She spent her morning with the diary in a part of the garden so sunk within yew hedges that it formed a perfect refuge. The sun was warm there, and the humming of the bees over zinnias, pentstemons, hollyhocks, asters, Michaelmas daisies, was very soothing. In that so sheltered garden the dislike of casting Hubert’s intimate feelings to the world’s opinion came on her again. Not that the diary whined; but it revealed the hurts of mind and body with the sharpness of a record meant for no eye but the recorder’s. The sound of shots kept floating to her; and presently, leaning her elbows on the top of the yew hedge, she looked out over the fields towards where they were shooting.

A voice said:

“There you are!”

Her aunt, in a straw hat so broad that it covered her to the very edges of her shoulders, was standing below with two gardeners behind her.

“I’m coming round to you, Dinny; Boswell, you and Johnson can go now. We’ll look at the Portulaca this afternoon.” And she gazed up from under the tilted and enormous halo of her hat. “It’s Majorcan,” she said, “so shelterin’.”

“Boswell and Johnson, Auntie!”

“We had Boswell, and your uncle would look till we found Johnson. He makes them go about together. Do you believe in Doctor Johnson, Dinny?”

“I think he used the word ‘Sir’ too much.”

“Fleur’s got my gardenin’ scissors. What’s that, Dinny?”

“Hubert’s diary.”

“Depressin’?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve been lookin’ at Professor Hallorsen — he wants takin’ in.”

“Begin with his cheek, Aunt Em.”

“I hope they’ll shoot some hares,” said Lady Mont; “hare soup is such a stand-by. Wilmet and Henrietta Bentworth have agreed to differ already.”

“What about?”

“Well, I couldn’t be bothered, but I think it was about the P.M., or was it Portulaca? — they differ about everything. Hen’s always been about Court, you know.”

“Is that fatal?”

“She’s a nice woman. I’m fond of Hen, but she does cluck. What are you doin’ with that diary?”

“I’m going to show it to Michael and ask his advice.”

“Don’t take it,” said Lady Mont; “he’s a dear boy, but don’t take it; he knows a lot of funny people — publishers and that.”

“That’s why I’m asking him.”

“Ask Fleur, she has a head. Have you got this zinnia at Condaford? D’you know, Dinny, I think Adrian’s goin’ potty.”

“Aunt Em!”

“He moons so; and I don’t believe there’s anywhere you could stick a pin into him. Of course I mustn’t say it to you, but I think he ought to have her.”

“So do I, Auntie.”

“Well, he won’t.”

“Or she won’t.”

“They neither of them will; so how it’s to be managed I don’t know. She’s forty.”

“How old is Uncle Adrian?”

“He’s the baby, all but Lionel. I’m fifty-nine,” said Lady Mont decisively. “I know I’m fifty-nine, and your father is sixty; your grandmother must have been in a great tear at that time, she kept on havin’ us. What do YOU think about this question of havin' children?"

Dinny swallowed a bubble and said:

"Well, for married people, perhaps, in moderation."

"Fleur's going to have another in March; it's a bad month — careless! When are you goin' to get married, Dinny?"

"When my young affections are engaged, not before."

"That's very prudent. But not an American."

Dinny flushed, smiled dangerously and said:

"Why on earth should I marry an American?"

"You never know," said Lady Mont, twisting off a faded aster; "it depends on what there is about. When I married Lawrence, he was so about!"

"And still is, Aunt Em; wonderful, isn't it?"

"Don't be sharp!"

And Lady Mont seemed to go into a dream, so that her hat looked more enormous than ever.

"Talking of marriage, Aunt Em, I wish I knew of a girl for Hubert. He does so want distracting."

"Your uncle," said Lady Mont, "would say distract him with a dancer."

"Perhaps Uncle Hilary knows one that he could highly recommend."

"You're naughty, Dinny. I always thought you were naughty. But let me think: there WAS a girl; no, she married."

"Perhaps she's divorced by now."

"No. I think she's divorcin' him, but it takes time. Charmin' little creature."

"I'm sure. Do think again, Auntie."

"These bees," replied her aunt, "belong to Boswell. They're Italian. Lawrence says they're Fascists."

"Black shirts and no after-thoughts. They certainly seem very active bees."

"Yes; they fly a lot and sting you at once if you annoy them. Bees are nice to me."

"You've got one on your hat, dear. Shall I take it off?"

"Stop!" said Lady Mont, tilting her hat back, with her mouth slightly open: "I've thought of one."

"One what?"

"Jean Tasburgh, the daughter of our Rector here — very good family. No money, of course."

"None at all?"

Lady Mont shook her head, and the hat wobbled. "No Jean never has money. She's pretty. Rather like a leopardess."

"Could I look her over, Auntie? I know fairly well what Hubert wouldn't like."

"I'll ask her to dinner. They feed badly. We married a Tasburgh once. I think it was under James, so she'll be a cousin, but terribly removed. There's a son, too; in the Navy, all there, you know, and no moustache. I believe he's stayin' at the Rectory on furlong."

"Furlough, Aunt Em."

"I knew that word was wrong. Take that bee off my hat, there's a dear."

Dinny took the small bee off the large hat with her handkerchief, and put it to her ear.

"I still like to hear them buzz," she said.

"I'll ask him too," answered her aunt; "his name's Alan, a nice fellow." And she looked at Dinny's hair. "Medlar-coloured, I call it. I think he's got prospects, but I don't know what they are. Blown up in the war."

"He came down again whole, I hope, Auntie?"

"Yes; they gave him something or other for it. He says it's very stuffy in the Navy now. All angles, you know, and wheels, and smells. You must ask him."

"About the girl, Aunt Em, how do you mean, a leopardess?"

"Well, she looks at you, and you expect to see a cub comin' round the corner. Her mother's dead. She runs the parish."

"Would she run Hubert?"

"No; she'd run anybody who tried to run him."

"That might do. Can I take a note for you to the Rectory?"

"I'll send Boswell and Johnson," Lady Mont looked at her wrist. "No, they'll have gone to dinner. I always set my watch by them. We'll go ourselves, Dinny; it's only quarter of a mile. Does my hat matter?"

"On the contrary, dear."

"Very well, then; we can get out this way," and moving to the far end of the yew-treed garden, they descended some steps into a long grassy avenue, and, passing through a wicket gate, had soon arrived at the Rectory. Dinny stood in its creepered porch, behind her aunt's hat. The door stood open, and a dim panelled hallway with a scent of pot-pourri and old wood, conveyed a kind of invitation. A female voice from within called:

"A— lan!"

A male voice answered: "Hal — lo!"

"D'you mind cold lunch?"

"There's no bell," said Lady Mont; "we'd better clap." They clapped in unison.

"What the deuce?" A young man in grey flannels had appeared in a doorway. He had a broad brown face, dark hair, and grey eyes, deep and direct.

"Oh!" he said. "Lady Mont . . . Hi! Jean!" Then, meeting Dinny's eyes round the edge of the hat, he smiled as they do in the Navy.

"Alan, can you and Jean dine to-night? Dinny, this is Alan Tasburgh. D'you like my hat?"

"It's a topper, Lady Mont."

A girl, made all of a piece and moving as if on steel springs, was coming towards them. She wore a fawn-coloured sleeveless jumper and skirt, and her arms and cheeks were fully as brown. Dinny saw what her aunt meant. The face, broad across the cheek-bones, tapered to the chin, the eyes were greenish grey and sunk right in under long black lashes; they looked straight out with a light in them; the nose was fine, the brow low and broad, the shingled hair dark brown. 'I wonder!' thought Dinny. Then, as the girl smiled, a little thrill went through her.

"This is Jean," said her aunt: "my niece, Dinny Cherrell."

A slim brown hand clasped Dinny's firmly.

"Where's your father?" continued Lady Mont.

"Dad's away at some parsonical Conference. I wanted him to take me, but he wouldn't."

"Then I expect he's in London really, doin' theatres."

Dinny saw the girl flash a look at her aunt, decide that it was Lady Mont, and smiled. The young man laughed.

"So you'll both come to dinner? Eight-fifteen. Dinny, we must go back to lunch. Swallows!" added Lady Mont round the brim of her hat, and passed out through the porch.

"There's a house-party," said Dinny to the young man's elevated eyebrows. "She means tails and white tie."

"Oh! Ah! Best bib and tucker, Jean."

The two stood in the porchway arm in arm. 'Very attractive!' Dinny thought.

"Well?" said her aunt, in the grass avenue again.

"Yes, I quite saw the cub. She's beautiful, I think. But I should keep her on a lead."

"There's Boswell and Johnson!" exclaimed Lady Mont, as if they were in the singular. "Gracious! It must be past two, then!"

❦

Chapter 9

Some time after lunch, for which Dinny and her aunt were late, Adrian and the four younger ladies, armed with such shooting sticks as had been left by the ‘guns,’ proceeded down a farm lane towards where the main ‘drive’ of the afternoon would debouch. Adrian walked with Diana and Cicely Muskham, and ahead of them Dinny walked with Fleur. These cousins by marriage had not met for nearly a year, and had in any case but slender knowledge of each other. Dinny studied the head which her aunt had recommended to her. It was round and firm and well carried under a small hat. The pretty face wore a rather hard but, she decided, very capable expression. The trim figure was as beautifully tailored as if it had belonged to an American.

Dinny felt that she would at least get common-sense from a source so neat.

“I heard your testimonial read in the Police Court, Fleur.”

“Oh! that. It was what Hilary wanted, of course. I really don’t know anything about those girls. They simply don’t let one. Some people, of course, can worm themselves into anybody’s confidence. I can’t; and I certainly don’t want to. Do you find the country girls about you any easier?”

“Round us they’ve all had to do with our family so long that one knows pretty well all there is to know before they do themselves.”

Fleur scrutinised her.

“Yes, I daresay you’ve got the knack, Dinny. You’ll make a wonderful ancestress; but I don’t quite know who ought to paint you. It’s time someone came along with the Early Italian touch. The pre-Raphaelites hadn’t got it a bit; their pictures lacked music and humour. YOU’LL have to be done with both.”

“Do tell me,” said Dinny, disconcerted, “was Michael in the House when those questions were asked about Hubert?”

“Yes; he came home very angry.”

“Good!”

“He thought of bringing the thing up again, but it was the day but one before they rose. Besides, what does the House matter? It’s about the last thing people pay attention to nowadays.”

“My father, I’m afraid, paid terrific attention to those questions.”

“Yes, the last generation. But the only thing Parliament does that really gets the Public now, is the Budget. And no wonder; it all comes back to money.”

“Do you say that to Michael?”

“I don’t have to. Parliament now is just a taxing machine.”

“Surely it still makes laws?”

“Yes, my dear; but always after the event; it consolidates what has become public practice, or at least public feeling. It never initiates. How can it? That’s not a democratic function. If you want proof, look at the state of the country! It’s the last thing Parliament bothers about.”

“Who does initiate, then?”

“Whence doth the wind blow? Well, the draughts begin in the coulisses. Great places, the coulisses! Whom do you want to stand with when we get to the guns?”

“Lord Saxenden.”

Fleur gazed at her: “Not for his beaux jeux, and not for his beau titre. Why, then?”

“Because I’ve got to get at him about Hubert, and I haven’t much time.”

“I see. Well, I’ll give you a warning, my dear. Don’t take Saxenden at his face value. He’s an astute old fox, and not so old either. And if there is one thing he enjoys more than another, it’s his quid pro quo. Have you got a quid for him? He’ll want cash down.”

Dinny grimaced.

“I shall do what I can. Uncle Lawrence has already given me some pointers.”

"'Have a care; she's fooling thee,'" hummed Fleur. "Well, I shall go to Michael; it makes him shoot better, and he wants it, poor dear. The Squire and Bart will be glad to do without us. Cicely, of course, will go to Charles; she's still honeymoonish. That leaves Diana for the American."

"And I hope," said Dinny, "she'll put him off his shots."

"I should say nothing would. I forgot Adrian; he'll have to sit on his stick and think about bones and Diana. Here we are. See? Through this gate. There's Saxenden, they've given him the warm corner. Go round by that stile and come on him from behind. Michael will be jammed away at the end, he always gets the worst stand."

She parted from Dinny and went on down the lane. Conscious that she had not asked Fleur what she had wanted to, Dinny crossed to the stile, and climbing over, stalked Lord Saxenden warily from the other side. The peer was moving from one hedge to the other in the corner of the field to which he had been assigned. Beside a tall stick, to a cleft in which was attached a white card with a number on it, stood a young keeper holding two guns, and at his feet a retriever dog was lying with his tongue out. The fields of roots and stubble on the far side of the lane rose rather steeply, and it was evident to Dinny — something of an expert — that birds driven off them would come high and fast. 'Unless,' she thought, 'there's fresh cover just behind,' and she turned to look. There was not. She was in a very large grass field and the nearest roots were three hundred yards away at least. 'I wonder,' she thought, 'if he shoots better or worse with a woman watching. Shouldn't think he had any nerves.' Turning again, she saw that he had noticed her.

"Do you mind me, Lord Saxenden? I'll be very quiet."

The peer plucked at his cap, which had special peaks before and behind.

"Well, well!" he said. "H'm!"

"That sounds as if you did. Shall I go?"

"No, no! That's all right. Can't touch a feather today, anyway. You'll bring me luck."

Dinny seated herself on her stick alongside the retriever, and began playing with its ears.

"That American chap has wiped my eye three times."

"What bad taste!"

"He shoots at the most impossible birds, but, dash it, he hits 'em. All the birds I miss he gets on the horizon. Got the style of a poacher; lets everything go by, then gets a right and left about seventy yards behind him. Says he can't see them when they sit on his foresight."

"That's funny," said Dinny, with a little burst of justice.

"Don't believe he's missed today," added Lord Saxenden, resentfully. "I asked him why he shot so darned well, and he said: 'Why! I'm used to shoot for the pot, where I can't afford to miss.'"

"The 'beat's' beginning, my lord," said the young keeper's voice.

The retriever began to pant slightly. Lord Saxenden grasped a gun; the keeper held the other ready.

"Covey to the left, my lord," Dinny heard a creaky whirring, and saw eight birds stringing towards the lane. Bang-bang . . . bang — bang!

"God bless my soul!" said Lord Saxenden: "What the deuce —!"

Dinny saw the same eight birds swoop over the hedge at the other end of the grass field.

The retriever uttered a little choked sound, panting horribly.

"The light," she said, "must be terribly puzzling!"

"It's not the light," said Lord Saxenden, "it's the liver!"

"Three birds coming straight, my lord."

Bang! . . . Bang — bang! A bird jerked, crumpled, turned over and pitched four yards behind her. Something caught Dinny by the throat. That anything so alive should be so dead! Often as she had seen birds shot, she had never before had that feeling. The other two birds were crossing the far hedge; she watched them vanish, with a faint sigh. The retriever, with the dead bird in his mouth, came up to the keeper, who took it from him. Sitting on his haunches, the dog continued to gaze at the bird, with his tongue out. Dinny saw the tongue drip, and closed her eyes.

Lord Saxenden said something inaudibly.

Lord Saxenden said the same word more inaudibly, and, opening her eyes, Dinny saw him put up his gun.

"Hen pheasant, my lord!" warned the young keeper.

A hen pheasant passed over at a most reasonable height, as if aware that her time was not yet.

"H'm!" said Lord Saxenden, resting the butt on his bent knee.

"Covey to the right; too far, my lord!"

Several shots rang out, and beyond the hedge Dinny saw two birds only flying on, one of which was dropping feathers.

"That's a dead bird," said the keeper, and Dinny saw him shade his eyes, watching its flight. "Down!" he said; the dog panted, and looked up at him.

Shots rang out to the left.

"Damn!" said Lord Saxenden, "nothing comes my way."

"Hare, my lord!" said the keeper, sharply. "Along the hedge!"

Lord Saxenden wheeled and raised his gun.

"Oh, no!" said Dinny, but her words were drowned by the report. The hare, struck behind, stopped short, then wriggled forward, crying pitifully.

"Fetch it, boy!" said the keeper.

Dinny put her hands over her ears and shut her eyes.

"Blast!" muttered Lord Saxenden. "Tailored!" Through her eyelids Dinny felt his frosty stare. When she opened her eyes the hare was lying dead beside the bird. It looked incredibly soft. Suddenly she rose, meaning to go, but sat down again. Until the beat was over she could go nowhere without interfering with the range of the shots. She closed her eyes again; and the shooting went on.

"That's the lot, my lord."

Lord Saxenden was handing over his gun, and three more birds lay beside the hare.

Rather ashamed of her new sensations, she rose, closed her shooting stick, and moved towards the stile. Regardless of the old convention, she crossed it and waited for him.

"Sorry I tailored that hare," he said. "But I've been seeing spots all day. Do you ever see spots?"

"No. Stars once in a way. A hare's crying is dreadful, isn't it?"

"I agree — never liked it."

"Once when we were having a picnic I saw a hare sitting up behind us like a dog — and the sun through its ears all pink. I've always liked hares since."

"They're not a sporting shot," admitted Lord Saxenden; "personally I prefer 'em roast to jugged."

Dinny stole a glance at him. He looked red and fairly satisfied.

'Now's my chance,' she thought.

"Do you ever tell Americans that they won the war, Lord Saxenden?"

He stared frostily.

"Why should I?"

"But they did, didn't they?"

"Does that Professor chap say so?"

"I've never heard him, but I feel sure he thinks so."

Again Dinny saw that sharp look come on his face. "What do you know about him?"

"My brother went on his expedition."

"Your brother? Ah!" It was just as if he had said to himself out loud: 'This young woman wants something out of me.'

Dinny felt suddenly that she was on very thin ice.

"If you read Professor Hallorsen's book," she said, "I hope you will also read my brother's diary."

"I never read anything," said Lord Saxenden; "haven't time. But I remember now. Bolivia — he shot a man, didn't he, and lost the transport?"

"He had to shoot the man to save his own life, and he had to flog two for continual cruelty to the mules; then all but three men deserted, stampeding the mules. He was the only white man there, with a lot of Indian half-castes."

And to his frosty shrewd eyes she raised her own suddenly, remembering Sir Lawrence's: 'Give him the Botticellian eye, Dinny!'

"Might I read you a little of his diary?"

"Well, if there's time."

"When?"

"To-night? I have to go up after shooting tomorrow."

"Any time that suits you," she said, hardily.

"There won't be a chance before dinner. I've got some letters that must go."

"I can stay up till any hour." She saw him give her a quick, all-over glance.

"We'll see," he said, abruptly. And at this minute they were joined by the others.

Escaping the last drive, Dinny walked home by herself. Her sense of humour was tickled, but she was in a quandary. She judged shrewdly that the diary would not produce the desired effect unless Lord Saxenden felt that he was going to get something out of listening to it; and she was perceiving more clearly than ever before how difficult it was to give anything without parting from it. A fluster of wood-pigeons rose from some stooks on her left and crossed over to the wood by the river; the light was growing level, and evening sounds fluttered in the crisper air. The gold of sinking sunlight lay on the stubbles; the leaves, hardly turned as yet, were just promising colour, and away down there the blue line of the river glinted through its bordering trees. In the air was the damp, slightly pungent scent of early autumn with wood smoke drifting already from cottage chimneys. A lovely hour, a lovely evening!

What passages from the diary should she read? Her mind faltered. She could see Saxenden's face again when he said: "Your brother? Ah!" Could see the hard direct calculating insensitive character behind it. She remembered Sir Lawrence's words: "Were there not, my dear? . . . Most valuable fellows!" She had just been reading the memoirs of a man, who, all through the war, had thought in moves and numbers, and, after one preliminary gasp, had given up thinking of the sufferings behind those movements and those numbers: in his will to win the war, he seemed to have made it his business never to think of its human side, and, she was sure, could never have visualised that side if he HAD thought of it. Valuable fellow! She had heard Hubert talk, with a curling lip, of 'armchair strategists'— who had enjoyed the war, excited by the interest of combining movements and numbers and of knowing this and that before someone else did, and by the importance they had gained therefrom. Valuable fellows! In another book she had lately read, she remembered a passage about the kind of men who directed what was called progress: sat in Banks, City offices, Governmental departments, combining movements and numbers, not bothered by flesh and blood, except their own; men who started this enterprise and that, drawing them up on sheets of paper, and saying to these and those: 'Do this, and see you dam' well do it properly.' Men, silk-hatted or plus-foured, who guided the machine of tropic enterprise, of mineral getting, of great shops, of railway building, of concessions here and there and everywhere. Valuable fellows! Cheery, healthy, well-fed, indomitable fellows with frosty eyes. Always dining, always in the know, careless of the cost in human feelings and human life. 'And yet,' she thought, 'they really must be valuable, or how should we have rubber or coal, or pearls or railways or the Stock Exchange, or wars and win them!' She thought of Hallorsen; he at least worked and suffered for his ideas, led his own charges; did not sit at home, knowing things, eating ham, tailoring hares, and ordering the movements of others. She turned into the Manor grounds and paused on the croquet lawn. Aunt Wilmet and Lady Henrietta appeared to be agreeing to differ. They appealed to her:

"Is that right, Dinny?"

"No. When the balls touch you just go on playing, but you mustn't move Lady Henrietta's ball, Auntie, in hitting your own."

"I said so," said Lady Henrietta.

"Of course you said so, Hen. Nice position I'm in. Well, I shall just agree to differ and go on," and Aunt Wilmet hit her ball through a hoop, moving her opponent's several inches in so doing.

"Isn't she an unscrupulous woman?" murmured Lady Henrietta, plaintively, and Dinny saw at once the great practical advantages inherent in ‘agreeing to differ.’

“You’re like the Iron Duke, Auntie,” she said, “except that you don’t use the word ‘damn’ quite so often.”

“She does,” said Lady Henrietta; “her language is appalling.”

“Go on, Hen!” said Aunt Wilmet in a flattered voice.

Dinny left them and retired towards the house.

When she was dressed she went to Fleur’s room.

Her aunt’s maid was passing a minute mowing-machine over the back of Fleur’s neck, while Michael, in the doorway of his dressing-room, had his fingers on the tips of his white tie.

Fleur turned.

“Hallo, Dinny! Come in, and sit down. That’ll do, thank you, Powers. Now, Michael.”

The maid faded out and Michael advanced to have a twist given to the ends of his tie.

“There!” said Fleur; and, looking at Dinny, added: “Have you come about Saxenden?”

“Yes. I’m to read him bits of Hubert’s diary to-night. The question is: Where will be suitable to my youth and —”

“Not innocence, Dinny; you’ll never be innocent, will she, Michael?”

Michael grinned. “Never innocent but always virtuous. You were a most sophisticated little angel as a kid, Dinny; looked as if you were wondering why you hadn’t wings. Wistful is the word.”

“I expect I was wondering why you’d pulled them off.”

“You ought to have worn trouserettes and chased butterflies, like the two little Gainsborough girls in the National Gallery.”

“Cease these amenities,” said Fleur; “the gong’s gone. You can have my little sitting-room next door, and, if you knock, Michael can come round with a boot, as if it were rats.”

“Perfect,” said Dinny; “but I expect he’ll behave like a lamb, really.”

“You never can tell,” said Michael; “he’s a bit of a goat.”

“That’s the room,” said Fleur, as they passed out. “Cabinet particulier. Good luck! . . .”

❦

CHAPTER 10

Seated between Hallorsen and young Tasburgh, Dinny had a slanting view of her Aunt and Lord Saxenden at the head of the table, with Jean Tasburgh round the corner on his right. “She was a ‘leopardess’ oh! so fair!” The tawnied skin, oblique face, and wonderful eyes of the young woman fascinated her. They appeared also to fascinate Lord Saxenden, whose visage was redder and more genial than Dinny had seen it yet. His attentions to Jean, indeed, were throwing Lady Mont to the clipped tongue of Wilfred Bentworth. For ‘the Squire,’ though a far more distinguished personality, too distinguished to accept a peerage, was, in accordance with the table of precedence, seated on her left. Next to him again Fleur was engaging Hallorsen; so that Dinny herself was exposed to the broadside of young Tasburgh. He talked easily, directly, frankly, like a man not yet calloused by female society, and manifested what Dinny described to herself as ‘transparent admiration’; yet twice at least she went into what he described as a ‘near-dream,’ her head turned high, and motionless, towards his sister.

“Ah!” he said. “What do you think of her?”

“Fascinating.”

“I’ll tell her that, she won’t turn a hair. The earth’s most matter-of-fact young woman. She seems to be vamping her neighbour all right. Who is he?”

“Lord Saxenden.”

“Oh! And who’s the John Bull at the corner on our side?”

“Wilfred Bentworth, ‘the Squire,’ they call him.”

“And next to you — talking to Mrs. Michael?”

“That’s Professor Hallorsen from America.”

“He’s a fine-looking chap.”

“So everybody says,” said Dinny, drily.

“Don’t you think so?”

“Men oughtn’t to be so good-looking.”

“Delighted to hear you say that.”

“Why?”

“It means that the ugly have a look in.”

“Oh! Do you often go trawling?”

“You know, I’m terribly glad I’ve met you at last.”

“At last? You’d never even heard of me this morning.”

“No. But that doesn’t prevent you from being my ideal.”

“Goodness! Is this the way they have in the Navy?”

“Yes. The first thing they teach us is to make up our minds quickly.”

“Mr. Tasburgh —”

“Alan.”

“I begin to understand the wife in every port.”

“I,” said young Tasburgh, seriously, “haven’t a single one. And you’re the first I’ve ever wanted.”

“Oo! Or is it: Coo!”

“Fact! You see, the Navy is very strenuous. When we see what we want, we have to go for it at once. We get so few chances.”

Dinny laughed. “How old are you?”

“Twenty-eight.”

“Then you weren’t at Zeebrugge?”

"I was."

"I see. It's become a habit to lay yourself alongside."

"And get blown up for it."

Her eyes rested on him kindly.

"I am now going to talk to my enemy."

"Enemy? Can I do anything about that?"

"His demise would be of no service to me, till he's done what I want."

"Sorry for that; he looks to me dangerous."

"Mrs. Charles is lying in wait for you," murmured Dinny, and she turned to Hallorsen, who said deferentially: "Miss Cherrell," as if she had arrived from the moon.

"I hear you shot amazingly, Professor."

"Why! I'm not accustomed to birds asking for it as they do here. I'll maybe get used to that in time. But all this is quite an experience for me."

"Everything in the garden lovely?"

"It certainly is. To be in the same house with you is a privilege I feel very deeply, Miss Cherrell."

"'Cannon to right of me, cannon to left of me!'" thought Dinny.

"And have you," she asked, suddenly, "been thinking what amend you can make to my brother?"

Hallorsen lowered his voice.

"I have a great admiration for you, Miss Cherrell, and I will do what you tell me. If you wish, I will write to your papers and withdraw the remarks in my book."

"And what would you want for that, Professor Hallorsen?"

"Why, surely, nothing but your goodwill."

"My brother has given me his diary to publish."

"If that will be a relief to you — go to it."

"I wonder if you two ever began to understand each other."

"I judge we never did."

"And yet you were only four white men, weren't you? May I ask exactly what annoyed you in my brother?"

"You'd have it up against me if I were to tell you."

"Oh! no, I CAN be fair."

"Well, first of all, I found he'd made up his mind about too many things, and he wouldn't change it. There we were in a country none of us knew anything about, amongst Indians and people that were only half civilised; but the captain wanted everything done as you might in England: he wanted rules, and he wanted 'em kept. Why, I judge he would have dressed for dinner if we'd have let him."

"I think you should remember," said Dinny, taken aback, "that we English have found formality pay all over the world. We succeed in all sorts of wild out of the world places because we stay English. Reading his diary, I think my brother failed from not being stolid enough."

"Well, he is not your John Bull type," he nodded towards the end of the table, "like Lord Saxenden and Mr. Bentworth there; maybe I'd have understood him better if he were. No, he's mighty high-strung and very tight held-in; his emotions kind of eat him up from within. He's like a race-horse in a hansom cab. Yours is an old family, I should judge, Miss Cherrell."

"Not yet in its dotage."

She saw his eyes leave her, rest on Adrian across the table, move on to her Aunt Wilmet, and thence to Lady Mont.

"I would like to talk to your uncle the Curator about old families," he said.

"What else was there in my brother that you didn't like?"

"Well, he gave me the feeling that I was a great husky."

Dinny raised her brows a little.

“There we were,” went on Hallorsen, “in the hell of a country — pardon me! — a country of raw metal. Well, I was raw metal myself, out to meet and beat raw metal; and he just wouldn’t be.”

“Perhaps couldn’t be. Don’t you think what was really wrong was your being American and his being English? Confess, Professor, that you don’t like us English.”

Hallorsen laughed.

“I like YOU terribly.”

“Thank you, but every rule —”

“Well,” his face hardened, “I just don’t like the assumption of a superiority that I don’t believe in.”

“Have we a monopoly of that? What about the French?”

“If I were an orang-outang, Miss Cherrell, I wouldn’t care a hoot whether a chimpanzee thought himself superior.”

“I see; too far removed. But, forgive me, Professor, what about yourselves? Are you not the chosen people? And don’t you frequently say so? Would you exchange with any other people in the world?”

“I certainly would not.”

“But isn’t that an assumption of a superiority that WE don’t believe in?”

He laughed. “You have me there; but we haven’t touched rock-bottom in this matter. There’s a snob in every man. We’re a new people; we haven’t gotten your roots and your old things; we haven’t gotten your habit of taking ourselves for granted; we’re too multiple and various and too much in the making. We have a lot of things that you could envy us besides our dollars and our bathrooms.”

“What ought we to envy you? I should very much like it made clear to me.”

“Well, Miss Cherrell, we know that we have qualities and energy and faith and opportunities that you just ought to envy; and when you don’t do it, we feel we’ve no use for that kind of gone-dead, bone-superior attitude. It’s like a man of sixty looking down his nose at a youth of thirty; and there’s no such God-darned — pardon me! — mistake as that.”

Dinny sat looking at him, silent and impressed.

“Where,” Hallorsen went on, “you British irritate us is that you’ve lost the spirit of enquiry; or if you’ve still gotten it, you have a dandy way of hiding it up. I judge there are many ways in which we irritate you. But we irritate your epidermis and you irritate our nerve centres. That’s about all there is to it, Miss Cherrell.”

“I see,” said Dinny; “that’s terribly interesting and I daresay quite true. My aunt’s getting up, so I must remove my epidermis and leave your nerve centres to quiet down.” She rose, and over her shoulder smiled back at him.

Young Tasburgh was at the door. At him too she smiled, and murmured: “Talk to my friend the enemy; he’s worth it.”

In the drawing-room she sought out the ‘leopardess,’ but converse between them suffered from the inhibition of a mutual admiration which neither wished to show. Jean Tasburgh was just twenty-one, but she impressed Dinny as older than herself. Her knowledge of things and people seemed precise and decided, if not profound; her mind was made up on all the subjects they touched on; she would be a marvellous person — Dinny thought — in a crisis, or if driven to the wall; would be loyal to her own side, but want to rule whatever roost she was in. But alongside her hard efficiency Dinny could well perceive a strange, almost feline fascination that would go to any man’s head, if she chose that it should. Hubert would succumb to her at once! And at that conclusion his sister was the more doubtful whether she wished him to. Here was the very girl to afford the swift distraction she was seeking for her brother. But was he strong enough and alive enough for the distractor? Suppose he fell in love with her and she would have none of him? Or suppose he fell in love with her and she had all of him! And then — money! If Hubert received no appointment or lost his commission what would they live on? He had only three hundred a year without his pay, and the girl presumably nothing. The situation was perverse. If Hubert could plunge again into soldiering, he would not need distraction. If he continued to be shelved, he would need distraction but could not afford it. And yet — was not this exactly the sort of girl who would carve out a career somehow for the man she married? So they talked of Italian pictures.

“By the way,” said Jean, suddenly, “Lord Saxenden says you want him to do something for you.”

“Oh!”

“What is it? Because I’ll make him.”

Dinny smiled.

"How?"

Jean gave her a look from under her lashes.

"It'll be quite easy. What is it you want from him?"

"I want my brother back in his regiment, or, better — some post for him. He's under a cloud owing to that Bolivian expedition with Professor Hallorsen."

"The big man? Is that why you had him down here?"

Dinny had a feeling that she would soon have no clothes on.

"If you want frankness, yes."

"He's rather fine to look at."

"So your brother said."

"Alan's the most generous person in the world. He's taken a toss over you."

"So he was telling me."

"He's an ingenuous child. But, seriously, shall I go for Lord Saxenden?"

"Why should you worry?"

"I like to put my fingers into pies. Give me a free hand, and I'll bring you that appointment on a charger."

"I am credibly informed," said Dinny, "that Lord Saxenden is a tough proposition."

Jean stretched herself.

"Is your brother Hubert like you?"

"Not a scrap; he's dark, and brown-eyed."

"You know our families intermarried a long way back. Are you interested in breeding? I breed Airedales, and I don't believe much in either the tail male or the tail female theories. Prepotency can be handed down through either male or female, and at any point of the pedigree."

"Perhaps, but except for not being covered with yellow varnish, my father and my brother are both very like the earliest portrait we have of a male ancestor."

"Well, we've got a Fitzherbert woman who married a Tasburgh in 1547, and she's the spit of me except for the ruff; she's even got my hands." And the girl spread out to Dinny two long brown hands, crisping them slightly as she did so.

"A strain," she went on, "may crop out after generations that have seemed free from it. It's awfully interesting. I should like to see your brother, if he's so unlike you."

Dinny smiled.

"I'll get him to drive over from Condaford and fetch me. You may not think him worth your wiles."

And at this moment the men came in.

"They do so look," murmured Dinny, "as if they were saying: 'Do I want to sit next to a female, and if so, why?' Men are funny after dinner."

Sir Lawrence's voice broke the hush:

"Saxenden, you and the Squire for Bridge?"

At those words Aunt Wilmet and Lady Henrietta rose automatically from the sofa where they had been having a quiet difference, and passed towards where they would continue the motion for the rest of the evening; they were followed closely by Lord Saxenden and the Squire.

Jean Tasburgh grimaced: "Can't you just see Bridge growing on people like a fungus?"

"Another table?" said Sir Lawrence: "Adrian? No. Professor?"

"Why, I think not, Sir Lawrence."

"Fleur, you and I then against Em and Charles. Come along, let's get it over."

"You can't see it growing on Uncle Lawrence," murmured Dinny. "Oh! Professor! Do you know Miss Tasburgh?"

Hallorsen bowed.

"It's an amazing night," said young Tasburgh on her other side: "Couldn't we go out?"

"Michael," said Jean, rising, "we're going out."

The night had been justly described. The foliage of holmoaks and elms clung on the dark air unstirring; stars were diamond bright, and there was no dew; the flowers had colour only when peered into; and sounds were lonely — the hooting of an owl from away towards the river, the passing drone of a chafer's flight. The air was quite warm, and through the cut cypresses the lighted house stared vaguely. Dinny and the sailor strolled in front.

"This is the sort of night," he said, "when you can see the Scheme a bit. My old Governor is a dear old boy, but his Services are enough to kill all belief. Have you any left?"

"In God, do you mean?" said Dinny: "Ye-es, without knowing anything about it."

"Don't YOU find it impossible to think of God except in the open and alone?"

"I HAVE been emotionalised in church."

"You want something beyond emotion, I think; you want to grasp infinite invention going on in infinite stillness. Perpetual motion and perpetual quiet at the same time. That American seems a decent chap."

"Did you talk about cousinly love?"

"I kept that for you. One of our great-great-great-great-grandfathers was the same, under Anne; we've got his portrait, terrible, in a wig. So we're cousins — the love follows."

"Does it? Blood cuts both ways. It certainly makes every difference glare out."

"Thinking of Americans?"

Dinny nodded.

"All the same," said the sailor, "there isn't a question in my mind that in a scrap I'd rather have an American with me than any other kind of foreigner. I should say we all felt like that in the Fleet."

"Isn't that just because of language being the same?"

"No. It's some sort of grain and view of things in common."

"But surely that can only apply to British-stock Americans?"

"That's still the American who counts, especially if you lump in the Dutch and Scandinavian-stock Americans, like this fellow Hallorsen. We're very much that stock ourselves."

"Why not German-Americans, then?"

"To some extent. But look at the shape of the German head. By and large, the Germans are Central or Eastern Europeans."

"You ought to be talking to my Uncle Adrian."

"Is that the tall man with the goatee? I like his face."

"He's a dear," said Dinny. "We've lost the others and I can feel dew."

"Just one moment. I was perfectly serious in what I said at dinner. You ARE my ideal, and I hope you'll let me pursue it."

Dinny curtsied.

"Young Sir, you are very flattering. 'But —' she went on with a slight blush —'I would point out that you have a noble profession —'"

"Are you never serious?"

"Seldom, when the dew is falling."

He seized her hand.

"Well, you will be one day; and I shall be the cause of it."

Slightly returning the pressure of his hand, Dinny disengaged hers, and walked on.

"Pleached alley — can you stand that expression? It seems to give joy to so many people."

"Fair cousin," said young Tasburgh, "I shall be thinking of you day and night. Don't trouble to answer."

And he held open a French window.

Cicely Muskham was at the piano, and Michael standing behind her.

Dinny went up to him.

“If I go to Fleur’s sitting-room now, could you show Lord Saxenden where it is, Michael? If he doesn’t come by twelve, I shall go to bed. I must sort out the bits I want to read to him.”

“All right, Dinny. I’ll leave him on the door-mat. Good luck!”

Fetching the diary, Dinny threw open the window of the little sitting-room and sat down to make her selections. It was half-past-ten, and not a sound disturbed her. She selected six fairly long passages which seemed to illustrate the impossible nature of her brother’s task. Then, lighting a cigarette, she waited, leaning out. The night was neither more nor less ‘amazing’ than it had been, but her own mood was deeper. Perpetual motion in perpetual quiet? If that, indeed, were God, He was not of much immediate use to mortals but why should He be? When Saxenden tailored the hare and it had cried, had God heard and quivered? When her hand was pressed, had He seen and smiled? When Hubert in the Bolivian wilds had lain fever-stricken, listening to the cry of the loon, had He sent an angel with quinine? When that star up there went out billions of years hence, and hung cold and lightless, would He note it on his shirt-cuff? The million million leaves and blades of grass down there that made the texture of the deeper darkness, the million million stars that gave the light by which she saw that darkness, all — all the result of perpetual motion in endless quiet, all part of God. And she herself, and the smoke of her cigarette; the jasmine under her nose, whose colour was invisible, and the movement of her brain, deciding that it was not yellow; that dog barking so far away that the sound was as a thread by which the woof of silence could be grasped; all — all endowed with the purpose remote, endless, pervading, incomprehensible, of God!

She shivered and withdrew her head. Sitting down in an armchair, with the diary in her lap, she gazed round the room. Fleur’s taste had remodelled it; there was fine colour in the carpet, the light was softly shaded and fell pleasantly on her sea-green frock and hands resting on the diary. The long day had tired her. She lay back tilting up her face, looking drowsily at the frieze of baked China Cupids with which some former Lady Mont had caused the room to be encircled. Fat funny little creatures they seemed to her — thus tied by rosy chains to the perpetual examination of each other’s behinds from stated distances. Chase of the rosy hours, of the rosy —! Dinny’s eyelids drooped, her lips opened, she slept. And the discreet light visiting her face and hair and neck revealed their negligence in slumber, their impudent daintiness, as of the fair Italians, so very English, whom Botticelli painted. A tendril of short ripe hair had come apart, a smile strayed off and on to the parted lips; eyelashes, a little darker than the hair, winked flutteringly on cheeks which seemed to have a sort of transparence; and in the passing of her dreams, the nose twitched and quivered as if mocking at its slight tiptilt. Uplifted thus, the face looked as if but a twist were needed to pluck it from its white stalk of neck . . . .

With a start her head came to the erect. He who had been ‘Snubby Bantham’ was standing in the middle of the room, regarding her with a hard blue unwinking stare.

“Sorry,” he said; “sorry! You were having a nice snooze.”

“I was dreaming of mince pies,” said Dinny. “It’s terribly good of you to come at whatever time of night it is.”

“Seven bells. You won’t be long, I suppose. D’you mind if I smoke a pipe?”

He sat down on a sofa opposite to her and began to fill his pipe. He had the look of a man who meant her to get it over, and was going to reserve judgment when she had. She better understood at that moment the conduct of public affairs. ‘Of course,’ she thought, ‘he’s giving his quo and he doesn’t see his quid. That’s the result of Jean!’ And whether she felt gratitude to the ‘leopardess’ for having deflected his interest, or whether a sort of jealousy, neither she nor any other woman would have told. Her heart was beating, however, and in a quick, matter-of-fact voice she began. She read through three of the passages before she looked at him again. His face, but for the lips sucking at his pipe, might have been made of a well-coloured wood. His eyes still regarded her in a curious and now slightly hostile way, as if he were thinking: ‘This young woman is trying to make me feel something. It’s very late.’

With an increasing hatred of her task Dinny hurried on. The fourth passage was — except for the last — the most harrowing, at least to herself; and her voice quivered a little as she finished it.

“Bit thick that,” said Lord Saxenden; “mules have no feelings, you know — most extraordinary brutes.”

Dinny’s temper rose; she would not look at him again. And she read on. This time she lost herself in that tortured recital, thus put into sound for the first time. She finished, breathless, quivering all over with the effort of keeping her voice controlled. Lord Saxenden’s chin was resting on his hand. He was asleep.

She stood looking at him, as he not long before had looked at her. For the moment she was on the point of jerking his hand from under his chin. Her sense of humour saved her, and gazing at him rather as Venus gazes at Mars in Botticelli's picture, she took a sheet of notepaper from Fleur's bureau, wrote the words: 'So sorry I exhausted you. Good-night,' and laid it with infinite precaution on his knee. Rolling up the diary, she stole to the door, opened it and looked back, faint sounds, that would soon be snoring, were coming from him. 'Appeal to his feelings and he sleeps,' she thought: 'That's exactly how he must have won the war.' And, turning, she found herself staring up at Professor Hallorsen.

❦

Chapter 11

When Dinny saw Hallorsen's eyes fixed, over her head, on the sleeping peer, she swallowed a gasp. What was he imagining of her, stealing thus at midnight away from a man of title in a little private room? His eyes, now looking into hers, were extremely grave. And, terrified lest he should say: "Pardon me!" and rouse the sleeper, she clutched the diary, put her finger to her lips, murmured: "Don't wake the baby!" and glided down the passage.

In her room she laughed her fill, then sat up and reviewed her sensations. Given the reputation of the titled in democratic countries, Hallorsen probably thought the worst. But she did him some rather remarkable justice. Whatever he thought of her would not go beyond him. Whatever he was — he was a BIG dog. She could imagine him at breakfast tomorrow, saying gravely: "Miss Cherrell, I am delighted to see you looking so well." And, saddened by her conduct of Hubert's affairs, she got into bed. She slept badly, awoke tired and pale, and had her breakfast upstairs.

During country house parties one day is very like another. The men put on the same kind of variegated tie and the same plus fours, eat the same breakfast, tap the same barometer, smoke the same pipes and kill the same birds. The dogs wag the same tails, lurk in the same unexpected spots, utter the same agonised yelps, and chase the same pigeons on the same lawns. The ladies have the same breakfast in bed or not, put the same salts in the same bath, straggle in the same garden, say of the same friends with the same spice of animosity, "I'm frightfully fond of them, of course"; pore over the same rock borders with the same passion for portulaca; play the same croquet or tennis with the same squeaks; write the same letters to contradict the same rumours, or match the same antiques; differ with the same agreement, and agree with the same difference. The servants have the same way of not being visible, except at the same stated moments. And the house has the same smell of pot-pourri, flowers, tobacco, books, and sofa cushions.

Dinny wrote a letter to her brother in which she said nothing of Hallorsen, Saxenden, or the Tasburghs, but discoursed in lively fashion of Aunt Em, Boswell and Johnson, Uncle Adrian, Lady Henrietta, and asked him to come over for her in the car. In the afternoon the Tasburghs came in for tennis, and not until the shooting was over did she see either Lord Saxenden or the American. But he who had been 'Snubby Bantham' gave her so long and so peculiar a stare from the corner where he was having tea, that she knew he had not forgiven her. Careful not to notice, she was at heart dismayed. So far she seemed to have done Hubert nothing but harm. 'I'll let Jean loose on him,' she thought, and went out to find 'the leopardess.' On her way she came on Hallorsen, and hastily deciding to regain her ground with him, said:

"If you had come up a little earlier last night, Professor Hallorsen, you could have heard me read some of my brother's diary to Lord Saxenden. It might have done you more good than it did him."

Hallorsen's face cleared.

"Why," he said, "I've been wondering what soporific you had administered to that poor lord."

"I was preparing him for your book. You ARE giving him a copy?"

"I judge not, Miss Cherrell; I am not that interested in his health. He may lie awake for me. I have very little use for any man that could listen to you and go to sleep on it. What does he do in life, this lord?"

"What does he do? Well, he is what I think you call a Big Noise. I don't quite know where he makes it, but my father says he is a man who counts. I hope you have been wiping his eye again today, Professor, because the more you wipe his eye the better chance my brother has of recovering the position he lost by going on your expedition."

"Is that so? Do personal feelings decide these things over here?"

"Don't they over there?"

"Why — yes! But I thought the old countries had too much tradition for that."

"Oh! we wouldn't ADMIT the influence of personal feelings, of course."

Hallorsen smiled.

"Isn't that just wonderful? All the world is kin. You would enjoy America, Miss Cherrell; I would like the chance to show it you some day."

He had spoken as if America were an antique that he had in his trunk; and she did not quite know how to take a remark which might have no significance or an absurdly great one. Then by his face she saw that he meant it to have the absurdly great one; and, revealing her teeth, answered:

"Thank you, but you are still my enemy."

Hallorsen put out his hand, but she had drawn back.

"Miss Cherrell, I am going to do all I can to remove the unpleasant impression you have of me. I am your very humble servant, and I hope some day to have a chance to be something else to you."

He looked terribly tall, handsome, and healthy, and she resented it.

"Let us not take anything too seriously, Professor; it leads to trouble. Forgive me now, I have to find Miss Tasburgh."

With that she skimmed away. Ridiculous! Touching! Flattering! Odious! It was all crazy! Whatever one did would be all criss-crossed and tangled, to trust to luck was best, after all!

Jean Tasburgh, who had just finished a single with Cicely Muskham, was removing a fillet from her hair.

"Come along to tea," said Dinny; "Lord Saxenden is pining for you."

At the door of the room where tea was being served, however, she herself was detached by Sir Lawrence, who, saying he had seen nothing of her yet, invited her to his study to look at his miniatures.

"My record of national characteristics, Dinny; all women, you see: French, German, Italian, Dutch, American, Spanish, Russian; and I should immensely like one of you, Dinny. Would you sit to a young man?"

"I?"

"You."

"But why?"

"Because," said Sir Lawrence, scrutinising her through his monocle, "you contain the answer to the riddle of the English lady, and I collect the essential difference between national cultures."

"That sounds terribly exciting."

"Look at this one. Here's French culture in excelsis; quick intelligence, wit, industry, decision, intellectual but not emotional aestheticism, no humour, conventional sentiment but no other, a having tendency — mark the eye; a sense of form, no originality, very clear but limited mental vision — nothing dreamy about her; quick but controlled blood. All of a piece, with very distinct edges. Now here's an American of rare type, tip-top cultured variety. Notice chiefly a look as if she had an invisible bit in her mouth and knew it; in her eyes is a battery she'll make use of but only with propriety. She'll be very well preserved to the end of her days. Good taste, a lot of knowledge, not much learning. See this German! Emotionally more uncontrolled, and less sense of form than either of those others, but has a conscience, is a hard worker, great sense of duty, not much taste, some rather unhandy humour. If she doesn't take care she'll get fat. Plenty, of sentiment, plenty of good sound sense too. More capacious in every way. She isn't perhaps a very good specimen. I can't get one. Here's my prize Italian. She's interesting. Beautifully varnished, with something feral, or let's say — natural, behind. Has a mask on, prettily shaped, prettily worn, liable to fall off. Knows her own mind, perhaps too well, gets her own way if she can, and if she can't, gets somebody else's. Poetic only in connection with her senses. Strong feelings, domestic and otherwise. Clear-eyed towards danger, plenty of courage but easily unnerved. Fine taste, subject to bad lapses. No liking for Nature, here. Intellectually decisive, but not industrious or enquiring. And here," said Sir Lawrence, suddenly confronting Dinny, "I shall have my prize English specimen. Do you want to hear about her?"

"Help!"

"Oh! I'll be quite impersonal. Here we have a self-consciousness, developed and controlled to the point when it becomes unselfconsciousness. To this lady Self is the unforgivable intruder. We observe a sense of humour, not devoid of wit, which informs and somewhat sterilises all else. We are impressed by what I may call a look not so much of domestic as of public or social service, not to be found in our other types. We discover a sort of transparency, as if air and dew had got into the system. We decide that PREcision is lacking, precision of learning, action, thought, judgment, but that DEcision is very present. The senses are not highly developed; the aesthetic emotions are excited more readily by natural than by artificial objects. There is not the capacity of the German; the clarity of the French woman; the duality or colour of the Italian; the disciplined neatness of the American; but there is a peculiar something — for which, my dear, I will leave you to discover the word — that makes me very anxious to have you in my collection of cultures."

"But I am not in the least cultured, Uncle Lawrence."

"I use the infernal word for want of a better, and by it I don't mean learning. I mean the stamp left by blood plus bringing-up, the two taken strictly together. If that French woman had had your bringing-up, she yet wouldn't have had your stamp, Dinny; nor would you with her bringing-up have had her stamp. Now look at this pre-war Russian; more fluid and more fluent than any of the others. I found her in the Caledonian Market. That woman must have wanted to go deep into everything, and never wanted to stay there long. I'll wager she ran through life at a great pace, and, if alive, is still running; and it's taking much less out of her than it would take out of you. The face gives you the feeling that she's experienced more emotions, and been less exhausted by them than any of the others. Here's my Spaniard; perhaps the most interesting of the lot. That's woman brought up apart from man; I suspect she's getting rare. There's a sweetness here, a touch of the convent; not much curiosity, not much energy, a lot of pride, very little conceit; might be devastating in her affections, don't you think, and rather difficult to talk to? Well, Dinny, will you sit to my young man?"

"If you really want me to, of course."

"I do. This is my hobby. I'll arrange it. He can come down to you at Condaford. I must get back now and see 'Snubby' off. Have you proposed to him yet?"

"I read him to sleep last night with Hubert's diary. He dislikes me intensely. I daren't ask him anything. Is he really 'a big noise,' Uncle Lawrence?"

Sir Lawrence nodded mysteriously. "Snubby," he said, "is the ideal public man. He has practically no feelers, and his feelings are always connected with Snubby. You can't keep a man like him down; he will always be there or thereabouts. India-rubber. Well, well, the State needs him. If we were all thin-skinned, who would sit in the seats of the mighty? They are hard, Dinny, and full of brass tacks. So you've wasted your time?"

"I think I've tied a second string to my bow."

"Excellent. Hallorsen's off too. I like that chap. Very American, but sound wood."

He left her, and, unwilling to encounter again either the india-rubber or the sound wood, Dinny went up to her room.

Next morning by ten o'clock, with the rapidity peculiar to the break-up of house-parties, Fleur and Michael were bearing Adrian and Diana off to Town in their car; the Muskhams had departed by train, and the Squire and Lady Henrietta were motoring across country to their Northamptonshire abode; Aunt Wilmet and Dinny alone were left, but the Tasburghs were coming to lunch and bringing their father.

"He's amiable, Dinny," said Lady Mont: "Old School, very courtly, says 'Nevah,' 'Evah,' like that. It's a pity they've no money. Jean is strikin', don't you think?"

"She scares me a little, Aunt Em; knows her own mind so completely."

"Match-makin'," replied her aunt, "is rather amusin'. I haven't done any for a long time. I wonder what Con and your mother will say to me. I shall wake up o' nights."

"First catch your Hubert, Auntie."

"I was always fond of Hubert; he has the family face — you haven't, Dinny, I don't know where you get your colourin'— and he looks so well on a horse. Where does he get his breeches?"

"I don't believe he's had a new pair since the war, Auntie."

"And he wears nice long waistcoats. Those short waistcoats straight across are so abbreviatin'. I shall send him out with Jean to see the rock borders. There's nothin' like portulaca for bringin' people together. Ah! There's Boswell-and-Johnson — I must catch him."

Hubert arrived soon after noon, and almost the first thing he said was:

"I've changed my mind about having my diary published, Dinny. Exhibiting one's sore finger is too revolting."

Thankful that as yet she had taken no steps, she answered meekly:

"Very well, dear."

"I've been thinking: If they're not going to employ me here, I might get attached to a Soudan regiment; or I believe they're short of men for the Indian Police. I shall be jolly glad to get out of the country again. Who's here?"

"Only Uncle Lawrence, Aunt Em, and Aunt Wilmet. The Rector and his family are coming to lunch — the Tasburghs, they're distant cousins."

"Oh!" said Hubert, glumly.

She watched the advent of the Tasburghs almost maliciously. Hubert and young Tasburgh at once discovered mutual service in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. They were talking about it when Hubert became conscious of Jean. Dinny saw him give her a long look, enquiring and detached, as of a man watching a new kind of bird; saw him avert his eyes, speak and laugh, then gaze back at her.

Her aunt's voice said: "Hubert looks thin."

The Rector spread his hands, as if to draw attention to his present courtly bulk. "Dear Lady, at his age I was thinnah."

"So was I," said Lady Mont; "thin as you, Dinny."

"We gathah unearned increment, ah-ha! Look at Jean — lithe is the word; in forty years — but perhaps the young of today will nevah grow fat. They do slimming — ah-ha!"

At lunch the Rector faced Sir Lawrence across the shortened table, and the two elder ladies sat one on each side of him. Alan faced Hubert and Dinny faced Jean.

"For what we are about to receive the Lord make us truly thankful."

"Rum thing — grace!" said young Tasburgh in Dinny's ear. "Benediction on murder, um?"

"There'll be hare," said Dinny, "and I saw it killed. It cried."

"I'd as soon eat dog as hare."

Dinny gave him a grateful look.

"Will you and your sister come and see us at Condaford?"

"Give me a chance!"

"When do you go back to your ship?"

"I've got a month."

"I suppose you are devoted to your profession?"

"Yes," he said, simply. "It's bred in the bone, we've always had a sailor in the family."

"And we've always had a soldier."

"Your brother's deathly keen. I'm awfully glad to have met him."

"No, Blore," said Dinny to the butler, "cold partridge, please. Mr. Tasburgh too will eat something cold."

"Beef, Sir; lamb, partridge."

"Partridge, thank you."

"I've seen a hare wash its ears," added Dinny.

"When you look like that," said young Tasburgh, "I simply —"

"Like what?"

"As if you weren't there, you know."

"Thank you."

"Dinny," said Sir Lawrence, "who was it said the world was an oyster? I say it's a clam. What's your view?"

"I don't know the clam, Uncle Lawrence."

"You're fortunate. That travesty of the self-respecting bivalve is the only tangible proof of American idealism. They've put it on a pedestal, and go so far as to eat it. When the Americans renounce the clam, they will have become realists and joined the League of Nations. We shall be dead."

But Dinny was watching Hubert's face. The brooding look was gone: his eyes seemed glued to Jean's deep luring eyes. She uttered a sigh.

"Quite right," said Sir Lawrence, "it will be a pity not to live to see the Americans abandon the clam, and embrace the League of Nations. For, after all," he continued, pursing up his left eye, "it WAS founded by an American and is about the only sensible product of our time. It remains, however, the pet aversion of another American called Monroe who died in 1831, and is never alluded to without a scoff by people like 'Snubby.'

"'A scoff, a sneer, a kick or two,
With few, but with how splendid jeers'—

D’you know that thing by Elroy Flecker?”

“Yes,” said Dinny, startled, “it’s in Hubert’s diary; I read it out to Lord Saxenden. It was just then he went to sleep.”

“He would. But don’t forget, Dinny, that Snubby’s a deuced clever fellow, and knows his world to a T. It may be a world you wouldn’t be seen dead in, but it’s the world where ten million more-or-less-young men were recently seen dead. I wonder,” concluded Sir Lawrence, more thoughtfully, “when I have been so well fed at my own table as these last days; something has come over your aunt.”

Organising after lunch a game of croquet between herself and Alan Tasburgh against his father and Aunt Wilmet, Dinny watched the departure of Jean and her brother towards the rock borders. They stretched from the sunken garden down to an old orchard, beyond which rose a swell of meadow-land.

‘THEY won’t stop at the portulaca,’ she thought.

Two games, indeed, were over before she saw them again coming from a different direction, deep in talk. ‘This,’ she thought, hitting the Rector’s ball with all her force, is about the quickest thing ever known.’

“God bless me!” murmured the smitten clergyman, and Aunt Wilmet, straight as a grenadier, uttered a loud: “Damn it, Dinny, you’re impossible! . . .”

Later, beside her brother in the open car, she was silent, making up her mind, as it were, to second place. Though what she had hoped for had come to pass, she was depressed. She had been first with Hubert until now. She needed all her philosophy watching the smile coming and going on his lips.

“Well, what do you think of our cousins?”

“He’s a good chap. I thought he seemed rather gone on you.’”

“Did you now? When would you like them to come over?”

“Any time.”

“Next week?”

“Yes.”

Seeing that he did not mean to be drawn, she lapsed into savouring the day’s slowly sinking light and beauty. The high land, Wantage, and Faringdon way, was glamoured by level sunlight; and Wittenham Clumps bastioned-up the rise ahead. Rounding to the right, they came on the bridge. In the middle of it she touched his arm:

“That stretch up there is where we saw the kingfishers, Hubert; d’you remember?”

Halted, they gazed up the quiet river, deserted and fit for the bright birds. Falling light sprinkled it through willows on the southern bank. The quietest river, it seemed, in the world, most subdued to the moods of men, flowing with an even clear stream among bright fields and those drooping shapely trees; having, as it were, a bland intensity of being, a presence of its own, gracious and apart.

“Three thousand years ago,” said Hubert suddenly, “this old river used to be like those I’ve seen in the wilds, an unshaped flow of water in matted jungle.”

He drove on. They had their backs to the sunlight now, and it was like driving into what had been painted for them.

And so they sped on, while into the sky crept the sunset glow, and the cleaned-up fields darkened a little, and gathered loneliness under the evening flight of birds.

At the door of Condaford Grange Dinny got out, humming: “‘She was a shepherdess oh! so fair’,” and looking into her brother’s face. He was, however, busy with the car and did not appear to see the connection.

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https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/g/galsworthy/john/maid/chapter11.html
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CHAPTER 12

The outline of a young Englishman of the inarticulate variety is difficult to grasp. The vocal variety is easily enough apprehended. Its manners and habits bulk large to the eye and have but little importance in the national life. Vociferous, critical, ingenious, knowing and advertising only its own kind, it forms an iridescence shimmering over the surface of the bog, and disguising the peat below. It constantly and brilliantly expresses almost nothing; while those whose lives are spent in the application of trained energy remain invisible, but none the less solid; for feelings continually voiced cease to be feelings, and feelings never voiced deepen with their dumbness. Hubert did not look solid, nor was he stolid; even those normal aids to the outline of the inarticulate were absent. Trained, sensitive, and no fool, he was capable of passing quiet judgment on people and events that would have surprised the vocal, but, except to himself, he never passed it. Till quite recently, indeed, he had lacked time and opportunity; but seeing him in a smoking-room, at a dinner-table, or wherever the expressive scintillate, you would know at once that neither time nor opportunity was going to make him vociferous. Going into the war, so early, as a professional, he had missed the expanding influences of the 'Varsity and London. Eight years in Mesopotamia, Egypt and India, a year of illness and the Hallorsen expedition, had given him a remote, drawn, rather embittered look. He was of the temperament that, in idleness, eats its heart out. With dog and gun or on a horse, he found it bearable, but only just; and without those adventitious aids he wilted. Three days after the return to Condaford he came to Dinny on the terrace, with 'The Times' in his hand.

"Look at this!"

Dinny read:

"SIR —

"You will pardon me, I trust, this intrusion on your space. It has come to my knowledge that certain passages in my book, 'Bolivia and Its Secrets,' published last July, have grievously annoyed my second-incommand, Captain Hubert Charwell, D.S.O., who had charge of the transport of the expedition. On re-reading these passages I certainly believe that in the vexation caused me by the partial failure of the expedition, and owing to the over-strained state in which I returned from the adventure, I have passed undue criticism on Captain Charwell's conduct; and I wish, pending the issue of the second and amended edition which I trust will not be long delayed, to take this opportunity of publicly withdrawing in your great journal the gravamen of my written words. It is my duty and pleasure to express to Captain Charwell and the British Army of which he is a member, my sincere apology, and my regret for any pain I may have caused him.

"Sir, Your obedient servant,

"EDWARD HALLORSEN (Professor).

"Piedmont Hotel,

"London."

"Very handsome!" said Dinny, trembling a little. "Hallorsen in London! What the devil does he mean by this all of a sudden?"

She began pulling yellowed leaves out of an Agapanthus. The danger of doing things for other people was being disclosed to her.

"It almost looks like repentance, dear."

"That fellow repent! Not he! There's something behind it."

"Yes, I am."

"You!"

Dinny quailed behind her smile.

"I met Hallorsen at Diana's in London; he was at Lippinghall, too. So I— er — got at him."

Hubert's sallowed face went red.

"You asked — you begged —?"

"Oh! no!"

"What then?"

"He seemed to take rather a fancy to me. It's odd, but I couldn't help it, Hubert."

"He's done this to curry favour with you?"

"You put it like a man and a brother."

"Dinny!"

Dinny flushed too, angry now behind her smile.

"I didn't lead him on. He took this highly unreasonable fancy, in spite of plenty of cold water. But, if you ask me, Hubert, he has quite a decent side to him."

"You would naturally think so," said Hubert, coldly. His face had resumed its sallow hue and was even a little ashened.

Dinny caught impulsively at his sleeve.

"Don't be silly, dear! If he chooses to make a public apology for any reason, even such a bad one, isn't it all to the good?"

"Not when my own sister comes into it. In this thing I'm like — I'm like a —" he put his hands to his head: "I'm in Chancery. Anyone can punch my head, and I can't move."

Dinny's coolness had come back to her.

"You needn't be afraid that I shall compromise you. This letter is very good news; it takes the wind out of the whole thing. In face of this apology, who can say anything?"

But Hubert, leaving the paper in her hand, went back into the house.

Dinny had practically no 'small' pride. Her sense of humour prevented her from attaching value to her own performances. She felt that she ought to have provided against this contingency, though she did not see how.

Hubert's resentment was natural enough. If Hallorsen's apology had been dictated by conviction, it would have soothed him; arising from a desire to please his sister, it was only the more galling; and he clearly abhorred the Professor's fancy for her. Still, there was the letter — an open and direct admission of false criticism, which changed the whole position! At once she began to consider what use could be made of it. Should she send it to Lord Saxenden? Having meddled so far, she decided that she would, and went in to write the covering letter.

'Condaford Grange. Sept. 21.

'Dear Lord Saxenden —

'I am venturing to send you the enclosed cutting from today's "Times," for I feel it excuses me to some extent for my effrontery the other evening. I really ought not to have bored you at the end of a long day with those passages of my brother's diary. It was unpardonable, and I don't wonder that you sought refuge. But the enclosed will show you the injustice from which my brother has suffered; and I hope you will forgive me.

'Sincerely yours,

'Elizabeth Charwell.'

Enclosing the cutting, she looked up Lord Saxenden in 'Who's Who,' and addressed the envelope to his London abode, marking it 'Personal.'

A little later, trying to find Hubert, she was told that he had taken the car and gone up to London . . . .

Hubert drove fast. Dinny's explanation of the letter had disturbed him greatly. He covered the fifty odd miles in a little under two hours and reached the Piedmont Hotel at one o'clock. Since he had parted from Hallorsen nearly six months ago, no word had passed between them. He sent his card in and waited in the hall with no precise knowledge of what he wanted to say. When the American's tall figure approached behind the buttoned boy, a cold stillness possessed his every limb.

"Captain Cherrell," said Hallorsen, and held out his hand.

With a horror of 'scenes' deeper than his more natural self, Hubert took it, but without pressure in his fingers.

"I saw you were here, from 'The Times.' Is there anywhere we could go and talk for a few minutes?"

Hallorsen led towards an alcove. "Bring some cocktails," he said to a waiter.

"Not for me, thank you. But may I smoke?"

"I trust this is the pipe of peace, Captain."

“I don’t know. An apology that does not come from conviction means less than nothing to me.”

“Who says it doesn’t come from conviction?”

“My sister.”

“Your sister, Captain Cherrell, is a very rare and charming young lady, and I would not wish to contradict her.”

“Do you mind my speaking plainly?”

“Why, surely no!”

“Then I would much rather have had no apology from you than know I owed it to any feeling of yours for one of my family.”

“Well,” said Hallorsen, after a pause, “I can’t write to the ‘Times’ and say I was in error when I made that apology. I judge they wouldn’t stand for that. I had a sore head when I wrote that book. I told your sister so, and I tell you so now. I lost all sense of charity, and I have come to regret it.”

“I don’t want charity. I want justice. Did I or did I not let you down?”

“Why, there’s no question but that your failure to hold that pack together did in fact finish my chance.”

“I admit that. Did I fail you from my fault, or from yours in giving me an impossible job?”

For a full minute the two men stood with their eyes on each other, and without a word. Then Hallorsen again held out his hand.

“Put it there,” he said; “my fault.”

Hubert’s hand went out impulsively, but stopped half way.

“One moment. Do you say that because it would please my sister?”

“No, Sir; I mean it.”

Hubert took his hand.

“That’s great,” said Hallorsen. “We didn’t get on, Captain; but since I’ve stayed in one of your old homes here, I think I’ve grasped the reason why. I expected from you what you class Englishmen seemingly will never give — that’s the frank expression of your feelings. I judge one has to translate you, and I just couldn’t do it, so we went on in the dark about each other. And that’s the way to get raw.”

“I don’t know why, but we got raw all right.”

“Well, I wish it could come all over again.”

Hubert shivered. “I don’t.”

“Now, Captain, will you lunch with me, and tell me how I can serve you? I will do anything you say to wipe out my mistake.”

For a moment Hubert did not speak, his face was unmoved, but his hands shook a little.

“That’s all right,” he said. “It’s nothing.”

And they moved towards the grill-room.

❦

Chapter 13

If one thing is more certain than another — which is extremely doubtful — it is that nothing connected with a Public Department will run as a private individual expects.

A more experienced and less simply faithful sister than Dinny would have let sleeping dogs lie. But she had as yet no experience of the fact that the usual effect of letters to those in high places is the precise opposite of what was intended by the sender. Arousing his amour-propre, which in the case of public men should be avoided, it caused Lord Saxenden to look no further into the matter. Did that young woman suppose for a moment that he didn't see how this American chap was feeding out of her hand? In accordance, indeed, with the irony latent in human affairs, Hallorsen's withdrawal of the charge had promoted in the authorities a more suspicious and judgmatic attitude, and Hubert received, two days before his year of leave was up, an intimation to the effect that it was extended indefinitely and he was to go on half-pay, pending an enquiry into the matter raised in the House of Commons by Major Motley, M.P. A letter from that military civilian had appeared in reply to Hallorsen's asking whether he was to assume that the shooting and flogging mentioned in his book had not really taken place, and if so, what explanation could this American gentleman afford of such an amazing discrepancy? This, in turn, had elicited from Hallorsen the answer that the facts were as stated in his book, but that his deductions from them had been erroneous, and that Captain Charwell had been perfectly justified in his actions.

On receiving intimation that his leave was extended, Hubert went up to the War office. He obtained no comfort, beyond the non-official saying of an acquaintance that the Bolivian Authorities were 'butting in.' This news created little less than consternation at Condaford. None of the four young people, indeed, for the Tasburghs were still there, and Clare away in Scotland, appreciated the report at its full value, for none of them had as yet much knowledge of the extent to which officialdom can go when it starts out to do its duty; but to the General it had so sinister a significance that he went up to stay at his Club.

After tea that day in the billiard room, Jean Tasburgh, chalking her cue, said quietly:

"What does that Bolivian news mean, Hubert?"

"It may mean anything. I shot a Bolivian, you know."

"But he tried to kill you first."

"He did."

She leaned her cue against the table; her hands brown, slim, and strong, gripped the cushion; suddenly she went up to him and put her hand through his arm. "Kiss me," she said; "I am going to belong to you."

"Jean!"

"No, Hubert; no chivalry and that sort of nonsense. You shan't have all this beastliness alone. I'm going to share it. Kiss me."

The kiss was given. It was long, and soothing to them both; but, when it was over, he said:

"Jean, it's quite impossible, until things dry straight."

"Of course they'll dry straight, but I want to help dry them. Let's be married quickly, Hubert. Father can spare me a hundred a year; what can you manage?"

"I've three hundred a year of my own, and half pay, which may be cut off."

"That's four hundred a year certain; people have married on lots less, and that's only for the moment. Of course we can be married. Where?"

Hubert stood breathless.

"When the war was on," said Jean, "people married at once; they didn't wait because the man was going to be killed. Kiss me again."

And Hubert stood more breathless than ever, with her arms round his neck. It was so that Dinny found them.

Without moving her arms, Jean said:

"We're going to be married, Dinny. Where do you think best? A Registry Office? Banns take so much time."

Dinny gasped.

"I didn't think you'd propose quite so soon, Jean."

"I had to. Hubert is full of stuffy chivalry. Dad won't like a Registry Office; why not a special licence?"

Hubert's hands on her shoulders held her away from him.

"Be serious, Jean."

"I am. With a special licence, nobody need know till it's over. So nobody will mind."

"Well," said Dinny, quietly, "I believe you're right. When a thing has to be, it had better be quickly. I daresay Uncle Hilary would tie you up."

Hubert dropped his hands. "You're both cracked."

"Polite!" said Jean. "Men are absurd. They want a thing, and when it's offered they carry on like old women. Who is Uncle Hilary?"

"Vicar of St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads; he has no sense of propriety to speak of."

"Good! You go up tomorrow, Hubert, and get the licence. We'll come after you. Where can we stay, Dinny?"

"Diana would have us, I think."

"That settles it. We'll have to go round by Lippinghall, for me to get some clothes, and see Dad. I can cut his hair while I'm talking to him; there won't be any trouble. Alan can come too; we shall want a best man. Dinny, you talk to Hubert." Left alone with her brother, Dinny said:

"She's a wonderful girl, Hubert, and far from cracked, really. It's breathless, but terribly good sense. She's always been poor, so it won't make any difference to her in that way."

"It isn't that. It's the feeling of something hanging over me, that'll hang over her too."

"It'll hang over her worse, if you don't. I really should, dear boy. Father won't mind. He likes her, and he'd rather you married a girl of breeding and spirit than any amount of money."

"It doesn't seem decent — a special licence," muttered Hubert.

"It's romantic, and people won't have a chance to discuss whether you ought to or not; when it's done they'll accept it, as they always do."

"What about Mother?"

"I'll tell Mother, if you like. I'm sure she won't really mind — you're not being fashionable, marrying a chorus girl or anything of that sort. She admires Jean. So do Aunt Em and Uncle Lawrence."

Hubert's face cleared.

"I'll do it. It's too wonderful. After all, I've nothing to be ashamed of."

He walked up to Dinny, kissed her almost violently, and hurried out. Dinny stayed in the billiard room practising the spot stroke. Behind her matter-of-fact attitude, she was extremely stirred. The embrace she had surprised had been so passionate; the girl was so strange a mixture of feeling and control, of lava and of steel, so masterful and yet so amusingly young. It might be a risk; but Hubert was already a different man because of it. All the same she was fully conscious of inconsistency; for to herself such a sensational departure would not be possible. The giving of her heart would be no rushing affair. As her old Scotch nurse used to say: "Miss Dinny aye knows on hoo many toes a pussy-cat goes." She was not proud of that 'sense of humour not devoid of wit which informed and somewhat sterilised all else.' Indeed, she envied Jean her colourful decision, Alan his direct conviction, Hallorsen's robust adventurousness. But she had her compensations, and, with a smile breaking her lips apart, went to find her mother.

Lady Cherrell was in her sanctum next to her bedroom, making muslin bags for the leaves of the scented verbena which grew against the house.

"Darling," said Dinny, "prepare for slight concussion. You remember my saying I wished we could find the perfect girl for Hubert. Well, she's found; Jean has just proposed to him."

"Dinny!"

"They're going to be married offhand by special licence."

"But —"

"Exactly, darling. So we go up tomorrow, and Jean and I stay with Diana till it's over. Hubert will tell Father."

"But, Dinny, really —!"

Dinny came through the barrage of muslin, knelt down and put her arm round her mother.

"I feel exactly like you," she said, "only different, because after all I didn't produce him; but, Mother darling, it is all right. Jean is a marvellous creature, and Hubert's head over ears. It's done him a lot of good already, and she'll see to it that he goes ahead, you know."

"But, Dinny — money?"

"They're not expecting Dad to do anything. They'll just be able to manage, and they needn't have children, you know, till later."

"I suppose not. It's terribly sudden. Why a special licence?"

"Intuition," and, with a squeeze of her mother's slender body, she added: "Jean has them. Hubert's position IS awkward, Mother."

"Yes; I'm scared about it, and I know your father is, though he's not said much."

This was as far as either of them would go in disclosure of their uneasiness, and they went into committee on the question of a perch for the adventuring couple.

"But why shouldn't they live here until things are settled?" said Lady Cherrell.

"They'll find it more exciting if they have to do their own washing up. The great thing is to keep Hubert's mind active just now."

Lady Cherrell sighed. Correspondence, gardening, giving household orders, and sitting on village committees were certainly not exciting, and Condaford would be even less exciting if, like the young, one had none of these distractions.

"Things ARE quiet here," she admitted.

"And thank God for it," murmured Dinny; "but I feel Hubert wants the strenuous life just now, and he'll get it with Jean in London. They might take a workman's flat. It can't be for long, you know. So, Mother dear, you'll not seem to know anything about it this evening, and we shall all know you do. That'll be so restful for everybody." And, kissing the rueful smile on her mother's face, she went away.

Next morning the conspirators were early afoot, Hubert looking, so Jean put it, as though he were 'riding at a bullfinch'; Dinny resolutely whimsical. Alan had the handy air of a best man in embryo; Jean alone appeared unmoved. They set forth in the Tasburghs' brown roadster, dropping Hubert at the station and proceeding towards Lippinghall. Jean drove. The other two sat behind.

"Dinny," said young Tasburgh, "couldn't WE have a special licence, too?"

"Reduction on taking a quantity. Behave yourself. You will go to sea and forget all about me in a month."

"Do I look like that?"

Dinny regarded his brown face.

"Well, in spots."

"Do be serious!"

"I can't; I keep seeing Jean snipping a lock and saying: 'Now Dad, bless me or I'll tonsure you!' and the Rector answering 'I— er — nevah —!' and Jean snipping another lock and saying: 'That's all right then, and I must have a hundred a year or off go your eyebrows!'"

"Jean's a holy terror. Promise me anyway, Dinny, not to marry anyone else?"

"But suppose I met someone I liked terribly, would you wish to blight my young life?"

"Yes."

"Not so do they answer on the 'screen.'"

"You'd make a saint swear."

"But not a naval lieutenant. Which reminds me: Those texts at the head of the fourth column of the 'Times.' It struck me this morning what a splendid secret code could be made out of 'The Song of Solomon,' or that Psalm about the Leviathan. 'My beloved is like a young roe' might mean 'Eight German battleships in Dover harbour. Come quickly.' 'And there is that Leviathan that takes his pastime therein' could be 'Tirpirz in command,' and so on. No one could possibly decipher it unless they had a copy of the code."

"I'm going to speed," said Jean, looking back. The speedometer rose rapidly: Forty — forty-five — fifty — fifty-five —!

The sailor's hand slipped under Dinny's arm.

"This can't last, the car will bust. But it's a tempting bit of road."

Dinny sat with a fixed smile; she hated being driven really fast, and, when Jean had dropped again to her normal thirty-five, said plaintively:

"Jean, I have a nineteenth century inside."

At Folwell she leaned forward again: "I don't want them to see me at Lippinghall. Please go straight to the Rectory and hide me somewhere while you deal with your parent."

Refuged in the dining-room opposite the portrait of which Jean had spoken, Dinny studied it curiously. Underneath were the words: "1553, Catherine Tastburgh, née Fitzherbert, ætate 35; wife of Sir Walter Tastburgh."

Above the ruff encircling the long neck, that time-yellowed face might truly have been Jean fifteen years hence, the same tapering from the broad cheek-bones to the chin, the same long dark-lashed luring eyes; even the hands, crossed on the stomacher, were the very spit of Jean's. What had been the history of that strange prototype; did they know it, and would it be repeated by her descendant?

"Awfully like Jean, isn't she?" said young Tasburgh: "She was a corker, from all accounts; they say she staged her own funeral, and got out of the country when Elizabeth set about the Catholics in the fifteen-sixties. D'you know what was the fate of anyone who celebrated Mass just then? Ripping up was a mere incident in it. The Christian religion! What oh! That lady had a hand in most pies, I fancy. I bet she speeded when she could."

"Any news from the front?"

"Jean went into the study with an old 'Times,' a towel, and a pair of scissors. The rest is silence."

"Isn't there anywhere from which we can see them when they come out?"

"We could sit on the stairs. They wouldn't notice us, there, unless they happen to go up."

They went out and sat in a dark corner of the stairway, whence through the bannisters they could see the study door. With some of the thrill of childhood Dinny watched for it to open. Suddenly Jean came forth, with a sheet of newspaper folded as a receptacle in one hand, and in the other a pair of scissors. They heard her say:

"Remember, dear, you're not to go out without a hat today."

An inarticulate answer was shut off by the closing of the door. Dinny rose above the bannisters: "Well?"

"It's all right. He's a bit grumpy — doesn't know who'll cut his hair and that; thinks a special licence a waste of money; but he's going to give me the hundred a year. I left him filling his pipe." She stood still, looking into the sheet of newspaper. "There was an awful lot to come away. We'll have lunch in a minute, Dinny, and then be off again."

The Rector's manner at lunch was still courtly, and Dinny observed him with admiring attention. Here was a widower well on in years, about to be deprived of his only daughter, who did everything about the house and parish, even to the cutting of his hair, yet he was apparently unmoved. Not a murmur escaped his lips. Was it breeding, benevolence, or unholy relief? She could not be sure; and her heart quailed a little. Hubert would soon be in his shoes. She stared at Jean. Little doubt but that she could stage her own funeral, if not other people's; still, there would be nothing ungraceful or raucous about her dominations; no vulgar domesticity in the way she stirred her pies. If only she and Hubert had enough sense of humour!

After lunch the Rector took her apart.

"My deah Dinny — if I may call you that — how do you feel about it? And how does your Mothah feel?"

"We both feel it's a little bit like 'The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea!'"

"'In a beautiful pea-green boat.' Yes, indeed, but not 'with plenty of money' I feah. Still," he added, dreamily, "Jean is a good girl; very — ah — capable. I am glad our families are to be — er — reunited. I shall miss her, but one must not be — ah — selfish."

"'What we lose on the swings we gain on the roundabouts,'" murmured Dinny.

The Rector's blue eyes twinkled.

“Ah!” he said, “yes, indeed; the rough with the smooth. Jean refuses to let me give her away. Here is her birth certificate in case of — ah — questions. She is of age.”

He produced a long yellowed slip. “Deah me!” he added, sincerely: “Deah me!”

Dinny continued to feel doubtful whether she was sorry for him: and, directly after, they resumed their journey.

❦

Chapter 14

Dropping Alan Tasburgh at his Club, the two girls headed the car for Chelsea. Dinny had sent no telegram, trusting to luck. On reaching the house in Oakley Street she got out and rang the bell. An elderly maid, with a frightened expression on her face, opened the door.

"Mrs. Ferse in?"

"No, Miss; Captain Ferse."

"Captain Ferse?"

The maid, looking to right and left, spoke in a low and hurried voice.

"Yes, Miss; we're dreadfully put about, we don't know what to do. Captain Ferse came in sudden at lunch time, and we never knew nothing of it, beforehand. The Mistress was out. There's been a telegram for her, but Captain Ferse took it; and someone's been on the 'phone for her twice but wouldn't give a message." Dinny sought for words in which to discover the worst.

"How — how does he seem?"

"Well, Miss, I couldn't say. He never said nothing but 'Where's your mistress?' He LOOKS all right, but not having heard anything, we're afraid; the children are in and we don't know where the Mistress is."

"Wait a minute," and Dinny went back to the car.

"What's the matter?" asked Jean, getting out.

The two girls stood consulting on the pavement, while from the doorway the maid watched them.

"I ought to get hold of Uncle Adrian," said Dinny. "There are the children."

"You do that, and I'll go in and wait for you. That maid looks scared."

"I believe he used to be violent, Jean; he may have escaped, you know."

"Take the car. I shall be all right." Dinny squeezed her hand.

"I'll take a taxi; then you'll have the car if you want to get away."

"Right! Tell the maid who I am, and then buzz off. It's four o'clock."

Dinny looked up at the house; and, suddenly, saw a face in the window of the dining-room. Though she had only twice seen Ferse, she recognised him at once. His face was not to be forgotten, it gave the impression of fire behind bars: A cut, hard face with a tooth-brush moustache, broad cheek-bones, strong-growing dark slightly-grizzled hair, and those steel-bright flickering eyes. They stared out at her now with a kind of dancing intensity that was painful, and she looked away.

"Don't look up! He's in there!" she said to Jean: "But for his eyes he looks quite normal — well-dressed and that. Let's both go, Jean, or both stay."

"No; I shall be quite all right; you go," and she went into the house.

Dinny hurried away. This sudden reappearance of one whom all had assumed to be hopelessly unhinged was staggering. Ignorant of the circumstances of Ferse's incarceration, ignorant of everything except that he had given Diana a terrible time before his break-down, she thought of Adrian as the only person likely to know enough. It was a long anxious drive. She found her uncle on the point of leaving the Museum, and told him hurriedly, while he stood looking at her with horror.

"Do you know where Diana is?" she finished.

"She was dining to-night with Fleur and Michael. I was going too, but till then I don't know. Let's get on back to Oakley Street. This is a thunderbolt."

They got into the cab.

"Couldn't you telephone to that Mental Home, Uncle?"

"Without seeing Diana, I daren't. You say he looked normal?"

"Yes. Only his eyes — but they always were like that, I remember."

Adrian put his hands up to his head. "It's too horrible! My poor girl!"

Dinny's heart began to ache — as much for him as for Diana.

"Horrible too," said Adrian, "to be feeling like this because that poor devil has come back. Ah, me! This is a bad business, Dinny; a bad business." Dinny squeezed his arm.

"What is the law about it, Uncle?"

"God knows! He never was certified. Diana wouldn't have that. They took him as a private patient."

"But surely he couldn't come away just when he liked, without any notice being given?"

"Who knows what's happened? He may be as crazy as ever and have got away in a flash of sanity. But whatever we do," and Dinny felt moved by the expression on his face, "we must think of him as well as of ourselves. We mustn't make it harder for him. Poor Ferse! Talk about trouble, Dinny — illness, poverty, vice, crime — none of them can touch mental derangement for sheer tragedy to all concerned."

"Uncle," said Dinny, "the night?"

Adrian groaned. "That we must save her from somehow."

At the end of Oakley Street they dismissed the cab and walked to the door . . . .

On going in Jean had said to the maid: "I'm Miss Tasburgh. Miss Dinny has gone for Mr. Cherrell. Drawing-room upstairs? I'll wait there. Has he seen the children?"

"No, Miss. He's only been here half an hour. The children are up in the schoolroom with Mam'selle."

"Then I shall be between them," said Jean. "Take me up."

"Shall I wait with you, Miss?"

"No. Keep a look-out for Mrs. Ferse and tell her at once."

The maid gazed at her admiringly and left her in the drawing-room. Setting the door ajar Jean stood listening. There was no sound. And she began to move silently up and down from door to window. If she saw Diana approaching she meant to run down to her; if Ferse came up she meant to go out to him. Her heart beat a little faster than usual, but she felt no real nervousness. She had been patrolling thus for a quarter of an hour when she heard a sound behind her, and, turning, saw Ferse just within the room.

"Oh!" she said: "I'm waiting for Mrs. Ferse; are you Captain Ferse?"

The figure bowed. "And you?"

"Jean Tasburgh. I'm afraid you wouldn't know me."

"Who was that with you?"

"Dinny Cherrell."

"Where has she gone?"

"To see one of her uncles, I believe."

Ferse uttered a queer sound — not quite a laugh.

"Adrian?"

"I think so."

He stood turning those bright flickering eyes on the pretty room.

"Prettier than ever," he said, "I've been away some time. Do you know my wife?"

"I met her staying at Lady Mont's."

"Lippinghall? Is Diana well?"

The words came out with a sort of hungry harshness.

"Yes. Quite."

"And beautiful?"

"Very."

"Thank you."

Looking at him from under her long lashes Jean could see nothing in him from top to toe that gave the impression of derangement. He looked what he was — a soldier in mufti, very neat and self-contained, all — all but those eyes.

“I haven’t seen my wife for four years,” he said, “I shall want to see her alone.”

Jean moved towards the door.

“I’ll go,” she said.

“No!” The word came out with startling suddenness: “Stay there!” And he blocked the doorway.

“Why?”

“I wish to be the first to tell her that I’m back.”

“Naturally.”

“Stay there, then!”

Jean moved back to the window. “Just as you like,” she said. There was a silence.

“Have you heard about me?” he asked, suddenly.

“Very little. I know you haven’t been well.”

He came from the door. “Do you see anything the matter with me?”

Jean looked up, her eyes held his till they went flickering away.

“Nothing. You look very fit.”

“I am. Sit down, won’t you?”

“Thank you.” Jean sat down.

“That’s right,” he said. “Keep your eyes on me.”

Jean looked at her feet. Again Ferse uttered that travesty of a laugh.

“You’ve never been mentally sick, I take it. If you had you’d know that everybody keeps their eyes on you; and you keep your eyes on everybody. I must go down now. Au revoir!”

He turned quickly and went out, shutting the door. Jean continued to sit quite still, expecting him to open it again. She had a feeling of having been worsted, and a curious tingling all over, as if she had been too close to a fire. He did not open the door again, and she got up to do so herself. It was locked. She stood looking at it. Ring the bell? Hammer on it and attract the maid? She decided to do neither, but went to the window and stood watching the street. Dinny would be back soon and she could call to her. Very coolly she reviewed the scene she had been through. He had locked her in because he meant no one to interfere before he saw his wife — suspicious of everyone — very natural! A dim sense of what it meant to be looked on as deranged penetrated her young hard intelligence. Poor man! She wondered if she could get out of the window without being noticed, and, deciding that she couldn’t, continued to stand watching the end of the street for the appearance of relief. And, suddenly, without anything to cause it, a shiver ran through her, the aftermath of that encounter. His eyes! It must be terrible to be his wife. She threw the window wider, and leaned out . . . .

❦

Chapter 15

The sight of Jean at the window stayed Dinny and her uncle on the doorstep.

"I'm locked in the drawing-room," said Jean, quietly; "you might let me out."

Adrian took his niece to the car.

"Stay here, Dinny. I'll send her out to you. We mustn't make a show of this."

"Take care, Uncle! I feel as if you were Daniel going into —"

With a wan smile Adrian rang the bell. Ferse himself opened the door.

"Ah! Cherrell? Come in."

Adrian held out his hand; but it was not taken.

"I can hardly expect a welcome," said Ferse.

"My dear fellow!"

"No, I can hardly expect a welcome, but I'm going to see Diana. Don't try and prevent me, Cherrell — you or anyone."

"Of course not! Do you mind if I fetch young Jean Tasburgh? Dinny is waiting for her in the car."

"I locked her in," said Ferse, sombrely. "Here's the key. Send her away."

He went into the dining-room.

Jean was standing just inside the door.

"Go out to Dinny," said Adrian, "and take her away. I'll manage. No trouble, I hope?"

"Only being locked in."

"Tell Dinny," said Adrian, "that Hilary is almost sure to be able to put you both up; if you go on there now I shall know where you are if I want you. You have pluck, young lady."

"Oh, not specially!" said Jean: "Good-bye!" and ran downstairs. Adrian heard the front door close and went slowly down to the dining-room. Ferse was at the window watching the girls start the car. He turned round sharply. The movement was that of a man used to being spied on. There was little change in him, less thin, less haggard, and his hair greyer — that was all. His dress as neat as ever, his manner composed; his eyes — but then — his eyes!

"Yes," said Ferse, uncannily, "you can't help pitying me, but you'd like to see me dead. Who wouldn't? A fellow has no business to go off his chump. But I'm sane enough now, Cherrell, don't make any mistake."

Sane? Yes, he seemed sane. But what strain could he stand?

Ferse spoke again: "You all thought I was gone for good. About three months ago I began to mend. As soon as I realised that — I kept dark. Those who look after us"— he spoke with concentrated bitterness —"must be so certain of our sanity that if it were left to them we should never be sane again. It's to their interest, you see." And his eyes, burning into Adrian's seemed to add: 'And to yours, and to hers?' "So I kept dark. I had the will-power to keep dark in that place for three months, in my right mind. It's only this last week or so that I've shown them I'm responsible. They want much more than a week before they'll write home about it. I didn't want them writing home. I wanted to come straight here and show myself as I am. I didn't want Diana or anybody warned. And I wanted to make sure of myself, and I have."

"Terrible!" said Adrian below his breath.

Ferse's eyes seemed to burn into him again.

"You used to be in love with my wife, Cherrell; you still are. Well?"

"We are just as we were," said Adrian, "friends."

"You'd say that anyway."

"Perhaps. But there is no more to say, except that I'm bound to think of her first, as I always have."

"That's why you're here, then?"

"Gracious, man! Haven't you realised the shock it will be to her? Perhaps you can't remember the life you led her before you went in there? But do you think she's forgotten? Wouldn't it be fairer to her and to yourself if you came to my room, say, at the Museum, and saw her there for the first time?"

"No; I'll see her here in my own house."

"This is where she went through hell, Ferse. You may have been right to keep dark, as you call it, so far as the doctors are concerned, but you're certainly not right to spring your recovery on her like this."

Ferse made a violent gesture.

"You want her kept from me."

Adrian bowed his head.

"That may be," he said, gently. "But look here, Ferse, you're just as well able to gauge this situation as myself. Put yourself in her place. Imagine her coming in, as she may at any minute, seeing you without warning, knowing nothing of your recovery, needing time to believe in it — with all her memories of you as you were. What chance are you giving yourself?"

Ferse groaned. "What chance shall I be given, if I don't take any chance I can? Do you think I trust anyone now? Try it — try four years of it, and see!" and his eyes went swiftly round: "Try being watched, try being treated like a dangerous child. I've looked on at my own treatment, as a perfectly sane man, for the last three months. If my own wife can't take me for what I am — clothed and in my right mind, who will or can?"

Adrian went up to him.

"Gently!" he said: "That's where you're wrong. Only SHE knew you at the worst. It should be more difficult for her than for anyone."

Ferse covered his face.

Adrian waited, grey with anxiety; but when Ferse uncovered his face again he could not bear the look on it, and turned his eyes away.

"Talk of loneliness!" said Ferse. "Go off your chump, Cherrell, then you'll know what it means to be lonely for the rest of your days."

Adrian put a hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, my dear fellow, I've got a spare room at my digs, come and put up with me till we get things straightened out." Sudden suspicion grinned from Ferse's face, an intense searching look came into his eyes; it softened as if with gratitude, grew bitter, softened again.

"You were always a white man, Cherrell; but no, thanks — I couldn't. I must be here. Foxes have holes, and I've still got this."

Adrian sighed.

"Very well; then we must wait for her. Have you seen the children?"

"No. Do they remember me?"

"I don't think so."

"Do they know I'm alive?"

"Yes. They know that you're away, ill."

"Not —?" Ferse touched his forehead.

"No. Shall we go up to them?"

Ferse shook his head, and at that moment through the window Adrian saw Diana coming. He moved quietly towards the door. What was he to do or say? His hand was on the knob when Ferse pushed by him into the hall. Diana had come in with her latchkey. Adrian could see her face grow deadly pale below the casque of her close hat. She recoiled against the wall.

"It's all right, Diana," he said quickly, and held open the dining-room door. She came from the wall, passed them both into the room, and Ferse followed.

"If you want to consult me I shall be here," said Adrian, and closed the door . . . .

Husband and wife stood breathing as if they had run a hundred yards instead of walking three.

"Diana!" said Ferse: "Diana!"

It seemed as if she couldn't speak, and his voice rose:

“I’m all right. Don’t you believe me?”

She bent her head, and still didn’t speak.

“Not a word to throw to a dog?”

“It’s — it’s the shock.”

“I have come back sane, I have been sane for three months now.”

“I am so glad, so glad.”

“My God! You’re as beautiful as ever.”

And suddenly he gripped her, pressed her hard against him, and began kissing her hungrily. When he let her go, she sank breathless into a chair, gazing at him with an expression of such terror that he put his hands over his face.

“Ronald — I couldn’t — I couldn’t let it be as it was before. I couldn’t — I couldn’t!”

He dropped on his knees at her feet. “I didn’t mean to be violent. Forgive me!”

And then, from sheer exhaustion of the power of feeling, both rose and moved apart.

“We had better talk it over quietly,” said Ferse.

“Yes.”

“Am I not to live here?”

“It’s your house. You must do whatever’s best for you.”

He uttered the sound that was so like a laugh.

“It would be best for me if you and everyone would treat me exactly as if nothing had happened to me.”

Diana was silent. She was silent so long that again he made that sound.

“Don’t!” she said. “I will try. But I must — I must have a separate room.”

Ferse bowed. Suddenly his eyes darted at her. “Are you in love with Cherrell?”

“No.”

“With anyone?”

“No.”

“Scared then?”

“Yes.”

“I see. Naturally. Well, it’s not for God’s playthings to make terms. We take what we can get. Will you wire for them to send my things from that place? That will save any fuss they might want to make. I came away without saying good-bye. There is probably something owing too.”

“Of course. I will see to all that.”

“Can we let Cherrell go now?”

“I will tell him.”

“Let me!”

“No, Ronald, I will,” and she moved resolutely past him.

Adrian was leaning against the wall opposite the door. He looked up at her and tried to smile; he had divined the upshot.

“He is to stay here, but apart. My dear, thank you so much for all. Will you see to that Home for me? I will let you know everything. I’ll take him up to the children now. Good-bye!” He kissed her hand and went out.

❦

Chapter 16

Hubert Cherrell stood outside his father's club in Pall Mall, a senior affair of which he was not yet a member. He was feeling concerned, for he had a respect for his father somewhat odd in days when fathers were commonly treated as younger brethren, or alluded to as 'that old man.' Nervously therefore he entered an edifice wherein more people had held more firmly to the prides and prejudices of a lifetime than possibly anywhere else on earth. There was little however, either of pride or prejudice, about the denizens of the room into which he was now shown. A short alert man with a pale face and a tooth-brush moustache was biting the end of a pen, and trying to compose a letter to 'The Times' on the condition of Iraq; a modest-looking little Brigadier General with a bald forehead and grey moustache was discussing with a tall modest-looking Lieutenant Colonel the flora of the island of Cyprus; a man of square build, square cheek-bones and lion-like eyes, was sitting in the window as still as if he had just buried an aunt and were thinking whether or not he would try and swim the Channel next year; and Sir Conway himself was reading 'Whitaker's Almanac.'

"Hallo, Hubert! This room's too small. Come into the hall." Hubert had the instant feeling not only that he wanted to say something to his father, but that his father wanted to say something to him. They sat down in a recess.

"What's brought you up?"

"I want to get married, Sir."

"Married?"

"To Jean Tasburgh."

"Oh!"

"We thought of getting a special licence and having no fuss."

The General shook his head. "She's a fine girl, and I'm glad you feel like that, but the fact is your position's queer, Hubert. I've just been hearing."

Hubert noticed suddenly how worn-looking was his father's face. "That fellow you shot. They're pressing for your extradition on a charge of murder."

"What?"

"It's a monstrous business, and I can't believe they'll go on with it in the face of what you say about his going for you — luckily you've still got his scar on your arm; but it seems there's the deuce of a fuss in the Bolivian papers; and those half-castes are sticking together about it."

"I must see Hallorsen at once."

"The authorities won't be in a hurry, I expect."

After this, the two sat silent in the big hall, staring in front of them with very much the same expression on their faces. At the back of both their minds the fear of this development had lurked, but neither had ever permitted it to take definite shape; and its wretchedness was therefore the more potent. To the General it was even more searing than to Hubert. The idea that his only son could be haled half across the world on a charge of murder was as horrible as a nightmare.

"No good to let it prey on our minds, Hubert," he said at last; "if there's any sense in the country at all we'll get this stopped. I was trying to think of someone who knows how to get at people. I'm helpless in these matters — some fellows seem to know everybody and exactly how to work them. I think we'd better go to Lawrence Mont; he knows Saxenden anyway, and probably the people at the Foreign Office. It was Topsham who told me, but he can do nothing. Let's walk, shall we? Do us good."

Much touched by the way his father was identifying himself with his trouble, Hubert squeezed his arm, and they left the Club. In Piccadilly the General said, with a transparent effort: "I don't much like all these changes."

"Well, Sir, except for Devonshire House, I don't believe I notice them."

"No, it's queer; the spirit of Piccadilly is stronger than the street itself, you can't destroy its atmosphere. You never see a top hat now, and yet it doesn't seem to make any difference. I felt the same walking down Piccadilly after the war as I did as a youngster back from India. One just had the feeling of having got there at last."

"Yes; you get a queer sort of homesickness for it. I did in Mespot and Bolivia. If one closed one's eyes the whole thing would start up."

"Core of English life," began the General, and stopped, as if surprised at having delivered a summary.

"Even the Americans feel it," remarked Hubert, as they turned into Half-Moon Street. "Hallorsen was saying to me they had nothing like it over there; 'no focus for their national influence' was the way he put it."

"And yet they HAVE influence," said the General.

"No doubt about that, Sir, but can you define it? Is it their speed that gives it them?"

"Where does their speed get them? Everywhere in general; nowhere in particular. No, it's their money, I think."

"Well, I've noticed about Americans, and it's where most people go wrong, that they care very little for money as money. They like to get it fast; but they'd rather lose it fast than get it slow."

"Queer thing having no core," said the General.

"The country's too big, Sir. But they have a sort of core, all the same — pride of country."

The General nodded.

"Queer little old streets these. I remember walking with my Dad from Curzon Street to the St. James' Club in '82 — day I first went to Harrow — hardly a stick changed." And so, concerned in talk that touched not on the feelings within them, they reached Mount Street.

"There's your Aunt Em, don't tell her."

A few paces in front of them Lady Mont was, as it were, swimming home. They overtook her some hundred yards from the door.

"Con," she said, "you're lookin' thin."

"My dear girl, I never was anything else."

"No. Hubert, there was somethin' I wanted to ask you. Oh! I know! But Dinny said you hadn't had any breeches since the war. How do you like Jean? Rather attractive?"

"Yes, Aunt Em."

"She wasn't expelled."

"Why should she have been?"

"Oh! well, you never know. She's never terrorised me. D'you want Lawrence? It's Voltaire now and Dean Swift. So unnecessary — they've been awfully done; but he likes doin' them because they bite. About those mules, Hubert?"

"What about them?"

"I never can remember if the donkey is the sire or the dam."

"The donkey is the sire and the dam a mare, Aunt Em."

"Yes, and they don't have children — such a blessin'. Where's Dinny?"

"She's in town, somewhere."

"She ought to marry."

"Why?" said the General.

"Well, there she is! Hen was saying she'd make a good lady-inwaitin'— unselfish. That's the danger." And, taking a latchkey out of her bag, Lady Mont applied it to the door.

"I can't get Lawrence to drink tea — would you like some?"

"No thank you, Em."

"You'll find him stewin' in the library." She kissed her brother and her nephew, and swam towards the stairs. "Puzzlin'," they heard her say as they entered the library. They found Sir Lawrence surrounded by the works of Voltaire and Swift, for he was engaged on an imaginary dialogue between those two serious men. He listened gravely to the General's tale.

"I saw," he said, when his brother-inlaw had finished, "that Hallorsen had repented him of the evil — that will be Dinny. I think we'd better see him — not here, there's no cook, Em's still slimming — but we can all dine at the Coffee House." And he took up the telephone.

Professor Hallorsen was expected in at five and should at once be given the message.

"This seems to be more of an F.O. business than a Police matter," went on Sir Lawrence. "Let's go over and see old Shropshire. He must have known your father well, Con; and his nephew, Bobbie Ferrar, is about as fixed a star as there is at the F.O. Old Shropshire's always in!"

Arrived at Shropshire House Sir Lawrence said:

"Can we see the Marquess, Pommett?"

"I rather think he's having his lesson, Sir Lawrence."

"Lesson — in what?"

"Heinstein, is it, Sir Lawrence?"

"Then the blind is leading the blind, and it will be well to save him. The moment there's a chance, Pommett, let us in."

"Yes, Sir Lawrence."

"Eighty-four and learning Einstein. Who said the aristocracy was decadent? I should like to see the bloke who's teaching it, though; he must have singular powers of persuasion — there are no flies on old Shropshire."

At this moment a man of ascetic aspect, with a cold deep eye and not much hair, entered, took hat and umbrella from a chair, and went out.

"Behold the man!" said Sir Lawrence. "I wonder what he charges? Einstein is like the electron or the vitamin — inapprehensible; it's as clear a case of money under false pretences as I've ever come across. Come along."

The Marquess of Shropshire was walking up and down his study, nodding his quick and sanguine grey-bearded head as if to himself.

"Ah! young Mont," he said, "did you meet that man — if he offers to teach you Einstein, don't let him. He can no more explain space bounded yet infinite, than I can."

"But even Einstein can't, Marquess."

"I am not old enough," said the Marquess, "for anything but the exact sciences. I told him not to come again. Whom have I the pleasure of seeing?"

"My brother-inlaw General Sir Conway Cherrell, and his son Captain Hubert Cherrell, D.S.O. You'll remember Conway's father, Marquess — he was Ambassador at Madrid."

"Yes, yes, dear me, yes! I know your brother Hilary, too; a live wire. Sit down! Sit down, young man! Is it anything to do with electricity?"

"Not wholly, Marquess; more a matter of extradition."

"Indeed!" The Marquess, raising his foot to the seat of a chair, leaned his elbow on his knee and his bearded chin on his hand. And, while the General was explaining, he continued to stand in this attitude, gazing at Hubert, who was sitting with compressed lips, and lowered eyes. When the General had finished the Marquess said:

"D.S.O., I think your uncle said. In the war?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I shall do what I can. Could I see that scar?"

Hubert drew up his left sleeve, unlinked his shirt cuff and exposed an arm up which a long glancing scar stretched almost from wrist to elbow.

The Marquess whistled softly through teeth still his own. "Narrow escape that, young man."

"Yes, Sir. I put up my arm just as he struck."

"And then?"

"Jumped back and shot him as he came on again. Then I fainted."

"This man was flogged for ill-treating his mules, you say?"

"Continually ill-treating them."

"Continually?" repeated the Marquess. "Some think the meat-trade and Zoological Society continually ill-treat animals, but I never heard of their being flogged. Tastes differ. Now, let me see, what can I do? Is Bobbie in town, young Mont?"

“Yes, Marquess. I saw him at the Coffee House yesterday.”

“I will get him to breakfast. If I remember he does not allow his children to keep rabbits, and has a dog that bites everybody. That should be to the good. A man who is fond of animals would always like to flog a man who isn’t. Before you go, young Mont, will you tell me what you think of this?” And replacing his foot on the ground, the Marquess went to the corner, took up a canvas that was leaning against the wall, and brought it to the light. It represented with a moderate degree of certainty a young woman without clothes.

“By Steinvitch,” said the Marquess; “she could corrupt no morals, could she — if hung?”

Sir Lawrence screwed in his monocle: “The oblong school. This comes of living with women of a certain shape, Marquess. No, she couldn’t corrupt morals, but she might spoil digestions — flesh sea-green, hair tomato, style blobby. Did you buy her?”

“Hardly,” said the Marquess; “she is worth a good deal of money, I am told. You — you wouldn’t take her away, I suppose?”

“For you, Sir, I would do most things, but not that; no,” repeated Sir Lawrence, moving backwards, “not that.”

“I was afraid of it,” said the Marquess, “and yet I am told that she has a certain dynamic force. Well, that is that! I liked your father, General,” he said, more earnestly, “and if the word of his grandson is not to be taken against that of half-caste muleteers, we shall have reached a stage of altruism in this country so complete that I do not think we can survive. I will let you know what my nephew says. Good-bye, General; good-bye, my dear young man — that is a very nasty scar. Good-bye, young Mont — you are incorrigible.”

On the stairs Sir Lawrence looked at his watch. “So far,” he said, “the matter has taken twenty minutes — say twenty-five from door to door. They can’t do it at that pace in America — and we very nearly had an oblong young woman thrown in. Now for the Coffee House, and Hallorsen.” And they turned their faces towards St. James’s Street. “This street,” he said, “is the Mecca of Western man, as the Rue de la Paix is the Mecca of Western woman.” And he regarded his companions whimsically. What good specimens they were of a product at once the envy and mock of every other country! All over the British Empire men made more or less in their image were doing the work and playing the games of the British world. The sun never set on the type; history had looked on it and decided that it would survive. Satire darted at its joints, and rebounded from an unseen armour. ‘It walks quietly down the days of Time,’ he thought, ‘the streets and places of the world, without manner to speak of, without parade of learning, strength, or anything, endowed with the conviction, invisible, impermeable, of being IT.’

“Yes,” he said on the doorstep of ‘The Coffee House,’ “I look on this as the plumb centre of the universe. Others may claim the North Pole, Rome, Montmartre — I claim the Coffee House, oldest Club in the world, and I suppose, by plumbing standards, the worst. Shall we wash, or postpone it to a more joyful opportunity? Agreed. Let’s sit down here, then, and await the apostle of plumbing. I take him for a hustler. Pity we can’t arrange a match between him and the Marquess. I’d back the old boy.”

“Here he is,” said Hubert.

The American looked very big coming into the low hall of the oldest Club in the world.

“Sir Lawrence Mont,” he said; “Ah! Captain! General Sir Conway Cherrell? Proud to meet you, General. And what can I do for you, gentlemen?”

He listened to Sir Lawrence’s recital with a deepening gravity. “Isn’t that too bad? I can’t take this sitting. I’m going right along now to see the Bolivian Minister. And, Captain, I’ve kept the address of your boy Manuel, I’ll cable our Consul at La Paz to get a statement from him right away, confirming your story. Who ever heard of such darned foolishness? Forgive me, gentlemen, but I’ll have no peace till I’ve set the wires going.” And with a circular movement of his head he was gone. The three Englishmen sat down again.

“Old Shropshire must look to his heels,” Sir Lawrence said.

“So that’s Hallorsen,” said the General. “Fine-looking chap.”

Hubert said nothing. He was moved.

❦

CHAPTER 17

Uneasy and silent, the two girls drove towards St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads.

"I don't know which I'm most sorry for," said Dinny, suddenly: "I never thought about insanity before. People either make a joke of it or hide it away. But it seems to me more pitiful than anything in the world; especially when it's partial like this."

Jean turned on her a surprised look — Dinny with the mask of humour off was new.

"Which way now?"

"Up here; we have to cross the Euston Road. Personally, I don't believe Aunt May can put us up. She's sure to have people learning to slum. Well, if she can't, we'll telephone to Fleur. I wish I'd thought of that before."

Her prediction was verified — the Vicarage was full, her aunt out, her uncle at home.

"While we're here, we'd better find out whether Uncle Hilary will do you in," whispered Dinny.

Hilary was spending the first free hour of three days in his shirt sleeves, carving the model of a Viking ship. For the production of obsolete ships in miniature was the favourite recreation now of one who had no longer leisure or muscle for mountain climbing. The fact that they took more time to complete than anything else, and that he had perhaps less time than anybody else to give to their completion, had not yet weighed with him. After shaking hands with Jean, he excused himself for proceeding with his job.

"Uncle Hilary," began Dinny, abruptly, "Jean is going to marry Hubert, and they want it to be by special licence; so we've come to ask if you would marry them."

Hilary halted his gouging instrument, narrowed his eyes till they were just shrewd slits, and said:

"Afraid of changing your minds?"

"Not at all," said Jean.

Hilary regarded her attentively. In three words and one look she had made it clear to him that she was a young woman of character.

"I've met your father," he said, "he always takes plenty of time."

"Dad is perfectly docile about this."

"That's true," said Dinny; "I've seen him."

"And YOUR father, my dear?"

"He WILL be."

"If he is," said Hilary, again gouging at the stern of his ship, "I'll do it. No point in delay if you really know your minds." He turned to Jean. "You ought to be good at mountains; the season's over, or I'd recommend that to you for your honeymoon. But why not a trawler in the North Sea?"

"Uncle Hilary," said Dinny, "refused a Deanship. He is noted for his asceticism."

"The hat ropes did it, Dinny, and let me tell you that the grapes have been sour ever since. I cannot think why I declined a life of some ease with time to model all the ships in the world, the run of the newspapers, and the charms of an increasing stomach. Your Aunt never ceases to throw them in my teeth. When I think of what Uncle Cuffs did with his dignity, and how he looked when he came to the end, I see my wasted life roll out behind me, and visions of falling down when they take me out of the shafts. How strenuous is your father, Miss Tasburgh?"

"Oh, he just marks time," said Jean; "but that's the country."

"Not entirely! To mark time and to think you're not — there never was a more universal title than 'The Man who was.'"

"Unless," said Dinny, "it's 'The Man who never was'. Oh! Uncle, Captain Ferse suddenly turned up today at Diana's."

Hilary's face became very grave.

"Ferse! That's either most terrible, or most merciful. Does your Uncle Adrian know?"

"Yes; I fetched him. He's there now with Captain Ferse. Diana wasn't in."

"Did you see Ferse?"

"*I* went in and had a talk with him," said Jean; "he seemed perfectly sane except that he locked me in."

Hilary continued to stand very still.

"We'll say good-bye now, Uncle; we're going to Michael's."

"Good-bye; and thank you very much, Mr. Cherrell."

"Yes," said Hilary, absently, "we must hope for the best."

The two girls, mounting the car, set out for Westminster.

"He evidently expects the worst," said Jean.

"Not difficult, when both alternatives are so horrible."

"Thank you!"

"No, no!" murmured Dinny: "I wasn't thinking of you." And she thought how remarkably Jean could keep to a track when she was on it!

Outside Michael's house in Westminster they encountered Adrian, who had telephoned to Hilary and been informed of their changed destination. Having ascertained that Fleur could put the girls up, he left them; but Dinny, smitten by the look on his face, ran after him. He was walking towards the river, and she joined him at the corner of the Square.

"Would you rather be alone, Uncle?"

"I'm glad of YOU, Dinny. Come along."

They went at a good pace westward along the Embankment, Dinny slipping her hand within his arm. She did not talk, however, leaving him to begin if he wished.

"You know I've been down to that Home several times," he said, presently, "to see how things were with Ferse, and make sure they were treating him properly. It serves me right for not having been these last months. But I always dreaded it. I've been talking to them now on the 'phone. They wanted to come up, but I've told them not to. What good can it do? They admit he's been quite normal for the last two weeks. In such cases it seems they wait a month at least before reporting. Ferse himself says he's been normal for three months."

"What sort of place is it?"

"A largish country house — only about ten patients; each has his own rooms and his own attendant. It's as good a place, I suppose, as you could find. But it always gave me the horrors with its spikey wall round the grounds and general air of something hidden away. Either I'm over-sensitive, Dinny, or this particular affliction does seem to me too dreadful."

Dinny squeezed his arm. "So it does to me. How did he get away?"

"He'd been so normal that they weren't at all on their guard — he seems to have said he was going to lie down, and slipped out during lunch time. He must have noticed that some tradesman came at a certain time every day, for he slid out when the lodge-keeper was taking in parcels; he walked to the station and took the first train. It's only twenty miles. He'll have been in town before they found out he was gone. I'm going down there tomorrow."

"Poor Uncle!" said Dinny, softly.

"Well, my dear, so things go in this life. But to be torn between two horrors is not my dream."

"Was it in his family?"

Adrian nodded. "His grandfather died raving. But for the war it might never have developed in Ferse, but you can't tell. Hereditary madness? Is it fair? No, Dinny, I'm not a believer in divine mercy in any form that we humans can understand, or in any way that we would exercise it ourselves. An all-embracing creativity and power of design without beginning and without end — obviously. But — tie it to our apron-strings we can't. Think of a mad-house! One simply daren't. And see what the fact that one daren't means for those poor creatures. The sensitive recoil and that leaves them mainly to the insensitive, and God help them!"

"According to you, God won't."

"God is the helping of man by man, somebody once said; at all events that's all the working version we can make of Him."

"And the Devil?"

"The harming of man by man, only I'd throw in animals."

"Pure Shelley, Uncle."

"Might be a lot worse. But I become a wicked Uncle, corrupting the orthodoxy of Youth."

"You can't corrupt what is not, dear. Here's Oakley Street. Would you like me to go and ask Diana if she wants anything?"

"Wouldn't I? I'll wait for you at this corner, Dinny; and thank you ever so."

Dinny walked swiftly, looking neither to right nor left, and rang the bell. The same maid answered it.

"I don't want to come in, but could you find out for me quietly from Mrs. Ferse whether she's all right, or whether she wants anything. And will you tell her that I'm at Mrs. Michael Mont's, and am ready to come at any moment, and to stay if she'd like me."

While the maid was gone upstairs she strained her ears, but no sound reached them till the maid came back.

"Mrs. Ferse says, Miss, to thank you very heartily, and to say she won't fail to send for you if she needs you. She's all right at present, Miss; but, oh dear! we ARE put about, hoping for the best. And she sends her love, Miss; and Mr. Cherrell's not to worry."

"Thank you," said Dinny: "Give her our love and say there we are — all ready."

Then, swiftly, looking neither to left nor right, she returned to Adrian. The message repeated, they walked on.

"Hanging in the wind," said Adrian, "is there anything more dreadful? And how long — oh, Lord! How long? But as she says, we mustn't worry," and he uttered an unhappy little laugh. It began to grow dusk, and in that comfortless light, neither day nor night, the ragged ends of the streets and bridges seemed bleak and unmeaning. Twilight passed, and with the lamps form began again and contours softened.

"Dinny, my dear," said Adrian, "I'm not fit to walk with; we'd better get back."

"Come and dine at Michael's then, Uncle — do!"

Adrian shook his head.

"Skeletons should not be at feasts. I don't know how to abide myself, as your Nurse used to say, I'm sure."

"She did not; she was Scotch. Is Ferse a Scottish name?"

"May have been originally. But Ferse came from West Sussex, somewhere in the Downs — an old family."

"Do you think old families are queer?"

"I don't see why. When there's a case of queerness in an old family, it's conspicuous of course, instead of just passing without notice. Old families are not inbred like village folk." By instinct for what might distract him, Dinny went on:

"Do you think age in families has any points to it at all, Uncle?"

"What is age? All families are equally old, in one sense. But if you're thinking of quality due to mating for generations within a certain caste, well, I don't know — there's certainly 'good breeding' in the sense that you'd apply it to dogs or horses, but you can get that in any favourable physical circumstances — in the dales, by the sea; wherever conditions are good. Sound stock breeds sound stock — that's obvious. I know villages in the very North of Italy where there isn't a person of rank, and yet not one without beauty and a look of breeding. But when you come to breeding from people with genius or those exceptional qualities which bring men to the front, I'm very doubtful whether you don't get distortion rather than symmetry. Families with military or naval origin and tradition have the best chance, perhaps — good physique and not too much brain; but Science and the Law and Business are very distorting. No! where I think 'old' families may have a pull is in the more definite sense of direction their children get in growing up, a set tradition, a set objective; also perhaps to a better chance in the marriage market; and in most cases to more country life, and more encouragement to taking their own line and more practice in taking it. What's talked of as 'breeding' in humans is an attribute of mind rather than of body. What one thinks and feels is mainly due to tradition, habit and education. But I'm boring you, my dear."

"No, no, Uncle; I'm terribly interested. You believe then in the passing on of an attitude to life rather than in blood."

"Yes, but the two are very mixed."

"And do you think 'oldness' is going out and soon nothing will be handed on?"

"I wonder. Tradition is extraordinarily strong, and in this country there's a lot of machinery to keep it alive. You see, there are such a tremendous lot of directive jobs to be done; and the people most fit for such jobs are those who, as children, have had most practice in taking their own line, been taught not to gas about themselves, and to do things because it’s their duty. It’s they, for instance, who run the Services, and they’ll go on running them, I expect. But privilege is only justified nowadays by running till you drop.”

“A good many,” said Dinny, “seem to drop first, and then do the running. Well, here we are again, at Fleur’s. Now do come in, Uncle! If Diana did want anything you’d be on the spot.”

“Very well, my dear, and bless you — you got me on a subject I often think about. Serpent!”

❦

CHAPTER 18

By pertinacious use of the telephone, Jean had discovered Hubert at 'The Coffee House' and learned his news. She passed Dinny and Adrian as they were coming in.

"Whither away?"

"Shan't be long," said Jean, and walked round the corner.

Her knowledge of London was small, and she hailed the first cab. Arriving in Eaton Square before a mansion of large and dreary appearance, she dismissed the cab and rang the bell.

"Lord Saxenden in Town?"

"Yes, my lady, but he's not in."

"When will he be in?"

"His lordship will be in to dinner, but —"

"Then I'll wait."

"Excuse me — my lady —"

"Not my lady," said Jean, handing him a card; "but he'll see me, all the same."

The man struggled a moment, received a look straight between the eyes, and said:

"Will you come in here, my — Miss?"

Jean went. The little room was barren except for gilt-edged chairs of the Empire period, a chandelier, and two marble-topped console tables.

"Please give him my card the moment he comes in."

The man seemed to rally.

"His Lordship will be pressed for time, Miss."

"Not more than I am, don't worry about that." And on a gilt-edged chair she sat down. The man withdrew. With her eyes now on the darkening Square, now on a marble and gilt clock, she sat slim, trim, vigorous, interlacing the long fingers of browned hands from which she had removed her gloves. The man came in again and drew the curtains.

"You wouldn't," he said, "like to leave a message, Miss, or write a note?"

"Thank you, no."

He stood a moment, looking at her as if debating whether she was armed.

"Miss Tasburgh?" he said.

"Tasborough," answered Jean. "Lord Saxenden knows me," and raised her eyes.

"Quite so, Miss," said the man, hastily, and again withdrew.

The clock's hands crept on to seven before she heard voices in the hall. A moment later the door was opened and Lord Saxenden came in with her card in his hand, and a face on which his past, present, and future seemed to agree.

"Pleasure!" he said: "A pleasure."

Jean raised her eyes, and the thought went through her: 'Purring stockfish.' She extended her hand.

"It's terribly nice of you to see me."

"Not at all."

"I wanted to tell you of my engagement to Hubert Cherrell — you remember his sister at the Monts'. Have you heard of this absurd request for his extradition? It's too silly for words — the shooting was in pure self-defence — he's got a most terrible scar he could show you at any time."

Lord Saxenden murmured something inaudible. His eyes had become somewhat frosted.

"So you see, I wanted to ask you to put a stop to it. I know you have the power."

"Power? Not a bit — none at all."

Jean smiled.

"Of course you have the power. Everybody knows that. This means such a lot to me."

"But you weren't engaged, were you, the other night?"

"No."

"Very sudden!"

"Aren't all engagements sudden?" She could not perhaps realise the impact of her news on a man over fifty who had entered the room with at all events vague hopes of having made an impression on Youth; but she did realise that she was not all that he had thought her, and that he was not all that she had thought him. A wary and polite look had come over his face.

'More hard-boiled than I imagined,' was her reflection. And changing her tone, she said coldly: "After all, Captain Cherrell is a D.S.O. and one of you. Englishmen don't let each other down, do they? Especially when they've been to the same school."

This remarkably astute utterance, at that disillusioned moment, impressed him who had been 'Snubby Bantham.'

"Oh!" he said: "Was he there, too?"

"Yes. And you know what a time he had on that expedition. Dinny read you some of his diary."

The colour deepened in his face, and he said with sudden exasperation: "You young ladies seem to think I've nothing to do but meddle in things that don't concern me. Extradition is a legal job."

Jean looked up through her lashes, and the unhappy peer moved as if to duck his head.

"What can I do?" he said, gruffly. "They wouldn't listen to me."

"Try," said Jean. "Some men are always listened to."

Lord Saxenden's eyes bulged slightly.

"You say he's got a scar. Where?"

Jean pushed up the sleeve on her left arm.

"From here to here. He shot as the man came on again."

"H'm!"

Looking intently at the arm, he repeated that profound remark, and there was silence, till Jean said suddenly: "Would YOU like to be extradited, Lord Saxenden?"

He made an impatient movement.

"But this is an official matter, young lady."

Jean looked at him again.

"Is it really true that no influence is ever brought to bear on anybody about anything?"

He laughed.

"Come and lunch with me at the Piedmont Grill the day after tomorrow — no, the day after that, and I'll let you know if I've been able to do anything."

Jean knew well when to stop; never in parish meetings did she talk on. She held out her hand: "Thank you ever so. One-thirty?"

Lord Saxenden gave her an astonished nod. This young woman had a directness which appealed to one whose life was passed among public matters conspicuous for the lack of it.

"Good-bye!" she said.

"Good-bye, Miss Tasburgh; congratulations."

"Thank you. That will depend on you, won't it?" And before he could answer she was through the door. She walked back, her mind not in a whirl. She thought clearly and quickly, with a natural distrust of leaving things to others. She must see Hubert that very night; and, on getting in, she went at once to the telephone again and rang up 'The Coffee House.'

"Is that you, Hubert? Jean speaking."

"Yes, darling."

"Come here after dinner. I must see you."

"About nine?"

"Yes. My love to you. That's all." And she cut off.

She stood for a moment before going up to dress, as if to endorse that simile of 'leopardess.' She looked, indeed, like Youth stalking its own future — lithe, intent, not to be deviated, in Fleur's finished and stylistic drawing-room as much at home and yet as foreign to its atmosphere as a cat might be.

Dinner, when any of the diners have cause for really serious anxiety and the others know of it, is conspicuous for avoidance of all but quick-fire conversation. Nobody touched on the Ferse topic, and Adrian left as soon as he had drunk his coffee. Dinny saw him out.

"Good-night, Uncle dear. I shall sleep with my emergency suit-case; one can always get a taxi here at a moment's notice. Promise me not to worry."

Adrian smiled, but he looked haggard. Jean met her coming from the door and told her the fresh news of Hubert. Her first feeling, of complete dismay, was succeeded by burning indignation.

"What utter ruffianism!"

"Yes," said Jean. "Hubert's coming in a minute or two and I want him to myself."

"Take him up to Michael's study, then. I'll go and tell Michael. Parliament ought to know; only," she added, "it's not sitting. It only seems to sit when it oughtn't to."

Jean waited in the hall to let Hubert in. When he had gone up with her to that room whose walls were covered with the graven witticisms of the last three generations, she put him into Michael's most comfortable chair, and sat down on his knee. Thus, with her arm round his neck, and her lips more or less to his, she stayed for some minutes.

"That'll do," she said, rising, and lighting cigarettes. "This extradition business isn't going to come to anything, Hubert."

"But suppose it does."

"It won't. But if it does — all the more reason for our being married at once."

"My darling girl, I can't possibly."

"You must. You don't suppose that if you WERE extradited — which is absurd — I shouldn't go too. Of course I should, and by the same boat — married or not."

Hubert looked at her.

"You're a marvel," he said, "but —"

"Oh! yes, I know. Your father, and your chivalry, and your desire to make me unhappy for my own good, and all that. I've seen your uncle Hilary. He's ready to do it; he's a padre and a man of real experience. Now, look here — we'll tell him of this development, and if he'll still do it, we'll be done. We'll go to him together tomorrow morning."

"But —"

"But! Surely you can trust him; he strikes me as a real person."

"He is," said Hubert; "no one more so."

"Very well then; that's settled. Now you can kiss me again." And she resumed her position on his knee. So, but for her acute sense of hearing, they would have been surprised. She was, however, examining the White Monkey on the wall, and Hubert was taking out his cigarette case, when Dinny opened the door.

"This monkey is frightfully good," said Jean. "We're going to be married, Dinny, in spite of this new nonsense — that is, if your Uncle Hilary still will. You can come with us to him again tomorrow morning, if you like."

Dinny looked at Hubert, who had risen.

"She's hopeless," he said: "I can't do anything with her."

"And you can't do anything without her. Imagine! He thought, if the worst came to the worst and he was sent out to be tried, that I shouldn't be going too. Men really are terribly like babies. Well, Dinny?"

"I'm glad."

"It depends on Uncle Hilary," said Hubert; "you understand that, Jean."

"Yes. He's in touch with real life, and what he says shall go. Come for us at ten tomorrow. Turn your back, Dinny. I'll give him one kiss, and then he must be off.”

Dinny turned her back.

“Now,” said Jean. They went down; and soon after, the girls went up to bed. Their rooms were next each other, and furnished with all Fleur’s taste. They talked a little, embraced and parted. Dinny dawdled over her undressing.

The quiet Square, inhabited for the most part by Members of Parliament away on holiday, had few lights in the windows of its houses; no wind stirred the dark branches of the trees; through her open window came air that had no night sweetness; and rumbling noises of the Town kept alive in her the tingling sensations of that long day.

‘I couldn’t live with Jean,’ she thought, ‘but,’ she added with the greater justice, ‘Hubert could. He needs that sort of thing.’ And she smiled wryly, mocking her sense of having been supplanted. Once in bed she lay, thinking of Adrian’s fear and dismay, of Diana, and that poor wretch, her husband — longing for her — shut off from her — shut off from everyone. In the darkness she seemed to see his eyes flickering, burning and intense; the eyes of a being that yearned to be at home, at rest, and could not be. She drew the bedclothes up to her own eyes, and over and over, for comfort, repeated to herself the nursery rhyme:

“Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
Silver bells and cockle shells
And pretty girls all of a row!”

❦

CHAPTER 19

If you had examined Hilary Cherrell, Vicar of St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads, in the privacy that lies behind all appearance, all spoken words, even all human gesture, you would have found that he did not really believe his faithful activity was leading anywhere. But to 'serve' was bred into his blood and bone, as they serve, that is, who lead and direct. As a setter dog, untrained, taken for a walk, will instantly begin to range, as a Dalmatian dog, taken out riding, will follow from the first under the heels of the horse, so was it bred into Hilary, coming of families who for generations had manned the Services, to wear himself out, leading, directing and doing things for the people round him, without conviction that in his leadership or ministrations he was more than marking the time of his own duty. In an age when doubt obscured everything and the temptation to sneer at caste and tradition was irresistible, he illustrated an 'order' bred to go on doing its job, not because it saw benefit to others, not because it sighted advantage to self, but because to turn tail on the job was equivalent to desertion. Hilary never dreamed of justifying his 'order' or explaining the servitude to which his father the diplomat, his uncle the Bishop, his brothers the soldier, the 'curator,' and the judge (for Lionel had just been appointed) were, in their different ways, committed. He thought of them and himself as just 'plugging along.' Besides, each of his activities had some specious advantage which he could point to, but which, in his heart, he suspected of being graven on paper rather than on stone.

He had dealt with a manifold correspondence when, at nine-thirty on the morning after the reappearance of Ferse, Adrian entered his somewhat threadbare study. Among Adrian's numerous male friends Hilary alone understood and appreciated his brother's feelings and position. There were but two years between them in age, they had been fast chums as boys; were both mountaineers, accustomed in pre-war days to each other's company in awkward ascents and descents still more awkward; had both been to the war, Hilary as Padre in France, Adrian, who spoke Arabic, on liaison work in the East; and they had very different temperaments, always an advantage to abiding comradeship. There was no need of spiritual discovery between them, and they went at once into Committee of Ways and Means.

"Any news this morning?" asked Hilary.

"Dinny reports all quiet; but sooner or later the strain of being in the same house is bound to break down his control. For the moment the feeling of being home and free may be enough; but I don't give that more than a week. I'm going down to the Home, but they'll know no more than we."

"Forgive me, old man, but normal life with her would be best."

Adrian's face quivered.

"It's beyond human power, Hilary. There's something about such a relationship too cruel for words. It shouldn't be asked of a woman."

"Unless the poor fellow's going to stay sane."

"The decision's not for you, or me, or him — it's for her; it's more than anyone ought to have to bear. Don't forget what she went through before he went into the Home. He ought to be got out of the house, Hilary."

"It would be simpler if she took asylum."

"Who would give it her, except myself, and that would send him over the edge again for a certainty."

"If she could put up with the conditions here, we could take her," said Hilary.

"But the children?"

"We could squeeze them in. But to leave him alone and idle wouldn't help him to stay sane. Could he do any work?"

"I don't suppose he could. Four years of that would rot any man. And who'd give him a job? If I could get him to come to me!"

"Dinny and that other young woman said that he looks and talks all right."

"In a way he does. Those people down there may have some suggestion."

Hilary took his brother's arm.

"Old boy, it's ghastly for you. But ten to one it won't be so bad as we think. I'll talk to May, and if, after you've seen those people, you think asylum here is the best thing for Diana — offer it."

Adrian pressed the hand within his arm.

"I'll get off now and catch my train."

Left to himself Hilary stood frowning. He had seen in his time so much of the inscrutability of Providence that he had given up classing it as benevolent even in his sermons. On the other hand he had seen many people by sheer tenacity defeat many misfortunes, and many other people, defeated by their misfortunes, live well enough on them afterwards; he was convinced, therefore, that misery was over-rated, and that what was lost was usually won. The thing was to keep going and not worry. At this moment he received his second visitor, the girl Millicent Pole, who, though acquitted, had lost her job at Petter and Poplin's; notoriety not being dispelled by legal innocence.

She came, by appointment, in a neat blue dress, and all her money, as it were, in her stockings, and stood waiting to be catechised.

"Well, Millie, how's your sister?"

"She went back yesterday, Mr. Cherrell."

"Was she fit to go?"

"I don't think so, but she said if she didn't, she'd likely lose her job, too."

"I don't see that."

"She said if she stayed away any longer they'd think we was in THAT together."

"Well, and what about YOU? Would you like to go into the country?"

"Oh, no."

Hilary contemplated her. A pretty girl, with a pretty figure and ankles, and an easy-going mouth; it looked to him, frankly, as if she ought to be married.

"Got a young man, Millie?"

The girl smiled.

"Not very special, Sir."

"Not special enough to get married?"

"He don't want to, so far as I can see."

"Do you?"

"I'm not in a hurry."

"Well, have you any views?"

"I'd like — well, I'd like to be a mannykin."

"I daresay. Have Petters given you a reference?"

"Yes, and they said they were sorry I had to go; but being so much in the papers the other girls —"

"Yes. Now Millie, you got yourself into that scrape, you know. I stood up for you because you were hard pressed, but I'm not blind. You've got to promise me that you won't do that again; it's the first step to blue ruin."

The girl made just the answer he expected — none.

"I'm going to turn you over to my wife now. Consult with her, and if you can't get a job like your old one, we might give you some quick training, and get you a post as a waitress. How would that suit you?"

"I wouldn't mind that."

She gave him a look half-shy, half-smiling; and Hilary thought: 'Faces like that ought to be endowed by the State; there's no other way to keep them safe.'

"Shake hands, Millie, and remember what I said. Your mother and father were friends of mine, and you're going to remain a credit to them."

"Yes, Mr. Cherrell."

'You bet!' thought Hilary, and led her into the dining-room opposite, where his wife was working a typing machine. Back in his study he pulled out a drawer of his bureau and prepared to wrestle with accounts, for if there were a place where money was of more importance than in this slum centre of a Christendom whose religion scorns money, Hilary had yet to meet with it.

‘The lilies of the field,’ he thought, ‘toil not, neither do they spin, but they beg all right. How the deuce am I going to get enough to keep the Institute going over the year?’ The problem had not been solved when the maid said:

“Captain and Miss Cherrell, and Miss Tasburgh.”

‘Phew!’ he thought: ‘THEY don’t let grass grow.’

He had not seen his nephew since his return from the Hallorsen Expedition, and was struck by the darkened and aged look of his face.

“Congratulations, old man,” he said. “I heard something of your aspiration, yesterday.”

“Uncle,” said Dinny, “prepare for the role of Solomon.”

“Solomon’s reputation for wisdom, my irreverent niece, is perhaps the thinnest in history. Consider the number of his wives. Well?”

“Uncle Hilary,” said Hubert: “I’ve had news that a warrant may be issued for my extradition, over that muleteer I shot. Jean wants the marriage at once in spite of that —”

“Because of that,” put in Jean.

“I say it’s too chancey altogether; and not fair to her. But we agreed to put it to you, and abide by your judgment.”

“Thank you,” murmured Hilary; “and why to me?”

“Because,” said Dinny, “you have to make more decisions-while-they-wait than anybody, except police magistrates.”

Hilary grimaced. “With your knowledge of Scripture, Dinny, you might have remembered the camel and the last straw. However —!” And he looked from Jean to Hubert and back again.

“Nothing can possibly be gained by waiting,” said Jean; “because if they took him I should go out too, anyway.”

“You would?”

“Of course.”

“Could you prevent that, Hubert?”

“No, I don’t suppose I could.”

“Am I dealing, young people, with a case of love at first sight?”

Neither of them answered, but Dinny said:

“Very much so; I could see it from the croquet lawn at Lippinghall.”

Hilary nodded. “Well, that’s not against you; it happened to me and I’ve never regretted it. Is your extradition really likely, Hubert?”

“No,” said Jean.

“Hubert?”

“I don’t know; Father’s worried, but various people are doing their best. I’ve got this scar, you know,” and he drew up his sleeve.

Hilary nodded. “That’s a mercy.”

Hubert grinned. “It wasn’t at the time, in that climate, I can tell you.”

“Have you got the licence?”

“Not yet.”

“Get it, then. I’ll turn you off.”

“Really?”

“Yes, I may be wrong, but I don’t think so.”

“You aren’t.” And Jean seized his hand. “Will tomorrow at two o’clock be all right for you, Mr. Cherrell?”

“Let me look at my book.” He looked at it and nodded.

“Splendid!” cried Jean. “Now Hubert, you and I will go and get it.”

“I’m frightfully obliged to you, Uncle,” said Hubert; “if you really think it’s not rotten of me.”

“My dear boy,” said Hilary, “when you take up with a young woman like Jean here, you must expect this sort of thing.

Au revoir, and God bless you both!"

When they had gone out, he turned to Dinny: "I'm much touched, Dinny. That was a charming compliment. Who thought of it?"

"Jean."

"Then she's either a very good or a very bad judge of character. I wonder which. That was quick work. It was ten five when you came in, it's now ten fourteen; I don't know when I've disposed of two lives in a shorter time. There's nothing wrong about the Tasburghs, is there?"

"No, they seem rather sudden, that's all."

"On the whole," said Hilary, "I like them sudden. It generally means sand."

"The Zeebrugge touch."

"Ah! Yes, there's a sailor brother, isn't there?"

Dinny's eyelids fluttered.

"Has he laid himself alongside yet?"

"Several times."

"And?"

"I'M not sudden, Uncle."

"Backer and filler?"

"Especially backer."

Hilary smiled affectionately at his favourite niece: "Blue eye true eye. I'll marry you off yet, Dinny. Excuse me now, I have to see a man who's in trouble with the hire-purchase system. He's got in and he can't get out — goes swimming about like a dog in a pond with a high bank. By the way, the girl you saw in Court the other day is in there with your Aunt. Like another look at her? She is, I fear, what we call an insoluble problem, which being interpreted means a bit of human nature. Have a shot at solving her."

"I should love to, but she wouldn't."

"I don't know that. As young woman to young woman you might get quite a lot of change out of her, and most of it bad, I shouldn't wonder. That," he added, "is cynical. Cynicism's a relief."

"It must be, Uncle."

"It's where the Roman Catholics have a pull over us. Well, good-bye, my dear. See you tomorrow at the execution."

Locking up his accounts, Hilary followed her into the hall; opening the door of the dining-room, he said: "My Love, here's Dinny! I'll be back to lunch," and went out, hatless.

❦

Chapter 20

Towards South Square, where Fleur was to be asked to give another reference, the girls left the Vicarage together.

"I'm afraid," said Dinny, overcoming her shyness, "that I should want to take it out of somebody, if I were you. I can't see why you should have lost your place." She could see the girl scrutinizing her askance, as if trying to make up her mind whether or no to say what was in it.

"I got meself talked about," she said, at last.

"Yes, I happened to come into the Court the day you were acquitted. I thought it brutal to make you stand there."

"I reely did speak to a man," said the girl, surprisingly, "I wouldn't tell Mr. Cherrell, but I did. I was just fed-up with wanting money. D'you think it was bad of me?"

"Well, personally, I should have to want more than money before I did it."

"You never have wanted money — not reely."

"I suppose you're right, although I've never had much."

"It's better than stealin'," said the girl, grimly: "after all, what is it? You can forget about it. At least, that's what I thought. Nobody thinks the worse of a man or does anything to him for it. But you won't tell Mrs. Mont what I'm telling you?'

"Of course not. Had things been going very badly?"

"Shockin'. Me and my sister make just enough when we're in full work. But she was ill five weeks, and on the top of that I lost my purse one day, with thirty bob in it. That wasn't my fault, anyway."

"Wretched luck."

"Rotten! If I'd been a reel one d'you think they'd have spotted me — it was just my being green. I bet girls in high life have no trouble that way when they're hard up."

"Well," said Dinny, "I suppose there are girls not above helping out their incomes in all sorts of ways. All the same, I think that kind of thing ought only to go with affection; but I expect I'm old-fashioned."

The girl turned another long and this time almost admiring look on her.

"You're a lady, Miss. I must say I should like to be one meself, but what you're born you stay."

Dinny wriggled. "Oh! Bother that word! The best ladies I've known are old cottage women in the country."

"Reely?"

"Yes. And I think some of the girls in London shops are the equal of anyone."

"Well, there is some awful nice girls, I must say. My sister is much better than me. She'd never 'ave done a thing like that. Your uncle said something I shall remember, but I can't never depend on meself. I'm one to like pleasure if I can get it; and why not?"

"The point is rather: What is pleasure? A casual man can't possibly be pleasure. He'd be the very opposite."

The girl nodded.

"That's true enough. But when you're bein' chivied about for want of money you're willin' to put up with things you wouldn't otherwise. You take my word for that."

It was Dinny's turn to nod.

"My uncle's a nice man, don't you think?"

"He's a gentleman — never comes religion over you. And he'll always put his hand in his pocket, if there's anything there."

"That's not often, I should think," said Dinny; "my family is pretty poor."

"It isn't money makes the gentleman."

Dinny heard the remark without enthusiasm; she seemed, indeed, to have heard it before. "We'd better take a 'bus now," she said.

The day was sunny, and they got on the top. "D'you like this new Regent Street?" asked Dinny.

"Oh yes! I think it's fine."

"Didn't you like the old street better?"

"No. It was so dull and yellow, and all the same."

"But unlike any other street, and the regularity suited the curve."

The girl seemed to perceive that a question of taste was concerned; she hesitated, then said assertively:

"It's much brighter now, I think. Things seem to move more — not so formal-like."

"Ah!"

"I do like the top of a 'bus," continued the girl; "you can see such a lot. Life does go on, don't it?"

In the girl's cockney-fied voice, those words hit Dinny a sort of blow. What was her own life but a cut-and-dried affair? What risks or adventure did it contain? Life for people who depended on their jobs was vastly more adventurous. Her own job so far had been to have no job. And, thinking of Jean, she said: "I'm afraid I live a very humdrum life. I always seem to be waiting for things."

The girl again stole a sideway look.

"Why, you must have lots of fun, pretty like you are!"

"Pretty? My nose turns up."

"Ah! but you've got style. Style's everything. I always think you may have looks, but it's style that gets you there."

"I'd rather have looks."

"Oh! no. Anyone can be a good-looker."

"But not many are," and with a glance at the girl's profile Dinny added: "You're lucky, yourself."

The girl bridled.

"I told Mr. Cherrell I'd like to be a mannykin, but he didn't seem to fall for it."

"I'm afraid I think that of all inane pursuits that's the worst. Dressing up for a lot of disgruntled women!"

"Someone's got to do it," said the girl, defiantly; "I like wearing clothes meself. But you need interest to get a thing like that. Perhaps Mrs. Mont'll speak for me. My! Wouldn't you make a mannykin, with your style, Miss, and slim."

Dinny laughed. The 'bus had halted at the Westminster end of Whitehall.

"We get off here. Ever been in Westminster Abbey?"

"No."

"Perhaps you'd like a look before they pull it down and put up flats or a Cinema."

"Are they reely goin' to?"

"I fancy it's only in the back of their minds so far. At present they talk about restoring it."

"It's a big place," said the girl, but under the walls a silence fell on her, which remained unbroken when they passed within. Dinny watched her, as with chin uplifted she contemplated the statue to Chatham and its neighbour.

"Who's the old beaver with no clothes on?"

"Neptune. He's a symbol. Britannia rules the waves, you know."

"Oh!" And they moved on till the full proportions of the old Museum were better disclosed.

"My! Isn't it full of things?"

"It IS rather an Old Curiosity Shop. They've got all English history here, you know."

"It's awful dark. The pillars look dirty, don't they?"

"Shall we just have a look at the Poets' Corner?" said Dinny.

"What's that?"

"Where they bury great writers."

"Because they wrote rhymes?" said the girl. "Isn't that funny?"

Dinny did not answer. She knew some of the rhymes and was uncertain. Having scrutinized a number of effigies and names which had for her a certain limited interest, and for the girl apparently none, they moved slowly down the aisle to where between two red wreaths lay the black and gold tablet to the Unknown Warrior.

"I wonder whether 'e knows," said the girl, "but I shouldn't think 'e cares, anyway; nobody knows 'is name, so 'e gets nothin' out of it."

"No. It's we who get something out of it," said Dinny, feeling the sensation in her throat with which the world rewards the Unknown Warrior.

Out in the street again the girl asked suddenly:

"Are you religious, Miss?"

"In a sort of way, I think," said Dinny, doubtingly.

"I never was taught any — Dad and Mother liked Mr. Cherrell, but they thought it was a mistake; my Dad was a Socialist, you see, and he used to say religion was part of the capitalist system. Of course we don't go to Church, in our class. We haven't time, for one thing. You've got to keep so still in Church, too. I must say I like more movement. And then, if there's a God, why is he called He? It puts me against Him, I know. Callin' God He gets girls treated as they are, I think. Since my case I've thought about that a good deal after what the Court missionary said. A he can't get on with creation without a she, anyway."

Dinny stared.

"You should have said that to my uncle. It's quite a thought."

"They say women are the equal of men now," the girl went on, "but they aren't, you know. There wasn't a girl at my place that wasn't scared of the boss. Where the money is, there's the power. And all the magistrates and judges and clergy are he's, and all the generals. They've got the whip, you see, and yet they can't do nothin' without us; and if I was Woman as a whole, I'd show 'em."

Dinny was silent. This girl was bitter from her experience, no doubt, but there was truth behind what she was saying. The Creator was bi-sexual, or the whole process would have ended at the start. In that was a primal equality, which she had never before quite realised. If the girl had been of her own order she would have answered, but it was impossible to be unreserved with her; and feeling herself snobbish, she fell back on irony.

"Some rebel! — as the Americans would say!"

"Of course I'm a rebel," said the girl, "after that."

"Well, here we are at Mrs. Mont's. I've got one or two things to see to, so I'll leave you with her. I hope we shall meet again." She held out her hand, the girl took it and said simply: "I've enjoyed it."

"So have I. Good luck!"

Leaving her in the hall, Dinny walked towards Oakley Street, and her mood was that of one who has failed to go as far as she has wished. She had touched on the uncharted, and recoiled. Her thoughts and feelings were like the twittering of Spring birds who have not yet shaped out their songs. That girl had roused in her some queer desire to be at grips with Life, without supplying the slightest notion of how to do it. It would be a relief even to be in love. How nice to know one's mind, as Jean and Hubert seemed at once to have known it; as Hallorsen and Alan Tasburgh had declared they knew it. Existence seemed like a Shadow Show rather than Reality. And, greatly dissatisfied, she leaned her elbows on the river parapet, above the tide that was flowing up. Religious? In a sort of way. But what way? A passage in Hubert's diary came back to her. "Anyone who believes he's going to Heaven has a pull on chaps like me. He's got a pension dangled." Was religion belief in reward? If so, it seemed vulgar. Belief in goodness for the sake of goodness, because goodness was beautiful, like a perfect flower, a starry night, a lovely tune! Uncle Hilary did a difficult job well for the sake of doing it well. Was he religious? She must ask him. A voice at her side said:

"Dinny!"

She turned with a start, to see Alan Tasburgh standing there with a broad grin on his face.

"I went to Oakley Street to ask for you and Jean; they told me you were at the Monts'. I was on my way there, and here you are, stupendous luck!"

"I was wondering," said Dinny, "whether I'm religious."

"How queer! So was I!"

"D'you mean whether YOU were or whether *I* was?"

"As a matter of fact I look on us as one person."

“Do you? Well, is one religious?”

“At a pinch.”

“Did you hear the news at Oakley Street?”

“No.”

“Captain Ferse is back there.”

“Cripes!”

“Precisely what everybody is saying! Did you see Diana?”

“No; only the maid — seemed a bit flustered. Is the poor chap still cracked?”

“No; but it’s awful for Diana.”

“She ought to be got away.”

“I’m going to stay there,” said Dinny, suddenly, “if she’ll have me.”

“I don’t like the idea of that.”

“I daresay not; but I’m going to.”

“Why? You don’t know her so very well.”

“I’m sick of scrimshanking.”

Young Tasburgh stared.

“I don’t understand.”

“The sheltered life has not come your way. I want to begin to earn my corn.”

“Then marry me.”

“Really, Alan, I never met anyone with so few ideas.”

“Better to have good ideas than many.”

Dinny walked on. “I’m going to Oakley Street now.”

They went along in silence till young Tasburgh said gravely:

“What’s biting you, my very dear?”

“My own nature; it doesn’t seem able to make trouble enough for me.”

“I could do that for you perfectly.”

“I am serious, Alan.”

“That’s good. Until you are serious you will never marry me. But why do you want to be bitten?”

Dinny shrugged. “I seem to have an attack of Longfellow: ‘Life is real, life is earnest’; I suppose you can’t realise that being a daughter in the country doesn’t amount to very much.”

“I won’t say what I was going to say.”

“Oh, do!”

“That’s easily cured. Become a mother in a town.”

“This is where they used to blush,” sighed Dinny. “I don’t want to turn everything into a joke, but it seems I do.”

Young Tasburgh slipped his hand through her arm.

“If you can turn being the wife of a sailor into a joke, you will be the first.”

Dinny smiled. “I’m not going to marry anyone till it hurts not to. I know myself well enough for that.”

“All right, Dinny; I won’t worry you.”

They moved on in silence; at the corner of Oakley Street she stopped.

“Now, Alan, don’t come any further.”

“I shall turn up at the Monts’ this evening and discover what’s happened to you. And if you want anything done — mind, anything — about Ferse, you’ve only to ‘phone me at the Club. Here’s the number.” He pencilled it on a card and handed it to her.

“Shall you be at Jean’s wedding tomorrow?”

"Sure thing! I give her away. I only wish —"

"Good-bye!" said Dinny.

❦

Chapter 21

She had parted from the young man lightly, but she stood on the doorstep with nerves taut as fiddlestrings. Never having come into contact with mental trouble, her thought of it was the more scaring. The same elderly maid admitted her. Mrs. Ferse was with Captain Ferse, and would Miss Cherrell come up to the drawing-room? Where Jean had been locked in Dinny waited some time. Sheila came in, said: “Hallo! Are you waiting for Muvver?” and went out again. When Diana did appear her face wore an expression as if she were trying to collect the evidence of her own feelings.

“Forgive me, my dear, I was going through papers. I’m trying my best to treat him as if nothing had happened.” Dinny went up to her and stood stroking her arm.

“But it can’t last, Dinny; it won’t last. I can see it won’t last.”

“Let me come and stay. You can put it that it was arranged before.”

“But, Dinny, it may be rather horrible. I don’t know what to do with him. He dreads going out, or meeting people. And yet he won’t hear of going away where nobody knows; and he won’t see a doctor, or take any advice. He won’t see anyone.”

“He’ll see me, and that’ll accustom him. I expect it’s only the first few days. Shall I go off now and get my things?”

“If you ARE going to be an angel, do!”

“I’ll let Uncle Adrian know before I come back; he went down to the Home this morning.”

Diana crossed to the window and stood there with her back to Dinny. Suddenly she turned:

“I’ve made up my mind, Dinny: I won’t let him down in any way. If there’s anything I can do to give him a chance, I’m going to do it.”

“Bless you!” said Dinny. “I’ll help!” And, not trusting either Diana or herself further, she went out and down the stairs. Outside, in passing the dining-room window, she was again conscious of a face with eyes, burningly alive, watching her go by. A feeling of tragic unfairness was with her all the way back to South Square.

Fleur said at lunch:

“It’s no good fashing yourself till something happens, Dinny. It’s lucky that Adrian’s been such a saint. But this is a very good instance of how little the Law can help. Suppose Diana could have got free, it wouldn’t have prevented Ferse coming straight back to her, or her feeling about him as she does. The Law can’t touch the human side of anything. Is Diana in love with Adrian?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Are you sure?”

“No, I’m not. I find it difficult enough to know what goes on inside myself.”

“Which reminds me that your American rang up. He wants to call.”

“Well, he can. But I shall be at Oakley Street.”

Fleur gave her a shrewd look.

“Am I to back the sailor, then?”

“No. Put your money on Old Maid.”

“My dear! Unthinkable!”

“I don’t see what one gains by marriage.”

Fleur answered with a little hard smile:

“We can’t stand still, you know, Dinny. At least, we don’t; it’s too dull.”

“You’re modern, Fleur; I’m mediæval.”

“Well, you ARE rather early Italian in face. But the early Italians never escaped. Entertain no flattering hopes. Sooner or later you’ll be fed up with yourself, and then!”

Dinny looked at her, startled by this flash of discernment in her disillusioned cousin-inlaw.

“What have YOU gained, Fleur?”

“I at least am the complete woman, my dear,” Fleur answered, drily.

"Children, you mean?"

"They are possible without marriage, or so I am told, but improbable. For you, Dinny, impossible; you're controlled by an ancestral complex, really old families have an inherited tendency towards legitimacy. Without it they can't be really old, you see."

Dinny wrinkled her forehead.

"I never thought of it before, but I SHOULD strongly object to having an illegitimate child. By the way, did you give that girl a reference?"

"Yes. I don't see at all why she shouldn't be a mannequin. She's narrow enough. I give the boyish figure another year, at least. After that, mark my words, skirts will lengthen, and we shall go in for curves again."

"Rather degrading, isn't it?"

"How?"

"Chopping and changing shape and hair and all that."

"Good for trade. We consent to be in the hands of men in order that they may be in ours. Philosophy of vamping."

"That girl won't have much chance of keeping straight as a mannequin, will she?"

"More, I should say. She might even marry. But I always refuse to worry about my neighbour's morals. I suppose you have to keep up the pretence at Condaford, having been there since the Conquest. By the way, has your father made provision against Death Duties?"

"He's not old, Fleur."

"No, but people do die. Has he got anything besides the estate?"

"Only his pension."

"Is there plenty of timber?"

"I loathe the idea of cutting down trees. Two hundred years of shape and energy all gone in half an hour. It's revolting."

"My dear, there's generally nothing else for it, except selling, and clearing out."

"We shall manage somehow," said Dinny shortly; "we'd never let Condaford go."

"Don't forget Jean."

Dinny sat up very straight.

"She'd never, either. The Tasburghs are just as old as we are."

"Admitted; but that's a young woman of infinite variety and go. She'll never vegetate."

"Condaford is not vegetation."

"Don't get ruffled, Dinny; I'm only thinking for the best. I don't want to see you outed, any more than I want Kit to lose Lippinghall. Michael is thoroughly unsound. He says that if he's one of the country's roots he's sorry for the country, which is silly of course. No one," added Fleur, with a sudden queer depth, "will ever know from me what pure gold Michael is." Then, seeming to notice Dinny's surprised eyes, she added: "So, I can wash out the American?"

"You can. Three thousand miles between me and Condaford — no, Ma'am!"

"Then I think you should put the poor brute out of his misery, for he confided to me that you were what he called his 'ideal.'"

"Not that again!" cried Dinny.

"Yes, indeed; and he further said that he was crazy about you."

"That means nothing."

"From a man who goes to the ends of the earth to discover the roots of civilisation it probably does. Most people would go to the ends of the earth to avoid discovering them."

"The moment this thing of Hubert's is over," said Dinny, "I will put an end to him."

"I think you'll have to take the veil to do it. You'll look very nice in the veil, Dinny, walking down the village aisle with the sailor, in a feudal atmosphere, to a German tune. May I be there to see!"

"I'm not going to marry anyone."

"Well, in the meantime shall we ring up Adrian?"

From Adrian's rooms came the message that he was expected back at four o'clock. He was asked to come on to South Square, and Dinny went up to put her things together. Coming down again at half past three, she saw on the coat 'sarcophagus' a hat whose brim she seemed to recognize. She was slinking back towards the stairs when a voice said:

"Why! This is fine! I was scared I'd missed you."

Dinny gave him her hand, and together they entered Fleur's 'parlour'; where, among the Louis Quinze furniture, he seemed absurdly male.

"I wanted to tell you, Miss Cherrell, what I've done about your brother. I've fixed it for our Consul in La Paz to get that boy Manuel to cable his sworn testimony that the Captain was attacked with a knife. If your folk here are anyway sensible, that should clear him. This fool game's got to stop if I have to go back to Bolivia myself."

"Thank you ever so, Professor."

"Why! There's nothing I wouldn't do for your brother, now. I've come to like him as if he were my own."

Those ominous words had a large simplicity, a generous warmth, which caused her to feel small and thin.

"You aren't looking all that well," he said, suddenly. "If there's anything worrying you, tell me and I'll fix it."

Dinny told him of Ferse's return.

"That lovely lady! Too bad! But maybe she's fond of him, so it'll be a relief to her mind after a time."

"I am going to stay with her."

"That's bully of you! Is this Captain Ferse dangerous?"

"We don't know yet."

He put his hand into a hip pocket and brought out a tiny automatic.

"Put that in your bag. It's the smallest made. I bought it for this country, seeing you don't go about with guns here."

Dinny laughed.

"Thank you, Professor, but it would only go off in the wrong place. And, even if there were danger, it wouldn't be fair."

"That's so! It didn't occur to me, but that's so. A man afflicted that way has every consideration due to him. But I don't like to think of you going into danger."

Remembering Fleur's exhortation, Dinny said hardily:

"Why not?"

"Because you are very precious to me."

"That's frightfully nice of you; but I think you ought to know, Professor, that I'm not in the market."

"Surely every woman's in the market till she marries."

"Some think that's when she begins to be."

"Well," said Hallorsen gravely, "I've no use for adultery myself. I want a straight deal in sex as in everything else."

"I hope you will get it."

He drew himself up. "And I want it from you. I have the honour to ask you to become Mrs. Hallorsen, and please don't say 'No' right away."

"If you want a straight deal, Professor, I must."

She saw his blue eyes film as if with pain, and felt sorry. He came a little closer, looking, as it seemed to her, enormous, and she gave a shiver.

"Is it my nationality?"

"I don't know what it is."

"Or the grouch you had against me over your brother?"

"I don't know."

"Can't I hope?"

"No. I am flattered, and grateful, believe me. But no."

"Pardon me! Is there another man?"

Dinny shook her head.

Hallorsen stood very still; his face wore a puzzled expression, then cleared suddenly.

"I judge," he said, "I haven't done enough for you. I'll have to serve a bit."

"I'm not worth service. It's simply that I don't feel like that towards you."

"I have clean hands and a clean heart."

"I'm sure you have; I admire you, Professor, but I should never love you."

Hallorsen drew back again to his original distance, as if distrusting his impulses. He gave her a grave bow. He looked really splendid standing there, full of simple dignity. There was a long silence, then he said:

"Well, I judge there's no use crying over spilt milk. Command me in any way. I am your very faithful servant." And, turning round, he went out.

Dinny heard the front door close with a slight choke in her throat. She felt pain at having caused him pain, but relief, too, the relief one feels when something very large, simple, primitive — the sea, a thunderstorm, a bull — is no longer imminent. In front of one of Fleur's mirrors she stood despitefully, as though she had just discovered the over-refinement of her nerves. How could that great handsome, healthy creature care for one so spindly and rarefied as she looked reflected there? He could snap her off with his hands. Was that why she recoiled? The great open spaces of which he seemed a part, with his height, strength, colour, and the boom of his voice! Funny, silly perhaps — but very real recoil! She belonged where she belonged — not to such as them, to such as him. About such juxtapositions there was even something comic. She was still standing there with a wry smile when Adrian was ushered in.

She turned to him impulsively. Sallow and worn and lined, subtle, gentle, harassed, no greater contrast could have appeared, not any that could have better soothed her jangled nerves. Kissing him, she said:

"I waited to see you before going to stay at Diana's!"

"You ARE going, Dinny?"

"Yes. I don't believe you've had lunch or tea or anything," and she rang the bell. "Coaker, Mr. Adrian would like —"

"A brandy and soda, Coaker, thank you!"

"Now, Uncle?" she said, when he had drunk it.

"I'm afraid, Dinny, one can't set much store by what they say down there. According to them Ferse ought to go back. But why he should, so long as he acts sanely, I don't know. They query the idea of his recovery, but they can bring nothing abnormal against him for some weeks past. I got hold of his personal attendant and questioned him. He seems a decent chap, and he thinks Ferse at the moment is as sane as himself. But — and the whole trouble lies there — he says he was like this once before for three weeks, and suddenly lapsed again. If anything really upsets him — opposition or what not — he thinks Ferse will be just as bad again as ever, perhaps worse. It's a really terrible position."

"When he's in mania is he violent?"

"Yes; a kind of gloomy violence, more against himself than anyone else."

"They're not going to do anything to get him back?"

"They can't. He went there voluntarily; I told you he hasn't been certified. How is Diana?"

"She looks tired, but lovely. She says she is going to do everything she can to give him a chance."

Adrian nodded.

"That's like her; she has wonderful pluck. And so have you, my dear. It's a great comfort to know you'll be with her. Hilary is ready to take Diana and the children if she'd go, but she won't, you say."

"Not at present, I'm sure."

Adrian sighed.

"Well, we must chance it."

"Oh! Uncle," said Dinny. "I AM so sorry for you."

"My dear, what happens to the fifth wheel doesn't matter so long as the car runs. Don't let me keep you. You can get at me any time either at the Museum or my rooms. Good-bye and bless you! My love to her, and tell her all I've told you."

Dinny kissed him again, and soon after in a cab set forth with her things to Oakley Street.

❦

CHAPTER 22

Bobbie Ferrar had one of those faces which look on tempests and are never shaken; in other words, he was an ideal permanent official — so permanent that one could not conceive of the Foreign Office functioning without him. Secretaries of State might come, might go, Bobbie Ferrar remained, bland, inscrutable, and with lovely teeth. Nobody knew whether there was anything in him except an incalculable number of secrets. Of an age which refused to declare itself, short and square, with a deep soft voice, he had an appearance of complete detachment. In a dark suit with a little light line, and wearing a flower, he existed in a large ante-room wherein was almost nothing except those who came to see the Foreign Minister and instead saw Bobbie Ferrar. In fact the perfect buffer. His weakness was criminology. No murder trial of importance ever took place without the appearance, if only for half-an-hour, of Bobbie Ferrar in a seat more or less kept for him. And he preserved the records of all those trials in a specially bound edition. Perhaps the greatest testimony to his character, whatever that might be, lay in the fact that no one ever threw his acquaintanceship with nearly everybody up against him. People came to Bobbie Ferrar, not he to them. Yet why? What had he ever done that he should be 'Bobbie' Ferrar to all and sundry? Not even 'the honourable,' merely the son of a courtesy lord, affable, unfathomable, always about, he was unquestionably a last word. Without him, his flower, and his faint grin, Whitehall would have been shorn of something that made it almost human. He had been there since before the war, from which he had been retrieved just in time, some said, to prevent the whole place from losing its character, just in time, too, to stand, as it were, between England and herself. She could not become the shrill edgy hurried harridan the war had tried to make her while his square, leisurely, beflowered, inscrutable figure passed daily up and down between those pale considerable buildings.

He was turning over a Bulb Catalogue, on the morning of Hubert's wedding day, when the card of Sir Lawrence Mont was brought to him, followed by its owner, who said at once:

"You know what I've come about, Bobbie?"

"Completely," said Bobbie Ferrar, his eyes round, his head thrown back, his voice deep.

"Has the Marquess seen you?"

"I had breakfast with him yesterday. Isn't he amazing?"

"Our finest old boy," said Sir Lawrence. "What are you going to do about it? Old Sir Conway Cherrell was the best Ambassador to Spain you ever turned out of the shop, and this is his grandson."

"Has he really got a scar?" asked Bobbie Ferrar, through a faint grin.

"Of course he has."

"Did he really get it over that?"

"Sceptical image! Of course he did."

"Amazing!"

"Why?"

Bobbie Ferrar showed his teeth. "Who can prove it?"

"Hallorsen is getting evidence."

"It's not in our department, you know."

"No? But you can get at the Home Secretary."

"Um!" said Bobbie Ferrar, deeply.

"You can see the Bolivians about it, anyway."

"Um!" said Bobbie Ferrar still more deeply, and handed him the catalogue. "Do you know this new tulip? Complete, isn't it?"

"Now, look you, Bobbie," said Sir Lawrence, "this is my nephew; emphatically a 'good egg,' as you say, and it won't do! See!"

"The age is democratic," said Bobbie Ferrar cryptically; "it came up in the House, didn't it — flogging?"

"We can pull out the national stop if there's any more fuss there. Hallorsen has taken back his criticism. Well, I'll leave it to you; you won't commit yourself if I stay here all the morning. But you'll do your best because it really is a scandalous charge."

"Completely," said Bobbie Ferrar. "Would you like to see the Croydon murder trial? It's amazing. I've got two seats; I offered one to my Uncle. But he won't go to any trial until they bring in electrocution."

"Did the fellow do it?"

Bobbie Ferrar nodded.

"The evidence is very shaky," he added.

"Well, good-bye, Bobbie; I rely on you."

Bobbie Ferrar grinned faintly, and held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said, through his teeth.

Sir Lawrence went westward to the Coffee House where the porter handed him a telegram: "Am marrying Jean Tasburgh two o'clock today St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads delighted to see you and Aunt Em Hubert."

Passing into the coffee-room, Sir Lawrence said to the Chief Steward: "Butts, I am about to see a nephew turned off. Fortify me quickly."

Twenty minutes later he was on his way to St. Augustine's, in a cab. He arrived a few minutes before two o'clock and met Dinny going up the steps.

"You look pale and interesting, Dinny."

"I AM pale and interesting, Uncle Lawrence."

"This proceeding appears to be somewhat sudden."

"That's Jean. I'm feeling terribly responsible. I found her for him, you see."

They entered the church and moved up to the front pews. Apart from the General, Lady Cherrell, Mrs. Hilary and Hubert there was no one except two sightseers and a verger. Someone's fingers were wandering on the organ. Sir Lawrence and Dinny took a pew to themselves.

"I'm not sorry Em isn't here," he whispered; "she still gives way. When you marry, Dinny, have 'No tears by request' on your invitation cards. What is it produces moisture at weddings? Even bailiffs weep."

"It's the veil," said Dinny; "nobody will cry today because there is none. Look! Fleur and Michael!"

Sir Lawrence turned his monocle on them as they came up the aisle.

"Eight years since we saw them married. Take it all round, they haven't done so badly."

"No," whispered Dinny; "Fleur told me yesterday that Michael was pure gold."

"Did she? That's good. There have been times, Dinny, when I've had my doubts."

"Not about Michael."

"No, no; he's a first-rate fellow. But Fleur has fluttered their dovecote once or twice; since her father's death, however, she's been exemplary. Here they come!"

The organ had broken into annunciation. Alan Tasburgh with Jean on his arm was coming up the aisle. Dinny admired his square and steady look. As for Jean, she seemed the very image of colour and vitality. Hubert, standing, hands behind him, as if at ease, turned as she came up, and Dinny saw his face, lined and dark, brighten as if the sun had shone on it. A choky feeling gripped her throat. Then she saw that Hilary in his surplice had come quietly and was standing on the step.

'I do like Uncle Hilary,' she thought.

Hilary had begun to speak.

Contrary to her habit in church, Dinny listened. She waited for the word 'obey'— it did not come; she waited for the sexual allusions — they were omitted. Now Hilary was asking for the ring. Now it was on. Now he was praying. Now it was the Lord's Prayer, and they were going to the vestry. How strangely short!

She rose from her knees.

"Amazingly complete," whispered Sir Lawrence, "as Bobbie Ferrar would say. Where are they going after?"

"To the theatre. Jean wants to stay in Town. She's found a workman's flat."

“Calm before the storm. I wish that affair of Hubert’s were over, Dinny.”

They were coming back from the vestry now, and the organ had begun to play the Mendelssohn march. Looking at those two passing down the aisle Dinny had feelings of elation and of loss, of jealousy and of satisfaction. Then, seeing that Alan looked as if he, too, had feelings, she moved out of her pew to join Fleur and Michael; but, catching sight of Adrian near the entrance, went to him instead.

“What news, Dinny?”

“All right so far, Uncle. I am going straight back now.”

With the popular instinct for experiencing emotion at secondhand a little crowd of Hilary’s parishioners had gathered outside, and a squeaky cheer rose from them as Jean and Hubert got into the brown roadster, and drove away.

“Come in this cab with me, Uncle,” said Dinny.

“Does Ferse seem to mind your being there?” asked Adrian, in the cab.

“He’s quite polite, just silent; his eyes are always on Diana. I’m terribly sorry for him.”

Adrian nodded. “And she?”

“Wonderful; as if nothing were out of the ordinary. He won’t go out, though; just stays in the dining-room — watches from there all the time.”

“The world must seem to him a conspiracy. If he remains sane long enough he’ll lose that feeling.”

“Need he ever become insane again? Surely there are cases of complete recovery?”

“So far as I can gather, my dear, his case is not likely to be one of them. Heredity is against him, and temperament.”

“I could have liked him, it’s such a daring face; but his eyes ARE frightening.”

“Have you seen him with the children?”

“Not yet; but they speak quite nicely and naturally about him; so he hasn’t scared them, you see.”

“At the Home they talked jargon to me about complexes, obsessions, repressions, dissociation — all that sort of thing, but I gathered that his case is one where fits of great gloom alternate with fits of great excitement. Lately, both have grown so much milder that he has become practically normal. What has to be watched for is the recrudescence of one or of the other. He always had a streak of revolt in him; he was up against the leadership in the war, up against democracy after the war. He’ll almost certainly get up against something now he’s back. If he does it will ungear him again in no time. If there’s any weapon in the house, Dinny, it ought to be removed.”

“I’ll tell Diana.”

The cab turned into the King’s Road.

“I suppose I’d better not come to the house,” said Adrian, sadly.

Dinny got out, too. She stood a moment watching him, tall and rather stooping, walk away, then turned down Oakley Street, and let herself in. Ferse was in the dining-room doorway.

“Come in here,” he said; “I want a talk.”

In that panelled room, painted a greenish-gold, lunch had been cleared away, and on the narrow refectory table were a newspaper, a tobacco jar, and several books. Ferse drew up a chair for her and stood with his back to a fire which simulated flames. He was not looking at her, so she was able to study him as she had not yet had the chance of doing. His handsome face was uncomfortable to look on. The high cheek-bones, stiff jaw, and crisp grizzled hair set off those thirsty burning steel-blue eyes. Even his attitude, square and a-kimbo, with head thrust forward, set off those eyes. Dinny leaned back, scared and faintly smiling. He turned to her and said:

“What are people saying about me?”

“I’ve not heard anything; I’ve only been to my brother’s wedding.”

“Your brother Hubert? Whom has he married?”

“A girl called Jean Tasburgh. You saw her the day before yesterday.”

“Oh! Ah! I locked her in.”

“Yes, why?”

“She looked dangerous to me. I consented to go into that place, you know. I wasn’t put there.”

“Oh! I know; I knew you were there of your own accord.”

“It wasn’t such a bad place, but — well! How do I look?”

Dinny said softly: “You see, I never saw you before, except at a distance, but I think you look very well.”

“I am well. I kept my muscles up. The fellow that looked after me saw to that.”

“Did you read much?”

“Lately — yes. What do they think about me?”

At the repetition of this question Dinny looked up into his face.

“How can they think about you without having seen you?”

“You mean I ought to see people?”

“I don’t know anything about it, Captain Ferse. But I don’t see why not. You’re seeing me.”

“I like YOU.”

Dinny put out her hand.

“Don’t say you’re sorry for me,” Ferse said, quickly.

“Why should I? You’re perfectly all right, I’m sure.”

He covered his eyes with his hand.

“I am, but how long shall I be?”

“Why not always?”

Ferse turned to the fire.

Dinny said, timidly: “If you don’t worry, nothing will happen again.”

Ferse spun round to her. “Have you seen much of my children?”

“Not very much.”

“Any likeness to me in them?”

“No; they take after Diana.”

“Thank God for that! What does Diana think about me?” This time his eyes searched hers, and Dinny realised that on her answer everything might depend.

“Diana is just glad.”

He shook his head violently. “Not possible.”

“The truth is often not possible.”

“She doesn’t hate me?”

“Why should she?”

“Your Uncle Adrian — what’s between them? Don’t just say: Nothing.”

“My uncle worships her,” said Dinny, quietly, “that’s why they are just friends.”

“Just friends?”

“Just friends.”

“That’s all you know, I suppose.”

“I know for certain.”

Ferse sighed, “You’re a good sort. What would you do if you were me?”

Again Dinny felt her ruthless responsibility.

“I think I should do what Diana wanted.”

“What is that?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think she does yet.”

Ferse strode to the window and back.

“I’ve got to do something for poor devils like myself.”

“Oh!” said Dinny, dismayed.

"I've had luck. Most people like me would have been certified, and stuck away against their will. If I'd been poor we couldn't have afforded that place. To be there was bad enough, but it was miles better than the usual run of places. I used to make my man talk. He'd seen two or three of them."

He stood silent, and Dinny thought of her uncle's words: "He'll get up against something, and that will ungear him again in no time."

Ferse went on suddenly: "If you had any other kind of job possible, would YOU take on the care of the insane? Not you, nor anyone with nerves or sensibility. A saint might, here and there, but there aren't saints enough to go round by a long chalk. No! To look after us you've got to shed the bowels of compassion, you must be made of iron, you must have a hide like leather; and no nerves. With nerves you'd be worse than the thick-skinned because you'd be jumpy, and that falls on us. It's an impasse. My God! Haven't I thought about it? And — money. No one with money ought to be sent to one of those places. Never, never! Give him his prison at home somehow — somewhere. If I hadn't known that I could come away at any time — if I hadn't hung on to that knowledge even at my worst, I wouldn't be here now — I'd be raving. God! I'd be raving! Money! And how many have money? Perhaps five in a hundred! And the other ninety-five poor devils are stuck away, willy-nilly, stuck away! I don't care how scientific, how good those places may be, as asylums go — they mean death in life. They must. People outside think we're as good as dead already — so who cares? Behind all the pretence of scientific treatment that's what they really feel. We're obscene — no longer human — the old idea of madness clings, Miss Cherrell; we're a disgrace, we've failed. Hide us away, put us underground. Do it humanely — twentieth century! Humanely! Try! You can't! Cover it all up with varnish then — varnish — that's all it is. What else can it be? Take my word for that. Take my man's word for it. He knew."

Dinny was listening, without movement. Suddenly Ferse laughed. "But we're not dead; that's the misfortune, we're not dead. If only we were! All those poor brutes — not dead — as capable of suffering in their own way as anyone else — more capable. Don't I know? And what's the remedy?" He put his hands to his head.

"To find a remedy," said Dinny, softly, "wouldn't it be wonderful?"

He stared at her.

"Thicken the varnish — that's all we do, all we shall do."

"Then why worry yourself?" sprang to Dinny's lips, but she held the words back.

"Perhaps," she said, "you will find the remedy, only that will need patience and calm."

Ferse laughed.

"You must be bored to death." And he turned away to the window.

Dinny slipped quietly out.

❦

Chapter 23

In that resort of those who know — the Piedmont Grill — the knowing were in various stages of repletion, bending towards each other as if in food they had found the link between their souls. They sat, two by two, and here and there four by five, and here and there a hermit, moody or observant over a cigar, and between the tables moved trippingly the lean and nimble waiters with faces unlike their own, because they were harassed by their memories. Lord Saxenden and Jean, in a corner at the near end, had already consumed a lobster, drunk half a bottle of hock, and talked of nothing in particular, before she raised her eyes slowly from an empty claw and said:

"Well, Lord Saxenden?"

His blue stare goggled slightly at that thick-lashed glance.

"Good lobster?" he said.

"Amazing."

"I always come here when I want to be well fed. Is that partridge coming, waiter?"

"Yes, milord."

"Well, hurry with it. Try this hock, Miss Tasburgh; you're not drinking."

Jean raised her greenish glass. "I became Mrs. Hubert Cherrell yesterday. It's in the paper."

Lord Saxenden's cheeks expanded slightly with the thought: 'Now, how does that affect me? Is this young lady more amusing single or more amusing married?'

"You don't waste time," he said, his eyes exploring her, as though seeking confirmation of her changed condition. "If I'd known, I shouldn't have had the cheek to ask you to lunch without him."

"Thank you," said Jean; "he's coming along presently." And, through her lashes, she looked at him draining his glass thoughtfully.

"Have you any news for me?"

"I've seen Walter."

"Walter?"

"The Home Secretary."

"How terribly nice of you!"

"It was. Can't bear the fellow. Got a head like an egg, except for his hair."

"What did he say?"

"Young lady, nobody in any official department ever SAYS anything. He always 'thinks it over.' Administration has to be like that."

"But of course he'll pay attention to what YOU said. What DID you say?"

Lord Saxenden's iced eyes seemed to answer: 'Really, you know, really!'

But Jean smiled; and the eyes thawed gradually.

"You're the most direct young woman I've ever come across. As a matter of fact I said: 'Stop it, Walter.'"

"How splendid!"

"He didn't like it. He's a 'just beast'."

"Could I see him?"

Lord Saxenden began to laugh. He laughed like a man who has come across the priceless.

Jean waited for him to finish, and said:

"Then I shall."

The partridge filled the ensuing gap.

"Look here!" said Lord Saxenden, suddenly: "If you really mean that, there's one man who might wangle you an interview — Bobble Ferrar. He used to be with Walter when he was Foreign Secretary. I'll give you a chit to Bobbie. Have a sweet?”

“No, thank you. But I SHOULD like some coffee, please. There’s Hubert!”

Just free of the revolving cage, which formed the door, was Hubert, evidently in search of his wife.

“Bring him over here!”

Jean looked intently at her husband. His face cleared, and he came towards them.

“You’ve got the eye all right,” murmured Lord Saxenden, rising. “How de do? You’ve married a remarkable wife. Have some coffee? The brandy’s good here.” And taking out a card he wrote on it in a hand both neat and clear:

“Robert Ferrar, Esq., P.O., Whitehall. Dear Bobbie, do see my young friend Mrs. Hubert Charwell and get her an interview with Walter if at all possible. Saxenden.”

Then, handing it to Jean, he asked the waiter for his bill.

“Hubert,” said Jean, “show Lord Saxenden your scar,” and, undoing the link of his cuff, she pushed up his sleeve. That livid streak stared queer and sinister above the tablecloth.

“H’m!” said Lord Saxenden: “useful wipe, that.”

Hubert wriggled his arm back under cover. “She still takes liberties,” he said.

Lord Saxenden paid his bill and handed Hubert a cigar.

“Forgive me if I run off now. Stay and finish your coffee. Good-bye and good luck to you both!” And, shaking their hands, he threaded his way out among the tables. The two young people gazed after him.

“Such delicacy,” said Hubert, “is not his known weakness, I believe. Well, Jean?”

Jean looked up.

“What does F.O. mean?”

“Foreign Office, my country girl.”

“Finish your brandy, and we’ll go and see this man.”

But in the courtyard a voice behind them said:

“Why! Captain! Miss Tasburgh!”

“My wife, Professor.”

Hallorsen seized their hands.

“Isn’t that just wonderful? I’ve a cablegram in my pocket, Captain, that’s as good as a wedding present.”

Over Hubert’s shoulder, Jean read out: “‘Exonerating statement sworn by Manuel mailed stop American Consulate La Paz.’ That’s splendid, Professor. Will you come with us and see a man at the Foreign Office about this?”

“Surely. I don’t want any grass to grow. Let’s take an automobile.”

Opposite to them in the cab he radiated surprised benevolence.

“You were mighty quick off the mark, Captain.”

“That was Jean.”

“Yes,” said Hallorsen, as if she were not present, “when I met her at Lippinghall I thought she could move. Is your sister pleased?”

“Is she, Jean?”

“Rather!”

“A wonderful young lady. There’s something good in low buildings. This Whitehall of yours makes me feel fine. The more sun and stars you can see from a street the more moral sense there is to the people. Were you married in a stovepipe hat, Captain?”

“No; just as I am now.”

“I’m sorry about that. They seem to me so cunning; like carrying a lost cause about on your head. I believe you are of an old family, too, Mrs. Cherrell. Your habit over here of families that serve their country from father to son is inspiring, Captain.”

“I hadn’t thought about that.”

"I had a talk with your brother, Ma'am, at Lippinghall, he informed me you'd had a sailor in your family for centuries. And I'm told that in yours, Captain, there's always been a soldier. I believe in heredity. Is this the Foreign Office?" He looked at his watch. "I'm just wondering whether that guy will be in? I've a kind of impression they do most of their business over food. We should do well to go and look at the ducks in the Park till three o'clock."

"I'll leave this card for him," said Jean.

She rejoined them quickly. "He's expected in at any minute."

"That'll be half an hour," said Hallorsen. "There's one duck here I'd like your opinion of, Captain."

Crossing the wide road to the water they were nearly run down by the sudden convergence of two cars embarrassed by unwonted space. Hubert clutched Jean convulsively. He had gone livid under his tan. The cars cleared away to right and left. Hallorsen, who had taken Jean's other arm, said with an exaggeration of his drawl:

"That just about took our paint off."

Jean said nothing.

"I sometimes wonder," continued Hallorsen, as they reached the ducks, "whether we get our money's worth out of speed. What do you say, Captain?"

Hubert shrugged. "The hours lost in going by car instead of by train are just about as many as the hours saved, anyway."

"That is so," said Hallorsen. "But flying's a real saver of time."

"Better wait for the full bill before we boast about flying."

"You're right, Captain. We're surely headed for hell. The next war will mean a pretty thin time for those who take part in it. Suppose France and Italy came to blows, there'd be no Rome, no Paris, no Florence, no Venice, no Lyons, no Milan, no Marseilles within a fortnight. They'd just be poisoned deserts. And the ships and armies maybe wouldn't have fired a shot."

"Yes. And all governments know it. I'm a soldier, but I can't see why they go on spending hundreds of millions on soldiers and sailors who'll probably never be used. You can't run armies and navies when the nerve centres have been destroyed. How long could France and Italy function if their big towns were gassed? England or Germany certainly couldn't function a week."

"Your Uncle the Curator was saying to me that at the rate Man was going he would soon be back in the fish state."

"How?"

"Why! Surely! Reversing the process of evolution — fishes, reptiles, birds, mammals. We're becoming birds again, and the result of that will soon be that we shall creep and crawl, and end up in the sea when land's uninhabitable."

"Why can't we all bar the air for war?"

"How can we bar the air?" said Jean. "Countries never trust each other. Besides, America and Russia are outside the League of Nations."

"We Americans would agree. But maybe not our Senate."

"That Senate of yours," muttered Hubert, "seems to be a pretty hard proposition."

"Why! It's like your House of Lords before a whip was taken to it in 1910. That's the duck," and Hallorsen pointed to a peculiar bird. Hubert stared at it.

"I've shot that chap in India. It's a — I've forgotten the name. We can get it from one of these boards — I shall remember if I see."

"No!" said Jean; "it's a quarter past three. He must be in by now." And, without allocating the duck, they returned to the Foreign Office.

Bobbie Ferrar's handshake was renowned. It pulled his adversary's hand up and left it there. When Jean had restored her hand, she came at once to the point. "You know about this extradition business, Mr. Ferrar?"

Bobbie Ferrar nodded.

"This is Professor Hallorsen, who was head of the expedition. Would you like to see the scar my husband has?"

"Very much," murmured Bobbie Ferrar, through his teeth.

"Show him, Hubert."

Unhappily Hubert bared his arm again.

"Amazing!" said Bobbie Ferrar: "I told Walter."

"You've seen him?"

"Sir Lawrence asked me to."

"What did Wal — the Home Secretary say?"

"Nothing. He'd seen Snubby; he doesn't like Snubby, so he's issued the order to Bow Street."

"Oh! Does that mean there will be a warrant?"

Bobbie Ferrar nodded, examining his nails.

The two young people stared at each other.

Hallorsen said, gravely:

"Can no one stop this gang?"

Bobbie Ferrar shook his head, his eyes looked very round.

Hubert rose.

"I'm sorry that I let anyone bother himself in the matter. Come along, Jean!" and with a slight bow he turned and went out. Jean followed him.

Hallorsen and Bobbie Ferrar were left confronted.

"I don't understand this country," said Hallorsen. "What ought to have been done?"

"Nothing," answered Bobbie Ferrar. "When it comes before the magistrate, bring all the evidence you can."

"We surely will. Mr. Ferrar, I am glad to have met you!"

Bobbie Ferrar grinned. His eyes looked even rounder.

❦

CHAPTER 24

In the due course of justice, Hubert was brought up at Bow Street on a warrant issued by one of its magistrates. Attending, in common with other members of the family, Dinny sat through the proceedings in a state of passive protest. The sworn evidence of six Bolivian muleteers, testifying to the shooting and to its being unprovoked; Hubert's countering statement, the exhibition of his scar, his record, and the evidence of Hallorsen, formed the material on which the magistrate was invited to come to his decision. He came to it. 'Remanded' till the arrival of the defendant's supporting evidence. That principle of British law, 'A prisoner is presumed innocent till he is proved guilty,' so constantly refuted by its practice, was then debated in regard to bail, and Dinny held her breath. The idea of Hubert, just married, being presumed innocent in a cell, while his evidence crossed the Atlantic, was unbearable. The considerable bail offered by Sir Conway and Sir Lawrence, however, was finally accepted, and with a sigh of relief she walked out, her head held high. Sir Lawrence joined her outside.

"It's lucky," he said, "that Hubert looks so unaccustomed to lying."

"I suppose," murmured Dinny, "this will be in the papers."

"On that, my nymph, you may bet the buttoned boots you haven't got."

"How will it affect Hubert's career?"

"I think it will be good for him. The House of Commons questions were damaging. But 'British Officer versus Bolivian Half-Castes,' will rally the prejudice we all have for our kith and kin."

"I'm more sorry for Dad than for anybody. His hair is distinctly greyer since this began."

"There's nothing dishonourable about it, Dinny."

Dinny's head tilted up.

"No, indeed!"

"You remind me of a two-year-old, Dinny — one of those whipcordy chestnuts that kick up their heels in the paddock, get left at the post, and come in first after all. Here's your American bearing down on us. Shall we wait for him? He gave very useful evidence."

Dinny shrugged her shoulders, and almost instantly Hallorsen's voice said:

"Miss Cherrell!"

Dinny turned.

"Thank you very much, Professor, for what you said."

"I wish I could have lied for you, but I had no occasion. How is that sick gentleman?"

"All right so far."

"I am glad to hear that. I have been worried thinking of you."

"What you said, Professor," put in Sir Lawrence, "about not being seen dead with any of those muleteers hit the magistrate plumb centre."

"To be seen alive with them was bad enough. I've an automobile here, can I take you and Miss Cherrell anywhere?"

"You might take us to the borders of civilisation, if you're going West."

"Well, Professor," continued Sir Lawrence, when they were seated, "what do you think of London? Is it the most barbarous or the most civilised town on earth?"

"I just love it," said Hallorsen, without ever taking his eyes off Dinny.

"I don't," murmured Dinny; "I hate the contrasts and the smell of petrol."

"Well, a stranger can't tell why he loves London, unless it's the variety and the way you've gotten freedom and order all mixed up; or maybe it's because it's so different from our towns over there. New York is more wonderful and more exciting, but not so homey."

"New York," said Sir Lawrence, "is like strychnine. It perks you up until it lays you out."

"I certainly couldn't live in New York. The West for me."

"The great open spaces," murmured Dinny.

"Why yes, Miss Cherrell; you would love them."

Dinny smiled wanly. "No one can be pulled up by the roots, Professor."

"Ah!" said Sir Lawrence, "my son once took up the question of Emigration in Parliament. He found that people's roots were so strong that he had to drop it like a hot potato."

"Is that so?" said Hallorsen. "When I look at your town folk, undersized and pale and kind of disillusioned, I can't help wondering what roots they can have."

"The townier the type, the more stubborn its roots — no open spaces for them; the streets, fried fish, and the pictures. Would you put me down here, Professor? Dinny, where are you bound for?"

"Oakley Street."

Hallorsen stopped the car and Sir Lawrence got out.

"Miss Cherrell, may I have the great pleasure of taking you as far as Oakley Street?"

Dinny bowed.

Seated thus side by side with him in the closed car, she wondered uneasily what use he would make of his opportunity. Presently, without looking at her, he said:

"As soon as your brother is fixed up I shall be sailing. I'm going to take an expedition to New Mexico. I shall always count it a privilege to have known you, Miss Cherrell."

His ungloved hands were gripping each other between his knees; and the sight moved her.

"I am very sorry for misjudging you at first, Professor, just as my brother did."

"It was natural. I shall be glad to think I have your good will when all's been said and done."

Dinny put out her hand impulsively.

"You have."

He took the hand with gravity, raised it to his lips, and returned it to her gently. Dinny felt extremely unhappy. She said, timidly: "You've made me think quite differently about Americans, Professor."

Hallorsen smiled.

"That is something, anyway."

"I'm afraid I was very crude in my ideas. You see, I haven't really known any."

"That is the little trouble between us; we don't really know each other. We get on each other's nerves, with little things, and there it ends. But I shall always remember you as the smile on the face of this country."

"That," said Dinny, "is very pretty, and I wish it were true."

"If I could have a picture of you, I should treasure it."

"Of course you shall! I don't know if I have a decent one, but I'll send you the best."

"I thank you. I think if you will allow me I will get out here; I am just not too sure of myself. The car will take you on." He tapped on the glass and spoke to the chauffeur.

"Good-bye!" he said, and took her hand again, looked at it rather long, pressed it hard, and slid his long frame through the doorway.

"Good-bye!" murmured Dinny, sitting back, with rather a choky feeling in her throat.

Five minutes later the car pulled up before Diana's house, and, very subdued, she went in.

Diana, whom she had not seen that morning, opened the door of her room as she was passing.

"Come in here, Dinny." Her voice was stealthy, and a little shudder went through Dinny. They sat down side by side on the four-poster bed, and Diana spoke low and hurriedly:

"He came in here last night and insisted on staying. I didn't dare refuse. There's a change; I have a feeling that it's the beginning of the end, again. His self-control is weakening, all round. I think I ought to send the children somewhere. Would Hilary take them?"

"I'm sure he would; or Mother would certainly."

"Perhaps that would be better."

"Don't you think you ought to go, yourself?"

Diana sighed and shook her head.

"That would only precipitate things. Could you take the children down for me?"

"Of course. But do you really think he —?"

"Yes. I'm sure he's working up again. I know the signs so well. Haven't you noticed, Dinny, he's been drinking more each evening? It's all of a piece."

"If he'd get over his horror of going out."

"I don't believe that would help. Here at all events we know what there is to know, and the worst at once if it comes. I dread something happening with strangers, and our hands being forced."

Dinny squeezed her arm.

"When would you like the children taken down?"

"As soon as possible. I can't say anything to him. You must just go off as quietly as you can. Mademoiselle can go down separately, if your mother will have her too."

"I shall come back at once, of course."

"Dinny, it isn't fair on you. I've got the maids. It's really too bad to bother you with my troubles."

"But of course I shall come back. I'll borrow Fleur's car. Will he mind the children going?"

"Only if he connects it with our feeling about his state. I can say it's an old invitation."

"Diana," said Dinny, suddenly, "have you any love for him left?"

"Love? No!"

"Just pity?"

Diana shook her head.

"I can't explain; it's the past and a feeling that if I desert him I help the fates against him. That's a horrible thought!"

"I understand. I'm so sorry for you both, and for Uncle Adrian."

Diana smoothed her face with her hands, as if wiping off the marks of trouble.

"I don't know what's coming, but it's no good going to meet it. As to you, my dear, don't for God's sake let me spoil your time."

"That's all right. I'm wanting something to take me out of myself. Spinsters, you know, should be well shaken before being taken."

"Ah! When ARE you going to be taken, Dinny?"

"I have just rejected the great open spaces, and I feel a beast."

"Between the great open spaces and the deep sea — are you?"

"And likely to remain so. The love of a good man — and all that, seems to leave me frost-bitten."

"Wait! Your hair is the wrong colour for the cloister."

"I'll have it dyed and sail in my true colours. Icebergs are sea-green."

"As I said before — wait!"

"I will," said Dinny . . . .

Fleur herself drove the South Square car to the door two days later. The children and some luggage were placed in it without incident, and they started.

That somewhat hectic drive, for the children were little used to cars, to Dinny was pure relief. She had not realised how much the tragic atmosphere of Oakley Street was on her nerves; and yet it was but ten days since she had come up from Condaford. The colours of 'the fall' were deepening already on the trees. The day had the soft and sober glow of fine October; the air, as the country deepened and grew remote, had again its beloved tang; wood smoke rose from cottage chimneys, and rooks from the bared fields.

They arrived in time for lunch, and, leaving the children with Mademoiselle, who had come down by train, Dinny went forth with the dogs alone. She stopped at an old cottage high above the sunken road. The door opened straight into the living-room, where an old woman was sitting by a thin fire of wood.

“Oh! Miss Dinny,” she said, “I am that glad. I haven’t seen you not all this month.”

“No, Betty; I’ve been away. How are you?”

The little old woman, for she was of pocket size, crossed her hands solemnly on her middle.

“My stummick’s bad again. I ‘aven’t nothin’ else the matter — the doctor says I’m wonderful. Just my stummick. ‘E says I ought to eat more; and I’ve such an appetite, Miss Dinny. But I can’t eat ‘ardly nothin’ without I’m sick, and that’s the truth.”

“Dear Betty, I’m so sorry. Tummies are a dreadful nuisance. Tummies and teeth. I can’t think why we have them. If you haven’t teeth you can’t digest; and if you have teeth you can’t digest either.”

The old lady cackled thinly.

“‘E du say I ought to ‘ave the rest of my teeth out, but I don’t like to part with ’em, Miss Dinny. Father ‘e’s got none, and ‘e can bite an apple, ‘e can. But at my age I can’t expect to live to ‘arden up like that.”

“But you could have some lovely false ones, Betty.”

“Oh! I don’t want to ‘ave no false teeth — so pretenshus. You wouldn’t never wear false teeth, would you, Miss Dinny?”

“Of course I would, Betty. Nearly all the best people have them nowadays.”

“You will ‘ave your joke. No, I shouldn’t like it. I’d as soon wear a wig. But my ‘air’s as thick as ever. I’m wonderful for my age. I’ve got a lot to be thankful for; it’s only my stummick, an’ that’s like as if there was somethin’ there.”

Dinny saw the pain and darkness in her eyes.

“How is Benjamin, Betty?”

The eyes changed, became amused and yet judgmatic, as if she were considering a child.

“Oh! Father’s all right, Miss; ‘e never ‘as anything the matter except ‘is rheumatiz; ‘e’s out now doin’ a bit o’ diggin’.”

“And how’s Goldie?” said Dinny, looking lugubriously at a goldfinch in a cage. She hated to see birds in cages, but had never been able to bring herself to say so to these old people with their small bright imprisoned pet. Besides, didn’t they say that if you released a tame goldfinch, it would soon be pecked to death?

“Oh!” said the old lady, “‘e thinks ‘e’s someone since you give him that bigger cage.” Her eyes brightened. “Fancy the Captain married, Miss Dinny, and that dreadful case against him an’ all — whatever are they thinkin’ about? I never ‘eard of such a thing in all my life. One of the Cherrell’s to be put in Court like that. It’s out of all knowledge.”

“It is, Betty.”

“I’m told she’s a fine young lady. And where’ll they be goin’ to live?”

“Nobody knows yet; we have to wait for this case to be over. Perhaps down here, or perhaps he’ll get a post abroad. They’ll be very poor, of course.”

“Dreadful; it never was like that in old days. The way they put upon the gentry now — oh, dear! I remember your great-grandfather, Miss Dinny, drivin’ four-inhand when I was a little bit of a thing. Such a nice old gentleman — curtly, as you might say.”

Such references to the gentry never ceased to make Dinny feel uneasy, only too well aware that this old lady had been one of eight children brought up by a farm worker whose wages had been eleven shillings a week, and that she and her husband now existed on their Old Age pensions, after bringing up a family of seven.

“Well, Betty dear, what CAN you digest, so that I can tell cook?”

“Thank you kindly, Miss Dinny; a nice bit of lean pork do seem to lie quiet sometimes.” Again her eyes grew dark and troubled. “I ‘ave such dreadful pain; really sometimes I feel I’d be glad to go ‘ome.”

“Oh! no, Betty dear. With a little proper feeding I know you’re going to feel better.”

The old lady smiled below her eyes.

“I’m wonderful for my age, so it’d never do to complain. And when are the bells goin’ to ring for you, Miss Dinny?”

“Don’t mention them, Betty. They won’t ring of their own accord — that’s certain.”

“Ah! People don’t marry young, and ‘ave the families they did in my young days. My old Aunt ‘ad eighteen an’ reared eleven."

"There doesn't seem room or work for them now, does there?"

"Aye! The country's changed."

"Less down here than in most places, thank goodness." And Dinny's eyes wandered over the room where these two old people had spent some fifty years of life; from brick floor to raftered ceiling it was scrupulously clean and had a look of homely habit.

"Well, Betty, I must go. I'm staying in London just now with a friend, and have to get back there this evening. I'll tell cook to send some little things that'll be better for you than pork even. Don't get up!"

But the little old woman was on her feet, her eyes looking out from her very soul.

"I am that glad to 'ave seen you, Miss Dinny. God bless you! And I do 'ope the Captain won't 'ave any trouble with those dreadful people."

"Good-bye, Betty dear, and remember me to Benjamin," and pressing the old lady's hand Dinny went out to where the dogs were waiting for her on the flagged pathway. As always after such visits she felt humble and inclined to cry. Roots! That was what she missed in London, what she would miss in the 'great open spaces.' She walked to the bottom of a narrow straggling beechwood, and entered it through a tattered gate that she did not even have to open. She mounted over the damp beech mast which smelled sweetly as of husks; to the left a grey-blue sky was rifted by the turning beeches, and to her right stretched fallow ground where a squatting hare turned and raced for the hedgerow; a pheasant rose squawking before one of the dogs and rocketed over the wood. She emerged from the trees at the top, and stood looking down at the house, long and stone-coloured, broken by magnolias and the trees on the lawn; smoke was rising from two chimneys, and the fantails speckled with white one gable. She breathed deeply, and for full ten minutes stood there, like a watered plant drawing up the food of its vitality. The scent was of leaves and turned earth and of rain not far away; the last time she had stood there had been at the end of May, and she had inhaled that scent of summer which is at once a memory and a promise, an aching and a draught of delight . . . .

After an early tea she started back, in the now closed car, sitting beside Fleur.

"I must say," said that shrewd young woman, "Condaford is the most peaceful place I was ever in. I should die of it, Dinny. The rurality of Lippinghall is nothing thereto."

"Old and mouldering, um?"

"Well, I always tell Michael that your side of his family is one of the least expressed and most interesting phenomena left in England. You're wholly unvocal, utterly out of the limelight. Too unsensational for the novelists, and yet you're there, and go on being there, and I don't quite know how. Every mortal thing's against you, from Death Duties down to gramophones. But you persist generally at the ends of the earth, doing things that nobody knows or cares anything about. Most of your sort haven't even got Condafords now to come home and die in; and yet you still have roots, and a sense of duty. I've got neither, you know, I suppose that comes of being half French. My father's family — the Forsytes — may have roots, but they haven't a sense of duty — not in the same way; or perhaps it's a sense of service that I mean. I admire it, you know, Dinny, but it bores me stiff. It's making you go and blight your young life over this Ferse business. Duty's a disease, Dinny; an admirable disease."

"What do you think I ought to do about it?"

"Have your instincts out. I can't imagine anything more ageing than what you're doing now. As for Diana, she's of the same sort — the Montjoys have a kind of Condaford up in Dumfriesshire — I admire her for sticking to Ferse, but I think it's quite crazy of her. It can only end one way, and that'll be the more unpleasant the longer it's put off."

"Yes; I feel she's riding for a bad fall, but I hope I should do the same."

"I know I shouldn't," said Fleur, cheerfully.

"I don't believe that anybody knows what they'll do about anything until it comes to the point."

"The thing is never to let anything come to a point."

Fleur spoke with a tang in her voice, and Dinny saw her lips harden. She always found Fleur attractive, because mystifying.

"You haven't seen Ferse," she said, "and without seeing him you can't appreciate how pathetic he is."

“That’s sentiment, my dear. I’m not sentimental.”

“I’m sure you’ve had a past, Fleur; and you can’t have had that without being sentimental.”

Fleur gave her a quick look, and trod on the accelerator.

“Time I turned on my lights,” she said.

For the rest of the journey she talked on Art, Letters, and other unimportant themes. It was nearly eight o’clock when she dropped Dinny at Oakley Street.

Diana was in, already dressed for dinner.

“Dinny,” she said, “he’s out.”

❦

Chapter 25

Portentous — those simple words!

"After you'd gone this morning he was in a great state — seemed to think we were all in a conspiracy to keep things from him."

"As we were," murmured Dinny.

"Mademoiselle's going upset him again. Soon after, I heard the front door bang — he hasn't been back since. I didn't tell you, but last night was dreadful. Suppose he doesn't come back?"

"Oh! Diana, I wish he wouldn't."

"But where has he gone? What can he do? Whom can he go to? O God! It's awful!"

Dinny looked at her in silent distress.

"Sorry, Dinny! You must be tired and hungry. We won't wait dinner."

In Ferse's 'lair,' that charming room panelled in green shot with a golden look, they sat through an anxious meal. The shaded light fell pleasantly on their bare necks and arms, on the fruit, the flowers, the silver; and until the maid was gone they spoke of indifferent things.

"Has he a key?" asked Dinny.

"Yes."

"Shall I ring up Uncle Adrian?"

"What can he do? If Ronald does come in, it will be more dangerous if Adrian is here."

"Alan Tasburgh told me he would come any time if anyone was wanted."

"No, let's keep it to ourselves to-night. To-morrow we can see."

Dinny nodded. She was scared, and more scared of showing it, for she was there to strengthen Diana by keeping cool and steady.

"Come upstairs and sing to me," she said, at last.

Up in the drawing-room Diana sang 'The Sprig of Thyme,' 'Waley, Waley,' 'The Bens of Jura,' 'Mowing the Barley,' 'The Castle of Dromore,' and the beauty of the room, of the songs, of the singer, brought to Dinny a sense of unreality. She had gone into a drowsy dream, when, suddenly, Diana stopped.

"I heard the front door."

Dinny got up and stood beside the piano.

"Go on, don't say anything, don't show anything."

Diana began again to play, and sing the Irish song 'Must I go bound and you go free.' Then the door was opened, and, in a mirror at the end of the room, Dinny saw Ferse come in and stand listening.

"Sing on," she whispered.

"'Must I go bound, and you go free?
Must I love a lass that couldn't love me?
Oh! was I taught so poor a wit
As love a lass would break my heart.'"

And Ferse stood there listening. He looked like a man excessively tired or overcome with drink; his hair was disordered and his lips drawn back so that his teeth showed. Then he moved. He seemed trying to make no noise. He passed round to a sofa on the far side and sank down on it. Diana stopped singing. Dinny, whose hand was on her shoulder, felt her trembling with the effort to control her voice.

"Have you had dinner, Ronald?"

Ferse did not answer, staring across the room with that queer and ghostly grin.

"Play on," whispered Dinny.

Diana played the Red Sarafan; she played the fine simple tune over and over, as if making hypnotic passes towards that mute figure. When, at last, she stopped, there followed the strangest silence. Then Dinny's nerve snapped and she said, almost sharply:

"Is it raining, Captain Ferse?"

Ferse passed his hand down his trouser, and nodded.

"Hadn't you better go up and change them, Ronald?"

He put his elbows on his knees, and rested his head on his hands.

"You must be tired, dear; won't you go to bed? Shall I bring you something up?"

And still he did not move. The grin had faded off his lips; his eyes were closed. He looked like a man suddenly asleep, as some overdriven beast of burden might drop off between the shafts.

"Shut the piano," whispered Dinny; "let's go up."

Diana closed the piano without noise and rose. With their arms linked they waited, but he did not stir.

"Is he really asleep?" whispered Dinny.

Ferse started up. "Sleep! I'm for it. I'm for it again. And I won't stand it. By God! I won't stand it!"

He stood a moment transfigured with a sort of fury; then, seeing them shrink, sank back on the sofa and buried his face in his hands. Impulsively Diana moved towards him.

Ferse looked up. His eyes were wild.

"Don't!" he growled out. "Leave me alone! Go away!"

At the door Diana turned and said:

"Ronald, won't you see someone? Just to make you sleep — just for that."

Ferse sprang up again. "I'll see no one. Go away!"

They shrank out of the room, and up in Dinny's bedroom stood with their arms round each other, quivering.

"Have the maids gone to bed?"

"They always go early, unless one of them is out."

"I think I ought to go down and telephone, Diana."

"No, Dinny, I will. Only to whom?"

That was, indeed, the question. They debated it in whispers. Diana thought her doctor; Dinny thought Adrian or Michael should be asked to go round to the doctor and bring him.

"Was it like this before the last attack?"

"No. He didn't know then what was before him. I feel he might kill himself, Dinny."

"Has he a weapon?"

"I gave his Service revolver to Adrian to keep for me."

"Razors?"

"Only safety ones; and there's nothing poisonous in the house."

Dinny moved to the door.

"I MUST go and telephone."

"Dinny, I can't have you —"

"He wouldn't touch ME. It's you that are in danger. Lock the door while I'm gone."

And before Diana could stop her, she slid out. The lights still burned, and she stood a moment. Her room was on the second floor, facing the street. Diana's bedroom and that of Ferse were on the drawing-room floor below. She must pass them to reach the hall and the little study where the telephone was kept. No sound came up. Diana had opened the door again and was standing there; and, conscious that at any moment she might slip past her and go down, Dinny ran forward and began descending the stairs. They creaked and she stopped to take off her shoes. Holding them in her hand she crept on past the drawing-room door. No sound came thence; and she sped down to the hall. She noticed Ferse's hat and coat thrown across a chair, and, passing into the study, closed the door behind her. She stood a moment to recover breath, then, turning on the light, took up the directory. She found Adrian's number and was stretching out her hand for the receiver when her wrist was seized, and with a gasp she turned to face Ferse. He twisted her round and stood pointing to the shoes still in her hand.

"Going to give me away," he said, and, still holding her, took a knife out of his side pocket. Back, at the full length of her arm, Dinny looked him in the face. Somehow she was not so scared as she had been; her chief feeling was a sort of shame at having her shoes in her hand.

"That's silly, Captain Ferse," she said, icily. "You know we'd neither of us do you any harm."

Ferse flung her hand from him, opened the knife, and with a violent effort severed the telephone wire. The receiver dropped on the floor. He closed the knife and put it back into his pocket. Dinny had the impression that with action he had become less unbalanced.

"Put on your shoes," he said.

She did so.

"Understand me, I'm not going to be interfered with, or messed about. I shall do what I like with myself."

Dinny remained silent. Her heart was beating furiously, and she did not want her voice to betray it.

"Did you hear?"

"Yes. No one wants to interfere with you, or do anything you don't like. We only want your good."

"I know that good," said Ferse. "No more of that for me." He went across to the window, tore a curtain aside, and looked out. "It's raining like hell," he said, then turned and stood looking at her. His face began to twitch, his hands to clench. He moved his head from side to side. Suddenly he shouted: "Get out of this room, quick! Get out, get out!"

As swiftly as she could without running Dinny slid to the door, closed it behind her and flew upstairs. Diana was still standing in the bedroom doorway. Dinny pushed her in, locked the door, and sank down breathless.

"He came out after me," she gasped, "and cut the wire. He's got a knife; I'm afraid there's mania coming on. Will that door hold if he tries to break it down? Shall we put the bed against it?"

"If we do we should never sleep."

"We shall never sleep, anyway," and she began dragging at the bed. They moved it square against the door.

"Do the maids lock their doors?"

"They have, since he's been back."

Dinny sighed with relief. The idea of going out again to warn them made her shudder. She sat on the bed looking at Diana, who was standing by the window.

"What are you thinking of, Diana?"

"I was thinking what I should be feeling if the children were still here."

"Yes, thank heaven, they're not."

Diana came back to the bed and took Dinny's hand. Grip and answering grip tightened till they were almost painful.

"Is there nothing we can do, Dinny?"

"Perhaps he'll sleep, and be much better in the morning. Now there's danger I don't feel half so sorry for him."

Diana said stonily: "I'm past feeling. I wonder if he knows yet that I'm not in my own room? Perhaps I ought to go down and face it."

"You shan't!" And taking the key from the lock Dinny thrust it into the top of her stocking: its cold hardness rallied her nerves.

"Now," she said, "we'll lie down with our feet to the door. It's no good getting worn out for nothing."

A sort of apathy had come over both of them, and they lay a long time thus, close together under the eiderdown, neither of them sleeping, neither of them quite awake. Dinny had dozed off at last when a stealthy sound awakened her. She looked at Diana. She was asleep, really asleep, dead asleep. A streak of light from outside showed at the top of the door, which fitted loosely. Leaning on her elbow she strained her ears. The handle of the door was turned, and softly shaken. There was a gentle knocking.

"Yes," said Dinny, very low, "what is it?"

"Diana," said Ferse's voice, but quite subdued: "I want her."

Dinny crouched forward close to the keyhole.

"Diana's not well," she said. "She's asleep now, don't disturb her."

There was silence. And then to her horror she heard a long moaning sigh; a sound so miserable, and as it were so final that she was on the point of taking out the key. The sight of Diana's face, white and worn, stopped her. No good! Whatever that sound meant — no good! And crouching back on the bed, she listened. No more sound! Diana slept on, but Dinny could not get to sleep again. 'If he kills himself,' she thought, 'shall I be to blame?' Would that not be best for everyone, for Diana and his children, for himself? But that long sighing moan went on echoing through her nerves. Poor man, poor man! She felt nothing now but a dreadful sore pity, a sort of resentment at the inexorability of Nature that did such things to human creatures. Accept the mysterious ways of Providence? Who could? Insensate and cruel! Beside the worn-out sleeper she lay, quivering. What had they done that they ought not to have done? Could they have helped him more than they had tried to? What could they do when morning came? Diana stirred. Was she going to wake? But she just turned and sank back into her heavy slumber. And slowly a drowsy feeling stole on Dinny herself and she slept.

A knocking on the door awakened her. It was daylight. Diana was still sleeping. She looked at her wrist watch. Eight o'clock. She was being called.

"All right, Mary!" she answered, softly: "Mrs. Ferse is here."

Diana sat up, her eyes on Dinny's half-clothed figure.

"What is it?"

"It's all right, Diana. Eight o'clock! We'd better get up and put the bed back. You've had a real good sleep. The maids are up."

They put on wrappers, and pulled the bed into place. Dinny took the key from its queer hiding nook, and unlocked the door.

"No good craning at it. Let's go down!"

They stood a moment at the top of the stairs listening, and then descended. Diana's room was untouched. The maid had evidently been in and pulled aside the curtains. They stood at the door that led from it to Ferse's room. No sound came from there. They went out to the other door. Still no sound!

"We'd better go down," whispered Dinny. "What shall you say to Mary?"

"Nothing. She'll understand."

The dining room and study doors were open. The telephone receiver still lay severed on the floor; there was no other sign of last night's terrors.

Suddenly, Dinny said: "Diana, his hat and coat are gone. They were on that chair."

Diana went into the dining room and rang the bell. The elderly maid, coming from the basement stairs, had a scared and anxious look.

"Have you seen Captain Ferse's hat and coat this morning Mary?"

"No, Ma'am."

"What time did you come down?"

"Seven o'clock."

"You haven't been to his room?"

"Not yet, Ma'am."

"I was not well last night; I slept upstairs with Miss Dinny."

"Yes, Ma'am."

They all three went upstairs.

"Knock on his door."

The maid knocked. Dinny and Diana stood close by. There was no answer.

"Knock again, Mary, louder."

Again and again the maid knocked. No answer. Diana put her aside and turned the handle. The door came open. Ferse was not there. The room was in disorder, as if someone had tramped and wrestled in it. The water bottle was empty, and tobacco ash was strewn about. The bed had been lain on, but not slept in. There was no sign of packing or of anything having been taken from the drawers. The three women looked at each other. Then Diana said:

"Get breakfast quick, Mary. We must go out."

"Yes, Ma'am — I saw the telephone."

"Hide that up, and get it mended; and don't tell the others anything. Just say: 'He's away for a night or two.' Make things here look like that. We'll dress quickly, Dinny."

The maid went downstairs again.

Dinny said: "Has he any money?"

"I don't know. I can see if his cheque book has gone."

She ran down again, and Dinny waited. Diana came back into the hall.

"No; it's on the bureau in the dining-room. Quick, Dinny, dress!"

That meant . . . What did it mean? A strange conflict of hopes and fears raged within Dinny. She flew upstairs.

❦

CHAPTER 26

Over a hasty breakfast they consulted. To whom should they go?

"Not to the police," said Dinny.

"No, indeed."

"I think we should go to Uncle Adrian first."

They sent the maid for a taxi, and set out for Adrian's rooms. It was not quite nine o'clock. They found him over tea and one of those fishes which cover the more ground when eaten, and explain the miracle of the seven baskets full.

Seeming to have grown greyer in these few days he listened to them, filling his pipe, and at last said:

"You must leave it to me now. Dinny, can you take Diana down to Condaford?"

"Of course."

"Before you go, could you get young Alan Tasburgh to go down to that Home and ask if Ferse is there, without letting them know that he's gone off on his own? Here's the address."

Dinny nodded.

Adrian raised Diana's hand to his lips.

"My dear, you look worn out. Don't worry; just rest down there with the children. We'll keep in touch with you."

"Will there be publicity, Adrian?"

"Not if we can prevent it. I shall consult Hilary; we'll try everything first. Do you know how much money he had?"

"The last cheque cashed was for five pounds two days ago, but all yesterday he was out."

"How was he dressed?"

"Blue overcoat, blue suit, bowler hat."

"And you don't know where he went yesterday?"

"No. Until yesterday he was never out at all."

"Does he still belong to any Club?"

"No."

"Has any old friend been told of his return?"

"No."

"And he took no cheque book? How soon can you get hold of that young man, Dinny?"

"Now, if I could telephone, Uncle; he's sleeping at his Club."

"Try, then."

Dinny went out to the telephone. She soon reported that Alan would go down at once, and let Adrian know. He would ask as an old friend, with no knowledge that Ferse had ever left. He would beg them to let him know if Ferse came back, so that he might come and see him.

"Good," said Adrian; "you have a head, my child. And now go off and look after Diana. Give me your number at Condaford."

Having jotted it down, he saw them back into their cab.

"Uncle Adrian is the best man in the world," said Dinny.

"No one should know that better than I, Dinny."

Back in Oakley Street, they went upstairs to pack. Dinny was afraid that at the last minute Diana might refuse to go. But she had given her word to Adrian, and they were soon on the way to the station. They spent a very silent hour and a half on the journey, leaning back in their corners, tired out. Dinny, indeed, was only now realising the strain she had been through. And yet, what had it amounted to? No violence, no attack, not even a great scene. How uncannily disturbing was insanity! What fear it inspired; what nerve-racking emotions! Now that she was free from chance of contact with Ferse he again seemed to her just pitiful. She pictured him wandering and distraught, with nowhere to lay his head and no one to take him by the hand; on the edge, perhaps already over that edge! The worst tragedies were always connected with fear. Criminality, leprosy, insanity, anything that inspired fear in other people — the victims of such were hopelessly alone in a frightened world. Since last night she understood far better Ferse's outburst about the vicious circle in which insanity moved. She knew now that her own nerves were not strong enough, her own skin not thick enough, to bear contact with the insane; she understood the terrible treatment of the insane in old days. It was like the way dogs had, of setting on an hysterical dog, their own nerves jolted beyond bearing. The contempt lavished on the imbecile, the cruelty and contempt had been defensive — defensive revenge on something which outraged the nerves. All the more pitiable, all the more horrible to think about. And, while the train bore her nearer to her peaceful home, she was more and more torn between the wish to shut away all thought of the unhappy outcast and feelings of pity for him. She looked across at Diana lying back in the corner opposite with closed eyes. What must she be feeling, bound to Ferse by memory, by law, by children of whom he was the father? The face under the close casque hat had the chiselling of prolonged trial — fine-lined and rather hard. By the faint movement of the lips she was not asleep. 'What keeps her going?' thought Dinny. 'She's not religious; she doesn't believe much in anything. If I were she I should throw everything up and rush to the ends of the earth — or should I?' Was there perhaps something inside one, some sense of what was due to oneself, that kept one unyielding and unbroken?

There was nothing to meet them at the station, so, leaving their things, they set forth for the Grange on foot, taking a path across the fields.

"I wonder," said Dinny, suddenly, "how little excitement one could do with in these days? Should I be happy if I lived down here all my time, like the old cottage folk? Clare is never happy here. She has to be on the go all the time. There IS a kind of jack-inthe-box inside one."

"I've never seen it popping out of you, Dinny."

"I wish I'd been older during the war. I was only fourteen when it stopped."

"You were lucky."

"I don't know. You must have had a terribly exciting time, Diana."

"I was your present age when the war began."

"Married?"

"Just."

"I suppose he was right through it?"

"Yes."

"Was that the cause?"

"An aggravation, perhaps."

"Uncle Adrian spoke of heredity."

"Yes."

Dinny pointed to a thatched cottage.

"In that cottage an old pet couple of mine have lived fifty years. Could you do that, Diana?"

"I could now; I want peace, Dinny."

They reached the house in silence. A message had come through from Adrian: Ferse was not back at the Home: but he and Hilary believed they were on the right track.

After seeing the children Diana went to her bedroom to lie down, and Dinny to her Mother's sitting-room.

"Mother, I must say it to someone — I am praying for his death."

"Dinny!"

"For his own sake, for Diana's, for the children's, for everybody's; even my own."

"Of course, if it's hopeless —"

"Hopeless or not, I don't care. It's too dreadful. Providence is a wash-out, Mother."

"My dear!"

"It's too remote. I suppose there is an eternal Plan — but we're like gnats for all the care it has for us as individuals."

“You want a good sleep, darling.”

“Yes. But that won’t make any difference.”

“Don’t encourage such feelings, Dinny; they affect one’s character.”

“I don’t see the connection between beliefs and character. I’m not going to behave any worse because I cease to believe in Providence or an after life.”

“Surely, Dinny —”

“No; I’m going to behave BETTER; if I’m decent it’s because decency’s the decent thing; and not because I’m going to get anything by it.”

“But why is decency the decent thing, Dinny, if there’s no God?”

“O subtle and dear mother, I didn’t say there wasn’t God. I only said his Plan was too remote. Can’t you hear God saying: ‘By the way, is that ball the Earth still rolling?’ And an angel answering: ‘Oh! Yes, Sir, quite nicely.’ ‘Let’s see, it must be fungused over by now. Wasn’t there some particularly busy little parasite —’”

“Dinny!”

“‘Oh! Yes, Sir, you mean man!’ ‘Quite! I remember we called it that.’”

“Dinny, how dreadful!”

“No, mother, if I’m decent, it will be because decency is devised by humans for the benefit of humans; just as beauty is devised by humans for the delight of humans. Am I looking awful, darling? I feel as if I had no eyes. I think I’ll go and lie down. I don’t know why I’ve got so worked up about this, Mother. I think it must be looking at his face.” And with suspicious swiftness Dinny turned and went away.

❦

CHAPTER 27

Ferse's disappearance was a holiday to the feelings of one who had suffered greatly since his return. That he had engaged to end that holiday by finding him was not enough to spoil Adrian's relief. Almost with zest he set out for Hilary's in a taxi, applying his wits to the problem. Fear of publicity cut him off from those normal and direct resorts — Police, Radio, and Press. Such agencies would bring on Ferse too fierce a light. And in considering what means were left he felt as when confronted with a cross-word puzzle, many of which he had solved in his time, like other men of noted intellect. From Dinny's account he could not tell within several hours at what time Ferse had gone out, and the longer he left enquiry in the neighbourhood of the house, the less chance one would have of stumbling on anyone who had seen him. Should he, then, stop the cab and go back to Chelsea? In holding on towards the Meads, he yielded to instinct rather than to reason. To turn to Hilary was second nature with him — and, surely, in such a task two heads were better than one! He reached the Vicarage without forming any plan save that of enquiring vaguely along the Embankment and the King's Road. It was not yet half past nine, and Hilary was still at his correspondence. On hearing the news, he called his wife into the study.

"Let's think for three minutes," he said, "and pool the result."

The three stood in a triangle before the fire, the two men smoking, and the woman sniffing at an October rose.

"Well?" said Hilary at last: "Any light, May?"

"Only," said Mrs. Hilary, wrinkling her forehead, "if the poor man was as Dinny describes, you can't leave out the hospitals. I could telephone to the three or four where there was most chance of his having been taken in, if he's made an accident for himself. It's so early still, they can hardly have had anybody in."

"Very sweet of you, my dear; and we can trust your wits to keep his name out of it."

Mrs. Hilary went out.

"Adrian?"

"I've got a hunch, but I'd rather hear you first."

"Well," said Hilary, "two things occur to me: It's obvious we must find out from the Police if anyone's been taken from the river. The other contingency, and I think it's the more likely, is drink."

"But he couldn't get drink so early."

"Hotels. He had money."

"I agree, we must try them, unless you think my idea any good."

"Well?"

"I've been trying to put myself in poor Ferse's shoes. I think, Hilary, if I had a doom over me, I might run for Condaford; not the place itself, perhaps, but round about, where we haunted as boys; where I'd been, in fact, before Fate got hold of me at all. A wounded animal goes home."

Hilary nodded.

"Where WAS his home?"

"West Sussex — just under the Downs to the north. Petworth was the station."

"Oh! I know that country. Before the war May and I used to stay a lot at Bignor and walk. We could have a shot at Victoria station, and see if anyone like him has taken train. But I think I'll try the Police about the river first. I can say a parishioner is missing. What height is Ferse?"

"About five feet ten, square, broad head and cheek-bones, strong jaw, darkish hair, steel-blue eyes, a blue suit and overcoat."

"Right!" said Hilary: "I'll get on to them as soon as May is through."

Left to himself before the fire, Adrian brooded. A reader of detective novels, he knew that he was following the French, inductive method of a psychological shot in the blue, Hilary and May following the English model of narrowing the issue by elimination — excellent, but was there time for excellence? One vanished in London as a needle vanishes in hay; and they were so handicapped by the need for avoiding publicity. He waited in anxiety for Hilary's report. Curiously ironical that he

— HE— should dread to hear of poor Ferse being found drowned or run over, and Diana free!

From Hilary's table he took up an A.B.C. There had been a train to Petworth at 8.50, another went at 9.56. A near thing! And he waited again, his eyes on the door. Useless to hurry Hilary, a past-master in saving time.

"Well?" he said when the door was opened.

Hilary shook his head.

"No go! Neither hospitals nor Police. No one received or heard of anywhere."

"Then," said Adrian, "let's try Victoria — there's a train in twenty minutes. Can you come rightaway?"

Hilary glanced at his table. "I oughtn't to, but I will. There's something unholy in the way a search gets hold of you. Hold on, old man, I'll tell May and nick my hat. You might look for a taxi. Go St. Pancras way and wait for me."

Adrian strode along looking for a taxi. He found one issuing from the Euston Road, turned it round, and stood waiting. Soon Hilary's thin dark figure came hurrying into view.

"Not in the training I was," he said, and got in.

Adrian leaned through the window.

"Victoria, quick as you can!"

Hilary's hand slipped through his arm.

"I haven't had a jaunt with you, old man, since we went up the Carmarthen Van in that fog the year after the war. Remember?"

Adrain had taken out his watch.

"We just shan't do it, I'm afraid. The traffic's awful." And they sat, silent, jerked back and forth by the spasmodic efforts of the taxi.

"I'll never forget," said Adrian, suddenly, "in France once, passing a 'maison d'aliénés,' as they call it — a great place back from the railway with a long iron grille in front. There was a poor devil standing upright with his arms raised and his legs apart, clutching at the grille, like an orang-outang. What's death compared with that? Good clean earth, and the sky over you. I wish now they'd found him in the river."

"They may still; this is a bit of a wild-goose chase."

"Three minutes more," muttered Adrian; "we shan't do it."

But as if animated by its national character the taxi gathered unnatural speed, and the traffic seemed to melt before it. They pulled up at the station with a jerk.

"You ask at the first class, I'll go for the third," said Hilary as they ran. "A parson gets more show."

"No," said Adrian; "if he's gone, he'll have gone first class; YOU ask there. If there's any doubt — HIS EYES."

He watched Hilary's lean face thrust into the opening and quickly drawn back.

"He HAS!" he said; "this train. Petworth! Rush!"

The brothers ran, but as they reached the barrier the train began to move. Adrian would have run on, but Hilary grabbed his arm.

"Steady, old man, we shall never get in; he'll only see us, and that'll spill it."

They walked back to the entrance with their heads down.

"That was an amazing shot of yours, old boy," said Hilary: "What time does that train get down?"

"Twelve twenty-three."

"Then we can do it in a car. Have you any money?"

Adrian felt in his pockets. "Only eight and six," he said ruefully.

"I've got just eleven bob. Awkward! I know! We'll take a cab to young Fleur's: if her car's not out, she'd let us have it, and she or Michael would drive us. We must both be free of the car at the other end."

Adrian nodded, rather dazed at the success of his induction.

At South Square Michael was out, but Fleur in. Adrian, who did not know her so well as Hilary, was surprised by the quickness with which she grasped the situation and produced the car. Within ten minutes, indeed, they were on the road with Fleur at the wheel.

"I shall go through Dorking and Pulborough," she said, leaning back. "I can speed all the way after Dorking on that road. But, Uncle Hilary, what are you going to do if you get him?"

At that simple but necessary question the brothers looked at each other. Fleur seemed to feel their indecision through the back of her head, for she stopped with a jerk in front of an imperilled dog, and, turning, said:

"Would you like to think it over before we start?"

Gazing from her short clear-cut face, the very spit of hard, calm, confident youth, to his brother's long, shrewd face, wrinkled, and worn by the experiences of others and yet not hard, Adrian left it to Hilary to answer.

"Let's get on," said Hilary; "it's a case of making the best of what turns up."

"When we pass a post-office," added Adrian, "please stop. I want to send a wire to Dinny."

Fleur nodded. "There's one in the King's Road, I must fill up, too, somewhere."

And the car slid on among the traffic.

"What shall I say in the wire?" asked Adrian. "Anything about Petworth?"

Hilary shook his head.

"Just that we think we're on the right track."

When they had sent the wire there were only two hours left before the train arrived.

"It's fifty miles to Pulborough," said Fleur, "and I suppose about five on. I wonder if I can risk my petrol. I'll see at Dorking." From that moment on she was lost to them, though the car was a closed saloon, giving all her attention to her driving.

The two brothers sat silent with their eyes on the clock and speedometer.

"I don't often go joy-riding," said Hilary, softly: "What are you thinking of, old man?"

"Of what on earth we're going to do."

"If I were to think of that beforehand, in my job, I should be dead in a month. In a slum parish one lives, as in a jungle, surrounded by wild cats; one grows a sort of instinct and has to trust to it."

"Oh!" said Adrian, "I live among the dead, and get no practice."

"Our niece drives well," said Hilary in a low voice. "Look at her neck. Isn't that capability personified?"

The neck, white, round and shingled, was held beautifully erect and gave a remarkable impression of quick close control of the body by the brain.

For several miles after that they drove in silence.

"Box Hill," said Hilary: "a thing once happened to me hereabouts I've never told you and never forgotten, it shows how awfully near the edge of mania we live." He sunk his voice and went on: "Remember that jolly parson Durcott we used to know? When I was at Beaker's before I went to Harrow, he was a master there; he took me a walk one Sunday over Box Hill. Coming back in the train we were alone. We were ragging a little, when all of a sudden he seemed to go into a sort of frenzy, his eyes all greedy and wild. I hadn't the least notion what he was after and was awfully scared. Then, suddenly, he seemed to get hold of himself again. Right out of the blue! Repressed sex, of course — regular mania for the moment — pretty horrible. A very nice fellow, too. There are forces, Adrian."

"Daemonic. And when they break the shell for good . . . Poor Ferse!"

Fleur's voice came back to them.

"She's beginning to go a bit wonky; I must fill up, Uncle Hilary. There's a station close here."

"Right-o!"

The car drew up before the filling station.

"It's always slow work to Dorking," said Fleur, stretching: "we can get along now. Only thirty-two miles, and a good hour still. Have you thought?"

"No," said Hilary, "we've avoided it like poison."

Fleur's eyes, whose whites were so clear, flashed on him one of those direct glances which so convinced people of her intelligence.

"Are you going to take him back in this? I wouldn't, if I were you." And, taking out her case, she repaired her lips slightly, and powdered her short straight nose.

Adrian watched her with a sort of awe. Youth, up to date, did not come very much his way. Not her few words, but the implications in them impressed him. What she meant was crudely this: Let him dree his weird — you can do nothing. Was she right? Were he and Hilary just pandering to the human instinct for interference; attempting to lay a blasphemous hand on Nature? And yet for Diana's sake they must know what Ferse did, what he was going to do. For Ferse's sake they must see, at least, that he did not fall into the wrong hands. On his brother's face was a faint smile. He at least, thought Adrian, knew youth, had a brood of his own, and could tell how far the clear hard philosophy of youth would carry.

They started again, trailing through the traffic of Dorking's long and busy street.

"Clear at last," said Fleur, turning her head, "if you really want to catch him, you shall;" and she opened out to full speed. For the next quarter of an hour they flew along, past yellowing spinneys, fields and bits of furzy common dotted with geese and old horses, past village greens and village streets, and all the other evidences of a country life trying to retain its soul. And then the car, which had been travelling very smoothly, began to grate and bump.

"Tyre gone!" said Fleur, turning her head: "That's torn it." She brought the car to a standstill, and they all got out. The off hind tyre was right down.

"Pipe to!" said Hilary, taking his coat off. "Jack her up, Adrian. I'll get the spare wheel off."

Fleur's head was lost in the tool-box, but her voice was heard saying: "Too many cooks, better let me!"

Adrian's knowledge of cars was nil, his attitude to machinery helpless; he stood willingly aside, and watched them with admiration. They were cool, quick, efficient, but something was wrong with the jack.

"Always like that," said Fleur, "when you're in a hurry."

Twenty minutes was lost before they were again in motion.

"I can't possibly do it now," she said, "but you'll be able to pick up his tracks easily, if you really want to. The station's right out beyond the town."

Through Billingshurst and Pulborough and over Stopham bridge, they travelled at full speed.

"Better go for Petworth itself," said Hilary, "if he's heading back for the town, we shall meet him."

"Am I to stop if we meet him?"

"No, carry straight on past and then turn."

But they passed through Petworth and on for the mile and a half to the station without meeting him.

"The train's been in a good twenty minutes," said Adrian, "let's ask."

A porter had taken the ticket of a gentleman in a blue overcoat and black hat. No! He had no luggage. He had gone off, towards the Downs. How long ago? Half an hour, maybe.

Regaining the car hastily they made towards the Downs.

"I remember," said Hilary, "a little further on there's a turn to Sutton. The point will be whether he's taken that or gone on up. There are some houses there somewhere. We'll ask, they may have seen him."

Just beyond the turning was a little post-office, and a postman was cycling towards it from the Sutton road.

Fleur pulled the car to a walk alongside.

"Have you seen a gentleman in a blue coat and bowler hat making towards Sutton?"

"No, Miss, 'aven't passed a soul."

"Thank you. Shall I carry on for the Downs, Uncle Hilary?"

Hilary consulted his watch.

"If I remember, it's a mile about to the top of the Down close to Duncton Beacon. We've come a mile and a half from the station; and he had, say, twenty-five minutes' start, so by the time we get to the top we should have about caught him. From the top we shall see the road ahead and be able to make sure. If we don't come on him, it'll mean he's taken to the Down — but which way?"

Adrian said under his breath: "Homewards."

"To the East?" said Hilary. "On then, Fleur, not too fast."

Fleur headed the car up the Downs road.

“Feel in my coat, you’ll find three apples,” she said. “I caught them up.”

“What a head!” said Hilary. “But you’ll want them yourself.”

“No. I’m slimming. You can leave me one.”

The brothers, munching each an apple, kept their eyes fixed on the woods on either side of the car.

“Too thick,” said Hilary; “he’ll be carrying on to the open. If you sight him, Fleur, stop dead.”

But they did not sight him, and, mounting slower and slower, reached the top. To their right was the round beech tree clump of Duncton, to the left the open Down; no figure was on the road in front.

“Not ahead,” said Hilary. “We’ve got to decide, old man.”

“Take my advice, and let me drive you home, Uncle Hilary.”

“Shall we, Adrian?”

Adrian shook his head.

“I shall go on.”

“All right, I’m with you.”

“Look!” said Fleur suddenly, and pointed.

Some fifty yards in, along a rough track leaving the road to the left, lay a dark object.

“It’s a coat, I think.”

Adrian jumped out and ran towards it. He returned with a blue overcoat over his arm.

“No doubt now,” he said. “Either he was sitting there and left it by mistake, or he tired of carrying it. It’s a bad sign, whichever it was. Come along, Hilary!”

He dropped the coat in the car.

“What orders for me, Uncle Hilary?”

“You’ve been a brick, my dear. Would you be still more of a brick and wait here another hour? If we’re not back by then, go down and keep close along under the Downs slowly by way of Sutton Bignor and West Burton, then if there’s no sign of us anywhere along that way, take the main road through Pulborough back to London. If you’ve any money to spare, you might lend us some.”

Fleur took out her bag.

“Three pounds. Shall I give you two?”

“Gratefully received,” said Hilary. “Adrian and I never have any money. We’re the poorest family in England, I do believe. Good-bye, my dear, and thank you! Now, old man!”

❦

Chapter 28

Waving their hands to where Fleur stood by her car with the remaining apple raised to her lips, the two brothers took the track on to the Down.

"You lead," said Hilary; "you've got the best eyes, and your clothes are less conspicuous. If you sight him, we'll consult."

They came almost at once on a long stretch of high wire fence running across the Down.

"It ends there to the left," said Adrian; "we'll go round it above the woods; the lower we keep the better."

They kept round it on the hillside over grass rougher and more uneven, falling into a climber's loping stride as if once more they were off on some long and difficult ascent. The doubt whether they would catch up with Ferse, what they could do if they did, and the knowledge that it might be a maniac with whom they had to deal, brought to both their faces a look that soldiers have, and sailors, and men climbing mountains, of out-staring what was before them.

They had crossed an old and shallow chalk working and were mounting the few feet to the level on its far side, when Adrian dropped back and pulled Hilary down.

"He's there," he whispered; "about seventy yards ahead!"

"See you?"

"No. He looks wild. His hat's gone, and he's gesticulating. What shall we do?"

"Put your head up through that bush."

Adrian knelt, watching. Ferse had ceased to gesticulate, he was standing with arms crossed and his bare head bent. His back was to Adrian, and, but for that still, square, wrapped-in attitude, there was nothing to judge from. He suddenly uncrossed his arms, shook his head from side to side and began to walk rapidly on. Adrian waited till he had disappeared among the bushes on the slope, and beckoned Hilary to follow.

"We mustn't let him get too far ahead," muttered Hilary, "or we shan't know whether he's taken to the wood."

"He'll keep to the open, he wants air, poor devil. Look out!" He pulled Hilary down again. The ground had suddenly begun to dip. It sloped right down to a grassy hollow, and halfway down the slope they could see Ferse plainly. He was walking slowly, clearly unconscious of pursuit. Every now and then his hands would go up to his bare head, as if to clear away something that entangled it.

"God!" murmured Adrian: "I hate to see him."

Hilary nodded.

They lay watching. Part of the weald was visible, rich with colour on that sunny autumn day. The grass, after heavy morning dew, was scented still; the sky of the dim spiritual blue that runs almost to white above the chalky downs. And the day was silent well-nigh to breathlessness. The brothers waited without speaking.

Ferse had reached the level at the bottom; they could see him dejectedly moving across a rough field towards a spinney. A pheasant rose just in front of him; they saw him start, as if wakened from a dream, and stand watching its rising flight.

"I expect he knows every foot round here," said Adrian: "he was a keen sportsman." And just then Ferse threw up his hands as if they held a gun. There was something oddly reassuring in that action.

"Now," said Hilary, as Ferse disappeared in the spinney, "run!" They dashed down the hill, and hurried along over rough ground.

"Suppose," gasped Adrian, "that he's stopped in the spinney."

"Risk it! Gently now, till we can see the rise."

About a hundred yards beyond the spinney, Ferse was plodding slowly up the hill.

"All right so far," murmured Hilary, "we must wait till that rise flattens out and we lose sight of him. This is a queer business, old boy, for you and me. And at the end of it, as Fleur said: What?"

"We MUST KNOW," said Adrian.

"We're just losing him now. Let's give him five minutes. I'll time it."

That five minutes seemed interminable. A jay squawked from the wooded hillside, a rabbit stole out and squatted in front of them; faint shiverings of air passed through the spinney.

"Now!" said Hilary. They rose, and breasted the grass rise at a good pace. "If he comes back on his tracks, here —"

"The sooner it's face to face the better," said Adrian, "but if he sees us following he'll run, and we shall lose him."

"Go slow, old man. It's beginning to flatten."

Cautiously they topped the rise. The Down now dipped a little to where a chalky track ran above a beech wood to their left. There was no sign of Ferse.

"Either he's gone into the wood or he's through that next thicket, and on the rise again. We'd better hurry and make sure."

They ran along the track between deep banks, and were turning into the brush, when the sound of a voice not twenty yards ahead jerked them to a standstill. They dropped back behind the bank and lay breathless. Somewhere in the thicket Ferse was muttering to himself. They could hear no words, but the voice gave them both a miserable feeling.

"Poor chap!" whispered Hilary: "shall we go on, and try to comfort him?"

"Listen!"

There was the sound as of a branch cracking underfoot, a muttered oath, and then with appalling suddenness a huntsman's scream. It had a quality that froze the blood. Adrian said:

"Pretty ghastly! But he's broken covert."

Cautiously they moved into the thicket; Ferse was running for the Down that rose from the end of it.

"He didn't see us, did he?"

"No, or he'd be looking back. Wait till we lose sight of him again."

"This is poor work," said Hilary, suddenly, "but I agree with you it's got to be done. That was a horrible sound! But we must know exactly what we're going to do, old man."

"I was thinking," said Adrian, "if we could induce him to come back to Chelsea, we'd keep Diana and the children away, dismiss the maids, and get him special attendants. I'd stay there with him till it was properly fixed. It seems to me that his own house is the only chance."

"I don't believe he'll come of his free will."

"In that case, God knows! I won't have a hand in caging him."

"What if he tries to kill himself?"

"That's up to you, Hilary."

Hilary was silent.

"Don't bet on my cloth," he said, suddenly; "a slum parson is pretty hard-boiled."

Adrian gripped his hand. "He's out of sight now."

"Come on, then!"

They crossed the level at a sharp pace and began mounting the rise. Up there the character of the ground changed, the hill was covered sparsely by hawthorn bushes, and yew trees, and bramble, with here and there a young beech. It gave good cover, and they moved more freely.

"We're coming to the cross roads above Bignor," murmured Hilary. "He might take the track down from there. We could easily lose him!"

They ran, but suddenly stood still behind a yew tree.

"He's not going down," said Hilary: "Look!"

On the grassy open rise beyond the cross tracks, where a signpost stood, Ferse was running towards the north side of the hill.

"A second track goes down there, I remember."

"It's all chance, but we can't stop now."

Ferse had ceased to run, he was walking slowly with stooped head up the rise. They watched him from behind their yew tree till he vanished over the hill's shoulder.

"Now!" said Hilary.

It was a full half mile, and both of them were over fifty.

"Not too fast, old man," panted Hilary; "we mustn't bust our bellows."

They kept to a dogged jog, reached the shoulder, over which Ferse had vanished, and found a grass track trailing down.

"Slowly does it now," gasped Hilary.

Here too the hillside was dotted with bushes and young trees, and they made good use of them till they came to a shallow chalk pit.

"Let's lie up here a minute, and get our wind. He's not going off the Down or we'd have seen him. Listen!"

From below them came a chanting sound. Adrian raised his head above the pit side and looked over. A little way down by the side of the track lay Ferse on his back. The words of the song he was droning out came up quite clearly:

"Must I go bound, and you go free?
Must I love a lass that couldn't love me?
Was e'er I taught so poor a wit
As love a lass, would break my heart."

He ceased and lay perfectly still; then, to Adrian's horror, his face became distorted; he flung his fists up in the air, cried out: "I won't — I won't be mad!" and rolled over on his face.

Adrian dropped back.

"It's terrible! I must go down and speak to him."

"We'll both go — round by the track — slow — don't startle him."

They took the track which wound round the chalk pit. Ferse was no longer there.

"Quietly on, old son," said Hilary.

They walked on in a curious calm, as if they had abandoned the chase.

"Who can believe in God?" said Adrian.

A wry smile contorted Hilary's long face.

"In God I believe, but not a merciful one as we understand the word. On this hillside, I remember, they trap. Hundreds of rabbits suffer the tortures of the damned. We used to let them out and knock them on the head. If my beliefs were known, I should be unfrocked. That wouldn't help. My job's a concrete one. Look! A fox!"

They stood a moment watching his low fulvous body steal across the track.

"Marvellous beast, a fox! Great places for wild life, these wooded chines; so steep, you can't disturb them — pigeons, jays, woodpeckers, rabbits, foxes, hares, pheasants — every mortal thing."

The track had begun to drop, and Hilary pointed.

Ahead, beyond the dip into the chine they could see Ferse walking along a wire fence.

They watched till he vanished then reappeared on the side of the hill, having rounded the corner of the fence.

"What now?"

"He can't see us from there. To speak to him, we must somehow get near before we try, otherwise he'll just run."

They crossed the dip and went up along and round the corner of the fence under cover of the hawthorns. On the uneven hillside Ferse had again vanished.

"This is wired for sheep," said Hilary, "Look! they're all over the hill — Southdowns."

They reached a top. There was no sign of him.

They kept along the wire, and reaching the crest of the next rise, stood looking. Away to the left the hill dropped steeply into another chine; in front of them was open grass dipping to a wood. On their right was still the wire fencing and rough pasture. Suddenly Adrian gripped his brother's arm. Not seventy yards away on the other side of the wire Ferse was lying face to the grass, with sheep grazing close to him. The brothers crawled to the shelter of a bush. From there, unseen, they could see him quite well, and they watched him in silence. He lay so still that the sheep were paying him no attention. Round-bodied, short-legged, snub-nosed, of a greyish white, and with the essential cosiness of the Southdown breed, they grazed on, undisturbed.

"Is he asleep, d'you think?"

Adrian shook his head. "Peaceful, though."

There was something in his attitude that went straight to the heart; something that recalled a small boy hiding his head in his mother's lap; it was as if the feel of the grass beneath his body, his face, his outstretched hands, were bringing him comfort; as if he were groping his way back into the quiet security of Mother Earth. While he lay like that it was impossible to disturb him.

The sun, in the west, fell on their backs, and Adrian turned his face to receive it on his cheek. All the nature-lover and country man in him responded to that warmth, to the scent of the grass, the song of the larks, the blue of the sky; and he noticed that Hilary too had turned his face to the sun. It was so still that, but for the larks' song and the muffled sound of the sheep cropping, one might have said Nature was dumb. No voice of man or beast, no whirr of traffic came up from the weald.

"Three o'clock. Have a nap, old man," he whispered to Hilary; "I'll watch."

Ferse seemed asleep now. Surely his brain would rest from its disorder here. If there were healing in air, in form, in colour, it was upon this green cool hill for a thousand years and more undwelt on and freed from the restlessness of men. The men of old, indeed, had lived up there; but since then nothing had touched it but the winds and the shadows of the clouds. And today there was no wind, no cloud to throw soft and moving darkness on the grass.

So profound a pity for the poor devil, lying there as if he would never move again, stirred Adrian that he could not think of himself, nor even feel for Diana. Ferse, so lying, awakened in him a sensation quite impersonal, the deep herding kinship men have for each other in the face of Fortune's strokes which seem to them unfair. Yes! He was sleeping now, grasping at the earth for refuge; to grasp for eternal refuge in the earth was all that was left him. And for those two quiet hours of watching that prostrate figure among the sheep, Adrian was filled not with futile rebellion and bitterness but with a strange unhappy wonder. The old Greek dramatists had understood the tragic plaything which the gods make of man; such understanding had been overlaid by the Christian doctrine of a merciful God. Merciful? — No! Hilary was right! Faced by Ferse's fate — what would one do? What — while the gleam of sanity remained? When a man's life was so spun that no longer he could do his job, be no more to his fellows than a poor distraught and frightening devil, the hour of eternal rest in quiet earth had surely come. Hilary had seemed to think so too; yet he was not sure what his brother would do if it came to the point. His job was with the living, a man who died was lost to him, so much chance of service gone! And Adrian felt a sort of thankfulness that his own job was with the dead, classifying the bones of men — the only part of men that did not suffer, and endured, age on age, to afford evidence of a marvellous animal. So he lay, and watched, plucking blade after blade of grass and rubbing the sweetness of them out between his palms.

The sun wore on due west, till it was almost level with his eyes; the sheep had ceased cropping and were moving slowly together over the hill, as if waiting to be folded. Rabbits had stolen out and were nibbling the grass; and the larks, one by one, had dropped from the sky. A chill was creeping on the air; the trees down in the weald had darkened and solidified; and the whitening sky seemed waiting for the sunset glow. The grass too had lost its scent; there was no dew as yet.

Adrian shivered. In ten minutes now the sun would be off the hill, and then it would be cold. When Ferse awoke, would he be better or worse? They must risk it. He touched Hilary, who lay with his knees drawn up, still sleeping. He woke instantly.

"Hallo, old man!"

"Hssh! He's still asleep. What are we to do when he wakes? Shall we go up to him now and wait for it?"

Hilary jerked his brother's sleeve. Ferse was on his feet. From behind their bush they could see him wildly looking round, as some animal warned of danger might stand gazing before he takes to flight. It was clear that he could not see them, but that he had heard or sensed some presence. He began walking towards the wire, crawled through and stood upright, turned towards the reddening sun balanced now like a fiery globe on the far wooded hill. With the glow from it on his face, bareheaded and so still that he might have been dead on his feet, he stood till the sun vanished.

"Now," whispered Hilary, and stood up. Adrian saw Ferse come suddenly to life, fling out his arm with a wild defiance, and turn to run.

Hilary said, aghast: “He’s desperate. There’s a chalk pit just above the main road. Come on, old man, come on!”

They ran, but stiffened as they were, had no chance with Ferse, who gained with every stride. He ran like a maniac, flinging his arms out, and they could hear him shout. Hilary gasped out:

“Stop! He’s not going for that pit after all. It’s away to the right. He’s making for the wood down there. Better let him think we’ve given up.”

They watched him running down the slope, and lost him as, still running, he entered the wood.

“Now!” said Hilary.

They laboured on down to the wood and entered it as near to the point of his disappearance as they could. It was of beech and except at the edge there was no undergrowth. They stopped to listen, but there was no sound. The light in there was already dim, but the wood was narrow and they were soon at its far edge. Below they could see some cottages and farm buildings.

“Let’s get down to the road.”

They hurried on, came suddenly to the edge of a high chalk pit, and stopped aghast.

“I didn’t know of this,” said Hilary. “Go that way and I’ll go this along the edge.”

Adrian went upwards till he reached the top. Below, at the bottom some sixty steep feet down, he could see a dark thing lying. Whatever it was, it did not move, and no sound came up. Was this the end then, a headlong dive into the half dark? A choking sensation seized him by the throat, and for a moment he stood unable to call out or move. Then hastily he ran along the edge till he came to where Hilary was standing.

“Well?”

Adrian pointed back into the pit. They went on along the edge through undergrowth till they could scramble down, and make their way over the grassed floor of the old pit to the farther corner below the highest point.

The dark thing was Ferse. Adrian knelt and raised his head. His neck was broken; he was dead.

Whether he had dived deliberately to that end, or in his mad rush fallen over, they could not tell. Neither of them spoke, but Hilary put his hand on his brother’s shoulder.

At last he said: “There’s a cart shed a little way along the road, but perhaps we ought not to move him. Stay with him, while I go on to the village and ‘phone. It’s a matter for the police, I suppose.”

Adrian nodded, still on his knees beside the broken figure.

“There’s a post office quite near, I shan’t be long.” Hilary hurried away.

Alone in the silent darkening pit Adrian sat cross-legged, with the dead man’s head resting against him. He had closed the eyes and covered the face with his handkerchief. In the wood above birds rustled and chirped, on their way to bed. The dew had begun to fall, and into the blue twilight the ground mist of autumn was creeping. Shape was all softened, but the tall chalk pit face still showed white. Though not fifty yards from a road on which cars were passing, this spot where Ferse had leapt to his rest seemed to Adrian desolate, remote, and full of ghostliness. Though he knew that he ought to be thankful for Ferse, for Diana, for himself, he could feel nothing but that profound pity for a fellow man so tortured and broken in his prime — profound pity, and a sort of creeping identification with the mystery of Nature enwrapping the dead man and this his resting-place.

A voice roused him from that strange coma. An old whiskered countryman was standing there with a glass in his hand.

“So there been an accident, I year,” he was saying; “a parson gentleman sent me with this. ’Tis brandy, sir.” He handed the glass to Adrian. “Did ‘e fall over yere, or what?”

“Yes, he fell over.”

“I allus said as they should put a fence up there. The gentleman said I was to tell you as the doctor and the police was comin’.”

“Thank you,” said Adrian, handing back the emptied glass.

“There be a nice cosy cartshed a little ways along the road maybe we could carry ’im along there.”

“We mustn’t move him till they come.”

“Ah!” said the old countryman: “I’ve read as there was a law about that, in case as ’twas murder or sooicide.” He peered down. “He do look quiet, don’t ‘e? D’e know ‘oo ‘e is, Sir?”

“Yes. A Captain Ferse. He came from round here.”

“What, one of the Ferses o’ Burton Rise? Why, I worked there as a boy; born in that parish I were.” He peered closer: “This’d never be Mr. Ronald, would it?”

Adrian nodded.

“Yeou don’ say! There’s none of ’em there neow. His grandfather died mad, so ‘e did. Yeou don’ say! Mr. Ronald! I knew ’im as a young lad.” He stooped to look at the face in the last of the light, then stood, moving his whiskered head mournfully from side to side. To him — Adrian could see — it made all the difference that here was no ‘foreigner.’

The sudden sputtering of a motor cycle broke the stillness; it came with gleaming headlight down the cart track into the pit, and two figures got off. A young man and a girl. They came gingerly towards the group disclosed by the beam from the headlight, and stood, peering down.

“We heard there’s been an accident.”

“Ah!” said the old countryman.

“Can we do anything?”

“No, thank you,” said Adrian; “the doctor and the police are coming. We must just wait.”

He could see the young man open his mouth as if to ask more, close it without speaking, and put his arm round the girl, then, like the old countryman, they stood silent with their eyes fixed on the figure with the broken neck lying against Adrian’s knee. The cycle’s engine, still running, throbbed in the silence, and its light made even more ghostly the old pit and the little group of the living around the dead.

❦

Chapter 29

At Condaford, the telegram came just before dinner. It ran: ‘Poor F dead Fell down chalk pit here Removed to Chichester Adrian and I going with him Inquest will be there. Hilary.’

Dinny was in her room when it was brought to her, and she sat down on her bed with that feeling of constriction in the chest which comes when relief and sorrow struggle together for expression. Here was what she had prayed for, and all she could think of was the last sound she had heard him utter, and the look on his face, when he was standing in the doorway listening to Diana singing. She said to the maid who had brought in the telegram:

“Amy, find Scaramouch.”

When the Scotch terrier came with his bright eyes and his air of knowing that he was of value, she clasped him so tight that he became uneasy. With that warm and stiffly hairy body in her arms, she regained the power of feeling; relief covered the background of her being, but pity forced tears into her eyes. It was a curious state, and beyond the comprehension of her dog. He licked her nose and wriggled till she set him down. She finished dressing hurriedly and went to her mother’s room.

Lady Cherrell, dressed for dinner, was moving between open wardrobe and open chest of drawers, considering what she could best part with for the approaching jumble sale which must keep the village nursing fund going over the year’s end. Dinny put the telegram into her hand without a word. Having read it, she said quietly:

“That’s what you prayed for, dear.”

“Does it mean suicide?”

“I think so.”

“Ought I to tell Diana now, or wait till she’s had a night’s sleep?”

“Now, I think. *I* will, if you like.”

“No, no, darling. It’s up to me. She’ll like dinner upstairs, I expect. To-morrow, I suppose, we shall have to go to Chichester.”

“This is all very dreadful for you, Dinny.”

“It’s good for me.” She took back the telegram and went out.

Diana was with the children, who were giving as long as possible to the process of going to bed, not having reached the age when to do such a thing has become desirable. Dinny beckoned her out into her own room, and, once more without a word, handed over the telegram. Though she had been so close to Diana these last days, there were sixteen years between them, and she made no consoling gesture as she might have to one of her own age. She had, indeed, a feeling of never quite knowing how Diana would take things. She took this stonily. It might have been no news at all. Her beautiful face, fine and worn as that on a coin, expressed nothing. Her eyes fixed on Dinny’s, remained dry and clear. All she said was: “I won’t come down. To-morrow — Chichester?”

Checking all impulse, Dinny nodded and went out. Alone with her mother after dinner, she said:

“I wish I had Diana’s self-control.”

“Self-control like hers is the result of all she’s been through.”

“There’s the Vere de Vere touch about it, too.”

“That’s no bad thing, Dinny.”

“What will this inquest mean?”

“She’ll need all her self-control there, I’m afraid.”

“Mother, shall I have to give evidence?”

“You were the last person who spoke to him so far as is known, weren’t you?”

“Yes. Must I speak of his coming to the door last night?”

“I suppose you ought to tell everything you know, if you’re asked.”

A flush stained Dinny’s cheeks.

"I don't think I will. I never even told Diana that. And I don't see what it has to do with outsiders."

"No, I don't see either; but we're not supposed to exercise our own judgments as to that."

"Well, I shall; I'm not going to pander to people's beastly curiosity, and give Diana pain."

"Suppose one of the maids heard him?"

"They can't prove that *I* did."

Lady Cherrell smiled. "I wish your father were here."

"You are not to tell Dad what I told you, Mother. I can't have the male conscience fussing around; the female's is bad enough, but one has it in hand."

"Very well."

"I shan't have the faintest scruple," said Dinny, fresh from her recollection of London Police Courts, "about keeping a thing dark, if I can safely. What do they want an inquest for, anyway? He's dead. It's just morbidity."

"I oughtn't to aid and abet you, Dinny."

"Yes, you ought, Mother. You know you agree at heart."

Lady Cherrell said no more. She did . . . .

The General and Alan Tasburgh came down next morning by the first train, and half an hour later they all started in the open car; Alan driving, the General beside him, and in the back seat Lady Cherrell, Dinny and Diana wedged together. It was a long and gloomy drive. Leaning back with her nose just visible above her fur, Dinny pondered. It was dawning on her gradually that she was in some sort the hub of the approaching inquest. She it was to whom Ferse had opened his heart; she who had taken the children away; she who had gone down in the night to telephone; she who had heard what she did not mean to tell; and, lastly but much the most importantly, it must be she who had called in Adrian and Hilary. Only behind her, their niece, who had caused Diana to turn to them for assistance when Ferse vanished, could Adrian's friendship for Diana be masked. Like everybody else, Dinny read, and even enjoyed, the troubles and scandals of others, retailed in the papers; like everybody else, she revolted against the papers having anything that could be made into scandal to retail about her family or her friends. If it came out crudely that her uncle had been applied to as an old and intimate friend of Diana's, he and she would be asked all sorts of questions, leading to all sorts of suspicions in the sex-ridden minds of the Public. Her roused imagination roamed freely. If Adrian's long and close friendship with Diana became known, what would there be to prevent the Public from suspecting even that her uncle had pushed Ferse over the edge of that chalk pit, unless, of course, Hilary were with him — for as yet they knew no details. Her mind, in fact, began running before the hounds. A lurid explanation of anything was so much more acceptable than a dull and true one! And there hardened within her an almost vicious determination to cheat the Public of the thrills it would be seeking.

Adrian met them in the hall of the hotel at Chichester, and she took her chance to say: "Uncle, can I speak to you and Uncle Hilary privately?"

"Hilary had to go back to Town, my dear, but he'll be down the last thing this evening; we can have a talk then. The inquest's tomorrow."

With that she had to be content.

When he had finished his story, determined that Adrian should not take Diana to see Ferse, she said: "If you'll tell us where to go, Uncle, I'LL go with Diana."

Adrian nodded. He had understood.

When they reached the mortuary, Diana went in alone, and Dinny waited in a corridor which smelled of disinfectant and looked out on to a back street. A fly, disenchanted by the approach of winter, was crawling dejectedly up the pane. Gazing out into that colourless back alley, under a sky drained of all warmth and light, she felt very miserable. Life seemed exceptionally bleak, and heavy with sinister issues. This inquest, Hubert's impending fate — no light or sweetness anywhere! Not even the thought of Alan's palpable devotion gave her comfort.

She turned to see Diana again beside her, and, suddenly forgetting her own woe, threw an arm round her and kissed her cold cheek. They went back to the hotel without speaking, except for Diana's: "He looked marvellously calm."

She went early to her room after dinner, and sat there with a book, waiting for her uncles. It was ten o'clock before Hilary's cab drew up, and a few minutes later they came. She noted how shadowy and worn they both looked; but there was something reassuring in their faces. They were the sort who ran till they dropped, anyway. They both kissed her with unexpected warmth, and sat down sideways, one on each side of her bed. Dinny stood between them at the foot and addressed Hilary.

"It's about Uncle Adrian, Uncle. I've been thinking. This inquest is going to be horrid if we don't take care."

"It is, Dinny. I came down with a couple of journalists who didn't suspect my connection. They've got hold of the mental home, and are all agog. I've a great respect for journalists, they do their job very thoroughly."

Dinny addressed Adrian.

"You won't mind my talking freely, will you, Uncle?"

Adrian smiled. "No, Dinny. You're a loyal baggage; go ahead!"

"It seems to me, then," she went on, plaiting her fingers on the bed-rail, "that the chief point is to keep Uncle Adrian's friendship for Diana out of it, and I thought that the asking of you two to find him ought to be put entirely on to me. You see, I was the last person known to speak to him, when he cut the telephone wire, you know, so, when I'm called, I could get it into their minds that you were entirely my suggestion, as a couple of Uncles who were clever and good at crossword puzzles. Otherwise, why did we go to Uncle Adrian? Because he was SUCH A FRIEND, and then you'd get at once all that they may think that means, especially when they hear that Captain Ferse was away four years."

There was silence before Hilary said:

"She's wise, old boy. Four years' friendship with a beautiful woman in a husband's absence means only one thing with a jury, and many things with the Public."

Adrian nodded. "But I don't see how the fact that I've known them both so long can be concealed."

"First impressions," said Dinny eagerly, "will be everything. I can say that Diana suggested going to her doctor and Michael, but that I overruled her, knowing that you were marvellous at tracing things out because of your job, and could get at Uncle Hilary, who was so good at human nature. If we START them right, I don't believe the mere fact that you knew both of them would matter. It seems to me awfully important that I should be called as early as possible."

"It's putting a lot on you, my dear."

"Oh! no. If I'm not called before you and Uncle Hilary, will you both say that it was I who came and asked you, and I can rub it in afterwards?"

"After the doctor and the police, Diana will be the first witness."

"Yes, but I can speak to her, so that we shall all be saying the same thing."

Hilary smiled. "I don't see why not, it's very white lying. I can put in that I've known them as long as you, Adrian. We both met Diana first at that picnic Lawrence gave near the Land's End, when she was a flapper, and we both met Ferse first at her wedding. Family friendship, um?"

"My visits to the Mental Home will come out," said Adrian, "the Doctor's been summoned as witness."

"Oh! well," said Dinny, "you went there as his friend, and specially interested in mental derangement. After all, you're supposed to be scientific, Uncle."

Both smiled, and Hilary said: "All right, Dinny, we'll speak to the Sergeant, he's a very decent chap, and get you called early, if possible." He went to the door.

"Good-night, little serpent," said Adrian.

"Good-night, dear Uncle; you look terribly tired. Have you got a hot water-bottle?"

Adrian shook his head. "I've nothing but a tooth-brush which I bought today."

Dinny hauled her bottle out of her bed, and forced it on him. "Shall I speak to Diana, then, about what we've been saying?"

"If you will, Dinny."

"After tomorrow the sun will shine."

"Will it?" said Adrian.

As the door closed, Dinny sighed. Would it? Diana seemed as if dead to feeling. And — there was Hubert's business!

Chapter 30

The reflections of Adrian and his niece, when together they entered the Coroner's Court on the following day, might have been pooled as follows:

A coroner's inquest was like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Sundays, devised for other times. When Sunday afternoons were devoted to games, murders infrequent, and suicides no longer buried at cross-roads, neither custom had its initial wisdom. In old days, Justice and its emissaries were regarded as the foes of mankind, so it was natural to interpose a civilian arbiter between death and the Law. In an age in which one called the police 'a splendid force' was there not something unnatural in supposing them incapable of judging when it was necessary for them to take action? Their incompetence, therefore, could not well be considered the reason for the preservation of these rites. The cause was, surely, in one's dread of being deprived of knowledge. Every reader of a newspaper felt that the more he or she heard about what was doubtful, sensational, and unsavoury, the better for his or her soul. One knew that, without coroners' inquests, there would often be no published enquiry at all into sensational death; and never two enquiries. If, then, in place of no enquiry one could always have one enquiry, and in place of one enquiry sometimes have two enquiries, how much pleasanter! The dislike which one had for being nosy disappeared the moment one got into a crowd. The nosier one could be in a crowd the happier one felt. And the oftener one could find room in a Coroner's Court, the greater the thankfulness to Heaven. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" could never go up more fervently than from the hearts of such as had been privileged to find seats at an enquiry about death. For an enquiry about death nearly always meant the torture of the living, and than that was anything more calculated to give pleasure?

The fact that the Court was full confirmed these reflections and they passed on into a little room to wait. Adrian saying: "You go in fifth wicket down, Dinny, both Hilary and I are taken before you. If we keep out of Court till we're wanted they can't say we copied each other."

They sat very silent in the little bare room. The police, the doctor, Diana and Hilary had all to be examined first.

"It's like the ten little nigger boys," murmured Dinny. Her eyes were fixed on a calendar on the wall opposite; she could not read it, but it seemed necessary.

"See, my dear," said Adrian, and drew a little bottle from his breast pocket, "take a sip or two of this — not more — it's fifty-fifty sal volatile and water; it'll steady you no end. Be careful!"

Dinny took a little gulp. It burned her throat, but not too badly.

"You too, Uncle."

Adrian also took a cautious gulp.

"No finer dope," he said, "before going in to bat, or anything like that."

And they again sat silent, assimilating the fumes. Presently Adrian said:

"If spirits survive, as I don't believe, what is poor Ferse thinking of this farce? We're still barbarians. There's a story of Maupassant's about a Suicide Club that provided a pleasant form of death to those who felt they had to go. I don't believe in suicide for the sane, except in very rare cases. We've got to stick things out; but for the insane, or those threatened with it, I wish we had that Club, Dinny. Has that stuff steadied you?"

Dinny nodded.

"It'll last pretty well an hour." He got up. "My turn, I see. Good-bye, my dear, good luck! Stick in a 'Sir,' to the Coroner, now and then."

Watching him straighten himself as he passed through the door, Dinny felt a sort of inspiration. Uncle Adrian was the man she admired most of any she had ever seen. And she sent up a little illogical prayer for him. Certainly that stuff had steadied her; the sinking, fluttering feeling she had been having was all gone. She took out her pocket mirror and powder-puff. She could go to the stake, anyway, with a nose that did not shine.

Another quarter of an hour, however, passed before she was called, and she spent it, with her eyes still fixed on that calendar, thinking of Condaford and recalling all her pleasantest times there. The old days of its unrestored state, when she was very small, hayfield days, and picnics in the woods; pulling lavender, riding on the retriever, promotion to the pony when Hubert was at school; days of pure delight in a new, fixed home, for, though she had been born there, she had been nomadic till she was four — at Aldershot, and Gibraltar. She remembered with special pleasure winding the golden silk off the cocoons of her silkworms, how they had made her think of creeping, crawling elephants, and how peculiar had been their smell.

"Elizabeth Charwell."

Nuisance to have a name that everyone pronounced wrong as a matter of course! And she rose, murmuring to herself:

> "One little nigger, walking all alone,
> Up came a coroner, and then there was none."

Someone took charge of her on her entry, and, taking her across the Court, placed her in a sort of pen. It was fortunate that she had been in such places lately, for it all felt rather familiar, and even faintly comic. The jury in front of her looked as it were disused, the coroner had a funny importance. Down there, not far to her left, were the other little niggers; and, behind them, stretching to the blank wall, dozens and dozens and dozens of faces in rows, as of sardines set up on their tails in a huge sardine box. Then aware that she was being addressed, she concentrated on the coroner's face.

"Your name is Elizabeth Cherrell. You are the daughter, I believe, of Lieutenant-General Sir Conway Cherrell, K.C.B., C.M.G., and Lady Cherrell?"

Dinny bowed. 'I believe he likes me for that,' she thought.

"And you live with them at Condaford Grange in Oxfordshire?"

"Yes."

"I believe, Miss Cherrell, that you were staying with Captain and Mrs. Ferse up to the morning on which Captain Ferse left his house?"

"I was."

"Are you a close friend of theirs?"

"Of Mrs. Ferse. I had seen Captain Ferse only once, I think, before his return."

"Ah! his return. Were you staying with Mrs. Ferse when he returned?"

"I had come up to stay with her on that very afternoon."

"The afternoon of his return from the Mental Home?"

"Yes. I actually went to stay at their house the following day."

"And were you there until Captain Ferse left his house?"

"I was."

"During that time what was his demeanour?"

At this question for the first time Dinny realised the full disadvantage of not knowing what has been said already. It almost looked as if she must say what she really knew and felt.

"He seemed to me quite normal, except that he would not go out or see anybody. He looked quite healthy, only his eyes made one feel unhappy."

"How do you mean exactly?"

"They — they looked like a fire behind bars, they seemed to flicker."

And, at those words, she noticed that the jury for a moment looked a trifle less disused.

"He would not go out, you say? Was that during the whole time you were there?"

"No; he went out on the day before he left his home. He was out all that day, I believe."

"You believe? Were you not there?"

"No; that morning I took the two children down to my mother's at Condaford Grange, and returned in the evening just before dinner. Captain Ferse was not in then."

"What made you take the children down?"

"Mrs. Ferse asked me to. She had noticed some change in Captain Ferse, and she thought the children would be better away."

“Could you say that you had noticed a change?”

“Yes. I thought he seemed more restless, and, perhaps, suspicious; and he was drinking more at dinner.”

“Nothing very striking?”

“No. I—”

“Yes, Miss Cherrell?”

“I was going to say something that I don’t know of my own knowledge.”

“Something that Mrs. Ferse had told you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you needn’t tell us that.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“Coming back to when you returned from taking the children to your home, Captain Ferse was not in, you say; was Mrs. Ferse in?”

“Yes, she was dressed for dinner. I dressed quickly and we dined alone together. We were very anxious about him.”

“And then?”

“After dinner we went up to the drawing-room, and to distract her I made Mrs. Ferse sing, she was so nervous and anxious. After a little we heard the front door, and Captain Ferse came in and sat down.”

“Did he say anything?”

“No.”

“How was he looking?”

“Dreadful, I thought. Very strange and strained, as if under the power of some terrible thought.”

“Yes?”

“Mrs. Ferse asked him if he had had dinner, and if he would like to go to bed; and if he would see a doctor; but he wouldn’t speak — he sat with his eyes closed, almost as if he might be asleep, until at last I whispered: ‘Is he asleep, d’you think?’ Then suddenly he cried out: ‘Sleep! I’m for it again, and I won’t stand it. By God! I won’t stand it.’”

When she had repeated those words of Ferse, Dinny understood better than hitherto what is meant by the expression ‘sensation in Court’; in some mysterious way she had supplied what had been lacking to the conviction carried by the witnesses who had preceded her. Whether she had been wise in this, she was utterly unable to decide; and her eyes sought Adrian’s face. He gave her an almost imperceptible nod.

“Yes, Miss Cherrell?”

“Mrs. Ferse went towards him, and he cried out: ‘Leave me alone. Go away!’ I think she said: ‘Ronald, won’t you see someone just to give you something to make you sleep?’ but he sprang up and cried out violently: ‘Go away! I’ll see no one — no one!’”

“Yes, Miss Cherrell, what then?”

“We were frightened. We went up to my room and consulted, and I said we ought to telephone.”

“To whom?”

“To Mrs. Ferse’s doctor. She wanted to go, but I prevented her and ran down. The telephone was in the little study on the ground floor, and I was just getting the number when I felt my hand seized, and there was Captain Ferse behind me. He cut the wire with a knife. Then he stood holding my arm, and I said: ‘That’s silly, Captain Ferse; you know we wouldn’t hurt you.’ He let me go, and put his knife away, and told me to put on my shoes, because I had them in my other hand.”

“You mean you had taken them off?”

“Yes, to run down quietly. I put them on. He said: ‘I’m not going to be messed about. I shall do what I like with myself.’ I said: ‘You know we only want your good.’ And he said: ‘I know that good — no more of that for me.’ And then he looked out of the window and said: ‘It’s raining like hell,’ and turned to me and cried: ‘Get out of this room, quick. Get out!’ and I flew back upstairs again.”

Dinny paused and took a long breath. This second living through those moments was making her heart beat. She closed her eyes.

“Yes, Miss Cherrell, what then?”

She opened her eyes. There was the coroner still, and there the jury with their mouths a little open, as it seemed.

“I told Mrs. Ferse. We didn’t know what to do or what was coming — we didn’t see what we could do, and I suggested that we should drag the bed against the door and try to sleep.”

“And did you?”

“Yes; but we were awake a long time. Mrs. Ferse was so exhausted that she did sleep at last, and I think I did towards morning. Anyway the maid woke me by knocking.”

“Did you hear nothing further of Captain Ferse during the night?”

The old school-boy saying ‘If you tell a lie, tell a good ’un,’ shot through her mind, and she said firmly: “No, nothing.”

“What time was it when you were called?”

“Eight o’clock. I woke Mrs. Ferse and we went down at once. Captain Ferse’s dressing-room was in disorder, and he seemed to have lain upon the bed; but he was nowhere in the house; and his hat and overcoat were gone from the chair where he had thrown them down in the hall.”

“What did you do then?”

“We consulted, and Mrs. Ferse wanted to go to her doctor and to her cousin and mine, Mr. Michael Mont, the Member of Parliament; but I thought if I could get my uncles they would be better able to trace Captain Ferse; so I persuaded her to come with me to my Uncle Adrian and ask him to get my Uncle Hilary and see if they could find Captain Ferse. I knew they were both very clever men and very tactful,” Dinny saw the coroner bow slightly towards her uncles, and hurried on, “and they were old family friends; I thought if they couldn’t manage to find him without publicity, nobody could. So we went to my Uncle Adrian, and he agreed to get my Uncle Hilary to help him and try; then I took Mrs. Ferse down with me to the children at Condaford, and that’s all I know, Sir.”

The coroner bowed quite low towards her and said: “Thank you, Miss Cherrell. You have given your evidence admirably.” The jury moved uneasily as if trying to bow too, and Dinny, with an effort, stepped down from the pen and took her seat beside Hilary, who put his hand on hers. She sat very still, and then was conscious that a tear, as it were the last of the sal volatile, was moving slowly down her cheek. Listening dully to what followed, the evidence of the Doctor in charge of the Mental Home, and the coroner’s address, then waiting dumbly for the jury’s verdict, she suffered from the feeling that in her loyalty to the living she had been disloyal to the dead. It was a horrid sensation, that: of having borne evidence of mania against one who could not defend or explain himself; and it was with a fearful interest that she watched the jury file back into their seats, and the foreman stand up in answer to the demand for their verdict.

“We find that the deceased died from falling down a chalk pit.”

“That,” said the coroner, “is death from misadventure.”

“We wish to express our sympathy with the widow.”

Dinny almost clapped her hands. So! They had given him the benefit of the doubt — those disused men! And with a sudden, almost personal, warmth she tilted her head up and smiled at them.

❦

Chapter 31

When she had come to from smiling, Dinny perceived that her uncle was looking at her quizzically.

"Can we go now, Uncle Hilary?"

"It would be as well, Dinny, before you've quite vamped the foreman."

Outside, in the damp October air, for the day was English autumn personified, she said:

"Let's go for a little breather, Uncle, and get the smell of that Court out of us."

They turned down towards the distant sea, walking at a good pace.

"I'm frightfully anxious to know what went before me, Uncle; did I say anything contradictory?"

"No. It came out at once in Diana's evidence that Ferse had come back from the Home, and the coroner treated her tenderly. It was lucky they called me before Adrian, so that his evidence was only a repetition of mine, and he was no way conspicuous. I feel quite sorry for the journalists. Juries avoid suicide and unsound mind when they can, and, after all, we don't know what happened to poor Ferse at that last minute. He may quite easily have run on over the edge, it was pretty blind there and the light was failing."

"Do you really think that, Uncle?"

Hilary shook his head. "No, Dinny. I think he meant to do it all along, and that was the nearest place to his old home. And, though I say it that shouldn't, thank God he did, and is at rest."

"Yes, oh! yes! What will happen to Diana and Uncle Adrian, now?"

Hilary filled his pipe and stopped to light it. "Well, my dear, I've given Adrian some advice. I don't know whether he'll take it, but you might back it up if you get a chance. He's waited all these years. He'd better wait another."

"Uncle, I agree terribly."

"Oh!" said Hilary, surprised.

"Yes. Diana is simply not fit to think even of him. She ought to be left to herself and the children."

"I'm wondering," said Hilary, "whether one couldn't wangle some 'bones' expedition that would take him out of England for a year."

"Hallorsen!" said Dinny, clasping her hands: "He's going again. And he loves Uncle Adrian."

"Good! But would he take him?"

"If *I* asked him," said Dinny, simply.

Hilary again gave her a quizzical look. "What a dangerous young woman you are! I daresay the Trustees would give Adrian leave. I can set old Shropshire and Lawrence on to it. We must go back now, Dinny. I've got to catch a train. It's distressing, because this air smells good; but the Meads are pining for me."

Dinny slipped her hand through his arm.

"I do admire you, Uncle Hilary."

Hilary stared. "I doubt if I follow you, my dear."

"Oh! you know what I mean: you've got all the old 'I serve' tradition, and that kind of thing; and yet you're so frightfully up-to-date, and tolerant, and free-thinking."

"H'm!" said Hilary, emitting a cloud of smoke.

"I'm sure you believe in birth control?"

"Well," said Hilary, "the position there is ironical for us parsons. It used to be considered unpatriotic to believe in limiting our population. But now that flying and poison gas have made food for powder unnecessary, and unemployment is rampant, I'm afraid there's no question but that it's unpatriotic NOT to believe in limiting our population. As for our Christian principles; being patriots, we didn't apply the Christian principle 'Thou shalt not kill' during the war, so, being patriots, we can't logically apply the Christian principle 'Thou shalt not limit' now. Birth control is essential for the slums anyway."

"And you don't believe in hell."

"I do, they've got it."

"You support games on Sundays, don't you?" Hilary nodded. "And sun bathing with nothing on?"

"I might, if there were any sun."

"And pyjamas and smoking for women."

"Not stinkers; emphatically not stinkers."

"I call that undemocratic."

"I can't help it, Dinny. Sniff!" And he puffed some smoke at her.

Dinny sniffed. "There's latakia in that, it does smell good; but women can't smoke pipes. I suppose we all have a blind spot somewhere, and yours is: 'No stinkers.' Apart from that you're amazingly modern, Uncle. When I was in that Court looking at all those people, it seemed to me that yours was the only really modern face."

"It's a Cathedral town, my dear."

"Well, I think the amount of modernity is awfully overestimated."

"You don't live in London, Dinny. All the same, you're right in a way. Frankness about things is not change. The difference between the days of my youth and today is only the difference of expression. We had doubts, we had curiosity, we had desires; but we didn't express them. Now they do. I see a lot of young 'Varsity men — they come and work in the Meads, you know. Well, from their cradles they've been brought up to say whatever comes into their heads, and just don't they? We didn't, you know; but the same things came into our heads. That's all the difference. That and cars."

"Then I'm still old-fashioned. I'm not a bit good at expressing things."

"That's your sense of humour, Dinny. It acts as a restraint, and keeps you self-conscious. Few young people nowadays seem to have much sense of humour; they often have wit — it isn't the same thing. Our young writers, and painters and musicians, could they carry on as they do if they could see a joke against themselves? Because that's the real test of humour."

"I'll think that over."

"Yes, but don't lose your sense of humour, Dinny. It's the scent to the rose. Are you going back to Condaford now?"

"I expect so, Hubert's remand won't be till after that mail boat comes in, and that's not for ten days yet."

"Well, give my love to Condaford. I don't suppose I'll ever have days again quite so good as when we were children there."

"That's what I was thinking, Uncle, when I was waiting to be the last little nigger boy."

"You're a bit young for that conclusion, Dinny. Wait till you're in love."

"I am."

"What, in love?"

"No, in waiting."

"Fearsome process, being in love," said Hilary. "Still, I never regretted it."

Dinny gazed at him sideways, and her teeth showed.

"What if you took it again, Uncle?"

"Ah! there," said Hilary, knocking his pipe out on a pillar box, "I'm definitely out of it. In my profession we can't run to it. Besides, I've never really got over my first attack."

"No," said Dinny, with compunction, "Aunt May's such a duck."

"You've said a mouthful. Here's the station. Good-bye, and bless you! I sent my bag down this morning." He waved his hand and was gone.

On reaching the hotel Dinny sought Adrian. He was not in, and, rather disconsolate, she wandered out again into the Cathedral. She was just about to sit down and take its restful beauty in, when she saw her Uncle standing against a column with his eyes fixed on the rose window. Going up she slid her arm through his. He squeezed it, but said nothing.

"Fond of glass, Uncle?"

"Terribly fond of good glass, Dinny. Ever see York Minster?"

Dinny shook her head; then, conscious that nothing she could say would lead up to what she wanted to say, she asked directly: “What are you going to do now, Uncle dear?”

“Have you been talking to Hilary?”

“Yes.”

“He wants me to keep away for a year.”

“So do I.”

“It’s a long time, Dinny; I’m getting on.”

“Would you go on Professor Hallorsen’s expedition if he wanted you?”

“He wouldn’t want me.”

“Yes, he would.”

“I could only go if I were certain that Diana wished it.”

“She would never say so, but I’m quite sure she wants complete rest for a long time.”

“When you worship the sun,” said Adrian, very low, “it is hard to go where the sun never shines.”

Dinny squeezed his arm. “I know; but you’d have it to look forward to. And it’s a nice healthy expedition this time, only to New Mexico. You’d come back very young, with hair all down the outsides of your legs. They do in the films. You’d be irresistible, Uncle; and I do want you to be irresistible. All that’s wanted is to let the tumult and the shouting die.”

“And my job?”

“Oh! that can be wangled all right. If Diana doesn’t have to think of anything for a year, she’ll be a different creature, and you will seem like the promised land. I do feel I know what I’m talking about.”

“You’re an endearing little serpent,” said Adrian, with his shadowy smile.

“Diana is pretty badly wounded.”

“I sometimes think it’s a mortal wound, Dinny.”

“No, no!”

“Why should she think of me again, if I once go away?”

“Because women are like that.”

“What do you know about women, at your age? I went away long ago, and she thought of Ferse. I fancy I’m made of the wrong stuff.”

“If you are, New Mexico’s the very place. You’ll come back a ‘he-man’. Think of that! I promise to watch over her, and the children will keep you to the fore. They’re always talking of you. And I’ll see that they go on doing it.”

“It’s certainly curious,” said Adrian, impersonally, “but I feel she’s further from me now than when Ferse was alive.”

“For the moment, and it’ll be a long moment. But I know it’ll dry straight in the long run. Really, Uncle.”

Adrian was silent a long time. Then he said:

“I’ll go, Dinny, if Hallorsen will take me.”

“He shall. Bend down, Uncle. I MUST kiss you.”

Adrian bent down. The kiss lighted on his nose. A verger coughed . . . .

The return to Condaford was made by car that afternoon in precisely the same order, young Tasburgh driving. He had been extremely tactful during these twenty-four hours, had not proposed at all, and Dinny was proportionately grateful. If Diana wanted peace, so did she. Alan left that same evening, Diana and the children the following day, and Clare came back from her long stay in Scotland, so that none but her own family were at the Grange. Yet had she no peace. For now that the preoccupation with poor Ferse was gone, she was oppressed and worried by the thought of Hubert. Extraordinary what power of disturbance was in that overhanging issue! He and Jean wrote cheerfully from the East Coast. According to themselves they were not worrying. Dinny was. And she knew that her mother, and even more her father, were. Clare was more angry than worried, and the effect of anger on her was to stimulate her energy, so that she went out ‘cubbing’ with her father; and in the afternoons would disappear with the car to neighbouring houses, where she would often stay till after dinner. The festive member of the family, she was always in great request. Dinny had her anxiety to herself. She had written to Hallorsen about her uncle, sending him the promised photograph, which depicted her in her presentation frock of two years back, when she and Clare had been economically presented together. Hallorsen answered promptly: “The picture is just too lovely. Nothing will please me more than to take your uncle, I am getting in touch with him rightaway”: he signed himself “Always your devoted servant.”

She read the letter gratefully, but without a tremor, and called herself a hard-hearted beast. Her mind thus set at rest about Adrian, for she knew his year of leave could be safely left to Hilary, she thought all the time of Hubert with a growing presentiment of evil. She tried to persuade herself that this came from having nothing particular to do, from the reaction after Ferse, and the habit of nerves into which he had thrown her; but such excuses were unconvincing. If they did not believe Hubert sufficiently here to refuse his extradition, what chance would he have out there? She spent surreptitious minutes staring at the map of Bolivia, as if its conformation could give her insight into the psychology of its people. She had never loved Condaford more passionately than during these uneasy days. The place was entailed, and if Hubert were sent out there and condemned, or died in prison, or was murdered by one of those muleteers, and if Jean had no son, it would pass away to Hilary’s eldest boy — a cousin she had barely seen, a boy at school; in the family, yes, but as good as lost. With Hubert’s fate was wrapped up the fate of her beloved home. And, though astonished that she could think of herself at all, when it meant so terribly much more to Hubert, she never quite lost the thought.

One morning she got Clare to run her over to Lippinghall. Dinny hated driving, and not without reason, for her peculiar way of seeing the humours of what she was passing had often nearly brought her to grief. They arrived at lunch time. Lady Mont was just sitting down, and greeted them with:

“My dears, but how provokin’! Unless you can eat carrots — your Uncle’s away — so purifyin’. Blore, see if Augustine has a cooked bird somewhere. Oh! and, Blore, ask her to make those nice pancakes with jam, that I can’t eat.”

“Oh! but, Aunt Em, nothing that you can’t eat, please.”

“I can’t eat anythin’ just now. Your Uncle’s fattin’, so I’m slimmin’. And, Blore, cheese ramequins, and a nice wine — and coffee.”

“But this is awful, Aunt Em.”

“Grapes, Blore. And those cigarettes up in Mr. Michael’s room. Your Uncle doesn’t smoke them, and I smoke gaspers, so we run low. And, Blore.”

“Yes, my lady?”

“Cocktails, Blore.”

“Aunt Em, we never drink cocktails.”

“You do; I’ve seen you. Clare, you’re lookin’ thin; are you slimmin’ too?”

“No. I’ve been in Scotland, Aunt Em.”

“Followin’ the guns, and fishin’. Now run about the house. I’ll wait for you.”

When they were running about the house, Clare said to Dinny:

“Where on earth did Aunt Em learn to drop her g’s?”

“Father told me once that she was at a school where an undropped ‘g’ was worse than a dropped ‘h’. They were bringin’ in a county fashion then, huntin’ people, you know. Isn’t she a dear?”

Clare nodded, slightly brightening her lips.

Re-entering the dining-room, they heard Lady Mont say:

“James’s trousers, Blore.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“They look as if they were comin’ down. Can somethin’ be done about it?”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Here you are! Your Aunt Wilmet’s gone to stay with Hen, Dinny. They’ll be differin’ all over the place. You’ve got a cold bird each. Dinny, what have you been doin’ with Alan? He’s lookin’ so interestin’, and his leave’s up tomorrow.”

“I’ve not been doing anything with him, Aunt Em.”

“That’s it, then. No. Give me my carrots, Blore. Aren’t you goin’ to marry him? I know he has prospects in Chancery — somewhere — Wiltshire, is it? He comes and puts his head in my hand about you.”

Under Clare’s gaze Dinny sat with fork suspended.

“If you don’t take care, he’ll be gettin’ transferred to China and marryin’ a purser’s daughter. They say Hong Kong’s full of them. Oh! And my portulaca’s dead, Dinny. Boswell and Johnson went and watered it with liquid manure. They’ve no sense of smell. D’you know what they did once?”

“No, Aunt Em.”

“Had hay fever all over my pedigree rabbit — sneezin’ about the hutch, and the poor thing died. I gave them notice, but they didn’t go. They don’t, you know. Your Uncle pets them. Are you to wed, Clare?”

“To ‘wed!’ Aunt Em!”

“I think it’s rather sweet, the uneducated papers use it. But are you?”

“Of course not.”

“Why? Haven’t you the time? I don’t like carrots really — so depressin’. But your Uncle’s gettin’ to a time of life — I have to be careful. I don’t know why men have a time of life. By rights he ought to be over it.”

“He is, Aunt Em. Uncle Lawrence is sixty-nine; didn’t you know?”

“Well, he’s never shown any signs yet. Blore!”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Go away!”

“Yes, my lady.”

“There are some things,” said Lady Mont, as the door closed, “that you can’t talk about before Blore — birth control, and your uncle, and that. Poor Pussy!”

She rose, went to the window, and dropped a cat into a flower bed.

“How perfectly sweet Blore is with her!” murmured Dinny.

“They stray,” she said, as she came back, “at forty-five, and they stray at sixty-five, and I don’t know when after that. I never strayed. But I’m thinkin’ of it with the Rector.”

“Is he very lonely now, Auntie?”

“No,” said Lady Mont, “he’s enjoyin’ himself. He comes up here a lot.”

“It would be delicious if you could work up a scandal.”

“Dinny!”

“Uncle Lawrence would love it.”

Lady Mont seemed to go into a sort of coma.

“Where’s Blore?” she said: “I want one of those pancakes after all.”

“You sent him away.”

“Oh! yes.”

“Shall I tread on the gas, Aunt Em?” said Clare; “it’s under my chair.”

“I had it put there for your Uncle. He’s been readin’ me Gulliver’s Travels, Dinny. The man was coarse, you know.”

“Not so coarse as Rabelais, or even as Voltaire.”

“Do you read coarse books?”

“Oh! well, those are classics.”

“They say there was a book — Achilles, or something; your Uncle bought it in Paris; and they took it away from him at Dover. Have you read that?”

“No,” said Dinny.

“I have,” said Clare.

“From what your Uncle tells me, you oughtn’t to.”

“Oh! one reads anything now, Auntie, it never makes any difference.”

Lady Mont looked from one niece to the other.

“Well,” she said, cryptically, “there’s the Bible. Blore!”

"Yes, my lady."

"Coffee in the hall on the tiger. And put a sniff on the fire, Blore. My Vichy."

When she had drunk her glass of Vichy they all rose.

"Marvellous!" whispered Clare in Dinny's ear.

"What are you doin' about Hubert?" said Lady Mont, in front of the hall fire.

"Sweating in our shoes, Auntie."

"I told Wilmet to speak to Hen. She sees Royalty, you know. Then there's flyin'. Couldn't he fly somewhere?"

"Uncle Lawrence went bail for him."

"He wouldn't mind. We could do without James, he's got adenoids; and we could have one man instead of Boswell and Johnson."

"Hubert would mind, though."

"I'm fond of Hubert," said Lady Mont: "and bein' married — it's too soon. Here's the sniff."

Blore, bearing coffee and cigarettes, was followed by James bearing a cedar log; and a religious silence ensued while Lady Mont made coffee.

"Sugar, Dinny?"

"Two spoonfuls, please."

"Three for me. I know it's fattenin'. Clare?"

"One, please."

The girls sipped, and Clare sighed out:

"Amazing!"

"Yes. Why is your coffee so much better than anybody else's, Aunt Em?"

"I agree," said her aunt. "About that poor man, Dinny: I was so relieved that he didn't bite either of you after all. Adrian will get her now. Such a comfort."

"Not for some time, Aunt Em: Uncle Adrian's going to America."

"But why?"

"We all thought it best. Even he did."

"When he goes to Heaven," said Lady Mont, "someone will have to go with him, or he won't get in."

"Surely he'll have a seat reserved!"

"You never know. The Rector was preachin' on that last Sunday."

"Does he preach well?"

"Well, cosy."

"I expect Jean wrote his sermons."

"Yes, they used to have more zip. Where did I get that word, Dinny?"

"From Michael, I expect."

"He always caught everythin'. The rector said we were to deny ourselves; he came here to lunch."

"And had a whacking good feed."

"Yes."

"What does he weigh, Aunt Em?"

"Without his clothes — I don't know."

"But with?"

"Oh! quite a lot. He's goin' to write a book."

"What about?"

"The Tasburghs. There was that one that was buried, and lived in France afterwards, only she was a Fitzherbert by birth. Then there was the one that fought the battle of — not Spaghetti — the other word, Augustine gives it us sometimes."

"Navarino? But did he?"

"Yes, but they said he didn't. The rector's goin' to put that right. Then there was the Tasburgh that got beheaded, and forgot to put it down anywhere. The rector's nosed that out."

"In what reign?"

"I never can be bothered with reigns, Dinny. Edward the Sixth — or Fourth, was it? He was a red rose. Then there was the one that married into us. Roland his name was — or was it? But he did somethin' strikin'— and they took away his land. Recusancy — what is that?"

"It means he was a Catholic, Auntie, in a Protestant reign."

"They burnt his house first. He's in Mercurius Rusticus, or some book. The rector says he was greatly beloved. They burnt his house twice, I think, and then robbed it — or was it the other way? It had a moat. And there's a list of what they took."

"How entrancing!"

"Jam, and silver, and chickens, and linen, and I think his umbrella, or something funny."

"When was all this, Auntie?"

"In the Civil War. He was a Royalist. Now I remember his name wasn't Roland, and she was Elizabeth after you, Dinny. History repeatin' itself."

Dinny looked at the log.

"Then there was the last Admiral — under William the Fourth — he died drunk, not William. The Rector says he didn't, so he's writin' to prove it. He says he caught cold and took rum for it; and it didn't click — where did I get THAT word?"

"I sometimes use it, Auntie."

"Yes. So there's quite a lot, you see, besides all the dull ones, right away back to Edward the Confessor or somebody. He's tryin' to make out they're older than we are. So unreasonable."

"My Aunt!" murmured Clare. "Who would read a book like that?"

"I shouldn't think so. But he'll simply love snobbin' into it: and it'll keep him awake. Here's Alan! Clare, you haven't seen where my portulaca was. Shall we take a turn?"

"Aunt Em, you're shameless," said Dinny in her ear; "and it's no good."

"'If at first you don't succeed'— d'you remember every mornin' when we were little? Wait till I get my hat, Clare."

They passed away.

"So your leave's up, Alan?" said Dinny, alone with the young man. "Where shall you be?"

"Portsmouth."

"Is that nice?"

"Might be worse. Dinny, I want to talk to you about Hubert. If things go wrong at the Court next time, what's going to happen?"

All 'bubble and squeak' left Dinny, she sank down on a fireside cushion, and gazed up with troubled eyes.

"I've been enquiring," said young Tasburgh; "they leave it two or three weeks for the Home Secretary to go into, and then, if he confirms, cart them off as soon as they can. From Southampton it would be, I expect."

"You don't really think it will come to that, do you?"

He said gloomily: "I don't know. Suppose a Bolivian had killed somebody, here, and gone back, we should want him rather badly, shouldn't we, and put the screw on to get him?"

"But it's fantastic!"

The young man looked at her with an extremely resolute compassion.

"We'll hope for the best; but if it goes wrong something's got to be done about it. I'm not going to stand for it, nor is Jean."

"But what could be done?"

Young Tasburgh walked round the hall looking at the doors; then, leaning above her, he said:

"Hubert can fly, and I've been up every day since Chichester. Jean and I are working the thing out — in case."

Dinny caught his hand.

"My dear boy, that's crazy!"

"No crazier than thousands of things done in the war."

"But it would ruin your career."

"Blast my career! Look on and see you and Jean miserable for years, perhaps, and a man like Hubert broken rottenly like that — what d'you think?"

Dinny squeezed his hand convulsively and let it go.

"It can't, it shan't come to that. Besides, how could you get Hubert? He'd be under arrest."

"I don't know, but I shall know all right if and when the time comes. What's certain is that if they once get him over there, he'll have a damned thin chance."

"Have you spoken to Hubert?"

"No. It's all perfectly vague as yet."

"I'm sure he wouldn't consent."

"Jean will see to that."

Dinny shook her head. "You don't know Hubert; he would never let you."

Alan grinned, and she suddenly recognised that in him there was something formidably determined.

"Does Professor Hallorsen know?"

"No, and he won't, unless it's absolutely necessary. But he's a good egg, I admit."

She smiled faintly. "Yes, he's a good egg; but an outsize."

"Dinny, you're not gone on him, are you?"

"No, my dear."

"Well, thank God for that! You see," he went on, "they're not likely to treat Hubert as an ordinary criminal. That will make things easier perhaps."

Dinny gazed at him, thrilled to her very marrow. Somehow that last remark convinced her of the reality of his purpose. "I'm beginning to understand Zeebrugge. But —"

"No buts, and buck up! That boat arrives the day after tomorrow, and then the case will be on again. I shall see you in Court, Dinny. I must go now — got my daily flight. I just thought I'd like you to know that if the worst comes to the worst, we aren't going to take it lying down. Give my love to Lady Mont; shan't be seeing her again. Good-bye, and bless you!" And, kissing her hand, he was out of the hall before she could speak.

Dinny sat on beside the cedar log, very still, and strangely moved. The idea of defiance had not before occurred to her, mainly perhaps because she had never really believed that Hubert would be committed for trial. She did not really believe it now, and that made this 'crazy' idea the more thrilling; for it has often been noticed that the less actual a risk, the more thrilling it seems. And to the thrill was joined a warmer feeling for Alan. The fact that he had not even proposed added to the conviction that he was in dead earnest. And on that tiger-skin, which had provided very little thrill to the eighth baronet, who from an elephant had shot its owner while it was trying to avoid notice, Dinny sat, warming her body in the glow from the cedar log, and her spirit in the sense of being closer to the fires of life than she had ever yet been. Her Uncle's old black and white spaniel dog, Quince, who in his master's absences, which were frequent, took little interest in human beings, came slowly across the hall and, lying down four-square, put his head on his fore-paws and looked up at her with eyes that showed red rims beneath them. "It may be all that, and it may not," he seemed to say. The log hissed faintly, and a grandfather clock on the far side of the hall struck three with its special slowness.

❦

Chapter 32

Over any impending issue, whether test match, ultimatum, the Cambridgeshire, or the hanging of a man, excitement beats up in the last few hours, and the feeling of suspense in the Cherrell family became painful when the day of Hubert's remand was reached. As some Highland clan of old, without summons issued, assembled when one of its number was threatened, so were Hubert's relatives collected in the Police Court. Except Lionel, who was in session, and his and Hilary's children, who were at school, they were all there. It might have been a wedding or a funeral, but for the grimness of their faces, and the sense of unmerited persecution at the back of every mind. Dinny and Clare sat between their father and mother, with Jean, Alan, Hallorsen and Adrian next them; just behind them were Hilary and his wife, Fleur and Michael and Aunt Wilmet; behind them again sat Sir Lawrence and Lady Mont, and in the extreme rear the Rector formed the spear tail of an inverted phalanx.

Coming in with his lawyer, Hubert gave them a clansman's smile.

Now that she was actually in Court, Dinny felt almost apathetic. Her brother was innocent of all save self-defence. If they committed him, he would still be innocent. And, after she had answered Hubert's smile, her attention was given to Jean's face. If ever the girl looked like a leopardess, it was now; her strange, deep-set eyes kept sliding from her 'cub' to him who threatened to deprive her of it.

The evidence from the first hearing having been read over, the new evidence — Manuel's affidavit — was produced by Hubert's lawyer. But then Dinny's apathy gave way, for this affidavit was countered by the prosecution with another, sworn by four muleteers, to the effect that Manuel had not been present at the shooting.

That was a moment of real horror.

Four half-castes against one!

Dinny saw a disconcerted look flit across the magistrate's face.

"Who procured this second affidavit, Mr. Buttall?"

"The lawyer in charge of the case in La Paz, Your Honour. It became known to him that the boy Manuel was being asked to give evidence."

"I see. What do you say now on the question of the scar shown us by the accused?"

"Beyond the accused's own statement there is no evidence whatever before you, Sir, or before me, as to how or when that scar was inflicted."

"That is so. You are not suggesting that this scar could have been inflicted by the dead man after he was shot?"

"If Castro, having drawn a knife, had fallen forward after he was shot, it is conceivable, I suppose."

"Not likely, I think, Mr. Buttall."

"No. But my evidence, of course, is that the shooting was deliberate, cold-blooded, and at a distance of some yards. I know nothing of Castro's having drawn a knife."

"It comes to this, then: Either your six witnesses are lying, or the accused and the boy Manuel are."

"That would appear to be the position, Your Honour. It is for you to judge whether the sworn words of six citizens are to be taken, or the sworn words of two."

Dinny saw the magistrate wriggle.

"I am perfectly aware of that, Mr. Buttall. What do you say, Captain Cherrell, to this affidavit that has been put in as to the absence of the boy Manuel?"

Dinny's eyes leaped to her brother's face. It was impassive, even slightly ironic.

"Nothing, Sir. I don't know where Manuel was. I was too occupied in saving my life. All I know is that he came up to me almost immediately afterwards."

"Almost? How long afterwards?"

"I really don't know, Sir — perhaps a minute. I was trying to stop the bleeding; I fainted just as he came."

During the speeches of the two lawyers which followed, Dinny's apathy returned. It fled again during the five minutes of silence which succeeded them. In all the Court the magistrate alone seemed occupied; and it was as if he would never be done. Through her lowered lashes she could see him consulting this paper, consulting that; he had a red face, a long nose, a pointed chin, and eyes which she liked whenever she could see them. Instinctively she knew that he was not at ease. At last he spoke.

"In this case," he said, "I have to ask myself not whether a crime has been committed, or whether the accused has committed it; I have only to ask myself whether the evidence brought before me is such as to satisfy me that the alleged crime is an extraditable offence, that the foreign warrant is duly authenticated, and that such evidence has been produced as would in this country justify me in committing the accused to take his trial." He paused a moment and then added: "There is no question but that the crime alleged is an extraditable offence, and that the foreign warrant is duly authenticated." He paused again, and in the dead silence Dinny heard a long sigh, as if from a spirit, so lonely and disembodied was the sound. The Magistrate's eyes passed to Hubert's face, and he resumed:

"I have come to the conclusion reluctantly that it is my duty on the evidence adduced to commit the accused to prison to await surrender to the foreign State on a warrant from the Secretary of State, if he sees fit to issue it. I have heard the accused's evidence to the effect that he had an antecedent justification removing the act complained of from the category of crime, supported by the affidavit of a witness which is contradicted by the affidavit of four others. I have no means of judging between the conflicting evidence of these two affidavits except in so far that it is in the proportion of four to one, and I must therefore dismiss it from my mind. In face of the sworn testimony of six witnesses that the shooting was deliberate, I do not think that the unsupported word of the accused to the contrary would justify me in the case of an offence committed in this country in refusing to commit for trial; and I am therefore unable to accept it as justification for a refusal to commit for trial in respect of an offence committed in another country. I make no hesitation in confessing my reluctance to come to this conclusion, but I consider that I have no other course open to me. The question, I repeat, is not whether the accused is guilty or innocent, it is a question of whether or not there should be a trial. I am not able to take on myself the responsibility of saying that there should not. The final word in cases of this nature rests with the Secretary of State, who issues the surrender warrant. I commit you, therefore, to prison to await the issue of such a warrant. You will not be surrendered until after fifteen days, and you have the right to apply for a writ of habeas corpus in regard to the lawfulness of your custody. I have not the power to grant you any further bail; but it may be that you may secure it, if you so desire, by application to the King's Bench Division."

Dinny's horrified eyes saw Hubert, standing very straight, make the magistrate a little bow, and leave the dock, walking slowly and without a look back. Behind him his lawyer, too, passed out of Court.

She herself sat as if stunned, and her only impression of those next minutes was the sight of Jean's stony face, and of Alan's brown hands gripping each other on the handle of his stick.

She came to herself conscious that tears were stealing down her mother's face, and that her father was standing up.

"Come!" he said: "Let's get out of here!"

At that moment she was more sorry for her father than for any other of them all. Since this thing began he had said so little and had felt so much. It was ghastly for him! Dinny understood very well his simple feelings. To him, in the refusal of Hubert's word, an insult had been flung not merely in his son's face, and his own as Hubert's father, but in the face of what they stood for and believed in; in the face of all soldiers and all gentlemen! Whatever happened now, he would never quite get over this. Between justice and what was just, what inexorable incompatibility! Were there men more honourable than her father and her brother, or than that magistrate, perhaps? Following him out into that dishevelled backwater of life and traffic, Bow Street, she noted that they were all there except Jean, Alan and Hallorsen. Sir Lawrence said:

"We must just 'take cabs and go about!' Better come to Mount Street and consult what we can each best do."

When half an hour later they assembled in Aunt Em's drawing-room, those three were still absent.

"What's happened to them?" asked Sir Lawrence.

"I expect they went after Hubert's lawyer," answered Dinny; but she knew better. Some desperate plan was being hatched, and she brought but a distracted mind to council.

In Sir Lawrence's opinion Bobbie Ferrar was still their man. If he could do nothing with 'Walter,' nothing could be done. He proposed to go again to him and to the Marquess.

The General said nothing. He stood a little apart, staring at one of his brother-inlaw's pictures, evidently without seeing it. Dinny realised that he did not join in because he could not. She wondered of what he was thinking. Of when he was young like his son, just married; of long field-days under burning sun among the sands and stones of India and South Africa; of longer days of administrative routine; of strenuous poring over maps with his eyes on the clock and his ear to the telephone; of his wounds and his son's long sickness; of two lives given to service and this strange reward at the end?

She herself stood close to Fleur, with the instinctive feeling that from that clear, quick brain might come a suggestion of real value.

"The Squire carries weight with the Government; I might go to Bentworth," she heard Hilary say, and the Rector add:

"Ah! I knew him at Eton, I'll come with you."

She heard her Aunt Wilmet's gruff: "I'll go to Hen again about Royalty." And Michael's:

"In a fortnight the House will be sitting"; and Fleur's impatient:

"No good, Michael. The Press is no use either. I've got a hunch."

'Ah!' she thought, and moved closer.

"We haven't gone deep enough. What's at the back of it? Why should the Bolivian Government care about a half-caste Indian? It's not the actual shooting, it's the slur on their country. Floggings and shootings by foreigners! What's wanted is something done to the Bolivian Minister that will make him tell 'Walter' that they don't really care."

"We can't kidnap him," muttered Michael; "it's not done in the best circles."

A faint smile came on Dinny's lips; she was not so sure.

"I'll see," said Fleur, as if to herself. "Dinny, you must come to us. They'll get no further here." And her eyes roved swiftly over the nine elders. "I shall go to Uncle Lionel and Alison. He won't dare move, being a new judge, but she will, and she knows all the Legation people. Will you come, Dinny?"

"I ought to be with mother and father."

"They'll be here, Em's just asked them. Well, if you stay here too, come round as much as you can; you might help."

Dinny nodded, relieved at staying in town; for the thought of Condaford during this suspense oppressed her.

"We'll go now," said Fleur, "and I'll get on to Alison at once."

Michael lingered to squeeze Dinny's arm.

"Buck up, Dinny! We'll get him out of it somehow. If only it wasn't 'Walter!' He's the worst kind of egg. To fancy yourself 'just' is simply to addle."

When all except her own people had gone, Dinny went up to her father. He was still standing before a picture, but not the same one. Slipping her hand under his arm, she said:

"It's going to be all right, Dad dear. You could see the magistrate was really sorry. He hadn't the power, but the Home Secretary must have."

"I was thinking," said the General, "what the people of this country would do if we didn't sweat and risk our lives for them." He spoke without bitterness, or even emphasis: "I was thinking why we should go on doing our jobs, if our words aren't to be believed. I was wondering where that magistrate would be — oh! I dare say he's all right according to his lights — if boys like Hubert hadn't gone off before their time. I was wondering why we've chosen lives that have landed me on the verge of bankruptcy, and Hubert in this mess, when we might have been snug and comfortable in the City or the Law. Isn't a man's whole career to weigh a snap when a thing like this happens? I feel the insult to the Service, Dinny."

She watched the convulsive movement of his thin brown hands, clasped as if he were standing at ease, and her whole heart went out to him, though she could perfectly well see the unreason of the exemption he was claiming. "It is easier for Heaven and Earth to pass than for one tittle of the Law to fail." Wasn't that the text she had just read in what she had suggested might be made into a secret naval code?

"Well," he said, "I must go out now with Lawrence. See to your mother, Dinny, her head's bad."

When she had darkened her mother's bedroom, applied the usual remedies, and left her to try and sleep, she went downstairs again. Clare had gone out, and the drawing-room, just now so full, seemed deserted. She passed down its length and opened the piano. A voice said:

"No, Polly, you must go to bed, I feel too sad"; and she became aware of her Aunt in the alcove at the end placing her parakeet in its cage.

“Can we be sad together, Aunt Em?”

Lady Mont turned round.

“Put your cheek against mine, Dinny.”

Dinny did so. The cheek was pink and round and smooth and gave her a sense of relaxation.

“From the first I knew what he would say,” said Lady Mont, “his nose was so long. In ten years’ time it’ll touch his chin. Why they allow them, I don’t know. You can do nothing with a man like that. Let’s cry, Dinny. You sit there, and I’ll sit here.”

“Do you cry high or low, Aunt Em?”

“Either. You begin. A man who can’t take a responsibility. I could have taken that responsibility perfectly, Dinny. Why didn’t he just say to Hubert ‘Go and sin no more’?”

“But Hubert hasn’t sinned.”

“It makes it all the worse. Payin’ attention to foreigners! The other day I was sittin’ in the window at Lippin’hall, and there were three starlin’s on the terrace, and I sneezed twice. D’you think they paid any attention? Where is Bolivia?”

“In South America, Aunt Em.”

“I never could learn geography. My maps were the worst ever made at my school, Dinny. Once they asked me where Livin’stone kissed Stanley, and I answered? ‘Niagara Falls.’ And it wasn’t.”

“You were only a continent wrong there, Auntie.”

“Yes. I’ve never seen anybody laugh as my schoolmistress laughed when I said that. Excessive — she was fat. I thought Hubert lookin’ thin.”

“He’s always thin, but he’s looking much less ‘tucked up’ since his marriage.”

“Jean’s fatter, that’s natural. You ought, Dinny, you know.”

“You never used to be so keen on people getting married, Auntie.”

“What happened on the tiger the other day?”

“I can’t possibly tell you that, Aunt Em.”

“It must have been pretty bad, then.”

“Or do you mean good?”

“You’re laughin’ at me.”

“Did you ever know me disrespectful, Auntie?”

“Yes. I perfectly well remember you writin’ a poem about me:

> ‘I do not care for Auntie Em,
> She says I cannot sew or hem.
> Does she? Well! I can sew a dem
> Sight better than my Auntie Em.’

I kept it. I thought it showed character.”

“Was I such a little demon?”

“Yes. There’s no way, is there, of shortenin’ dogs?” And she pointed to the golden retriever lying on a rug. “Bonzo’s middle is really too long.”

“I told you that, Aunt Em, when he was a puppy.”

“Yes, but I didn’t notice it till he began to scratch for rabbits. He can’t get over the hole properly. It makes him look so weak. Well! If we’re not goin’ to cry, Dinny, what shall we do?”

“Laugh?” murmured Dinny.

❦

CHAPTER 33

Her father and Sir Lawrence not coming back to dinner, and her mother remaining in bed, Dinny dined alone with her aunt, for Clare was staying with friends.

"Aunt Em," she said, when they had finished, "do you mind if I go round to Michael's? Fleur has had a hunch."

"Why?" said Lady Mont: "It's too early for that — not till March."

"You're thinking of the hump, Auntie. A 'hunch' means an idea."

"Then why didn't she say so?" And, with that simple dismissal of the more fashionable forms of speech, Lady Mont rang the bell.

"Blore, a taxi for Miss Dinny. And, Blore, when Sir Lawrence comes in, let me know; I'm goin' to have a hot bath, and wash my hair."

"Yes, my lady."

"Do you wash your hair when you're sad, Dinny?"

Driving through the misty dark evening to South Square, Dinny experienced melancholy beyond all she had felt yet. The thought of Hubert actually in a prison cell, torn from a wife not more than three weeks married, facing separation that might be permanent, and a fate that would not bear thinking of; and all because they were too scrupulous to stretch a point and take his word, caused fear and rage to bank up in her spirit, as unspent heat before a storm.

She found Fleur and her Aunt Lady Alison discussing ways and means. The Bolivian Minister, it appeared, was away convalescing after an illness, and a subordinate was in charge. This in Lady Alison's opinion made it more difficult, for he would probably not take any responsibility. She would, however, arrange a luncheon to which Fleur and Michael should be bidden, and Dinny, too, if she wished; but Dinny shook her head — she had lost faith in her power of manipulating public men.

"If you and Fleur can't manage it, Aunt Alison, I certainly can't. But Jean is singularly attractive when she likes."

"Jean telephoned just now, Dinny. If you came in to-night, would you go round and see her at their flat; otherwise she was writing to you."

Dinny stood up. "I'll go at once."

She hurried through the mist along the Embankment and turned down towards the block of workmen's flats where Jean had found her lodgment. At the corner boys were crying the more sanguinary tidings of the day; she bought a paper to see if Hubert's case was mentioned, and opened it beneath a lamp. Yes! There it was! "British officer committed. Extradition on shooting charge." How little attention she would have given to that, if it had not concerned her! This, that was agony to her and hers, was to the Public just a little pleasurable excitement. The misfortunes of others were a distraction; and the papers made their living out of it! The man who had sold the paper to her had a thin face, dirty clothes, and was lame; and, throwing a libationary drop out of her bitter cup, she gave him back the paper and a shilling. His eyes widened in a puzzled stare, his mouth remained a little open. Had she backed the winner — that one?

Dinny went up the bricked stairs. The flat was on the second floor. Outside its door a grown black cat was spinning round after its own tail. It flew round six times on the same spot, then sat down, lifted one of its back legs high into the air, and licked it.

Jean herself opened the door. She was evidently in the throes of packing, having a pair of combinations over her arm. Dinny kissed her and looked round. She had not been here before. The doors of the small sitting-room, bedroom, kitchen and bathroom were open; the walls were distempered apple green, the floors covered with dark-green linoleum. For furniture there was a double bed, and some suit-cases in the bedroom, two armchairs and a small table in the sitting-room; a kitchen table and some bath salts in a glass jar; no rugs, no pictures, no books, but some printed linen curtains to the windows and a hanging cupboard along one whole side of the bedroom, from which Jean had been taking the clothes piled on the bed. A scent of coffee and lavender bags distinguished the atmosphere from that on the stairs.

Jean put down the combinations.

"Have some coffee, Dinny? I've just made it."

She poured out two cups, sweetened them, handed Dinny one and a paper packet of cigarettes, then pointed to one of the armchairs and sat down in the other.

"You got my message, then? I'm glad you've come — saves my making up a parcel. I hate making parcels, don't you?"

Her coolness and unharassed expression seemed to Dinny miraculous.

"Have you seen Hubert since?"

"Yes. He's fairly comfortable. It's not a bad cell, he says, and they've given him books and writing paper. He can have food in, too; but he's not allowed to smoke. Someone ought to move about that. According to English law Hubert's still as innocent as the Home Secretary; there's no law to prevent the Home Secretary smoking, is there? I shan't be seeing him again, but you'll be going, Dinny — so give him my special love, and take him some cigarettes in case they let him."

Dinny stared at her.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Well, I wanted to see you about that. This is all strictly for your ear only. Promise to lie absolutely doggo, Dinny, or I shan't say anything."

Dinny said, resolutely: "Cross my heart as they say. Go on."

"I'm going to Brussels tomorrow. Alan went today; he's got extension of leave for urgent family affairs. We're simply going to prepare for the worst, that's all. I'm to learn flying in double quick time. If I go up three times a day, three weeks will be quite enough. Our lawyer has guaranteed us three weeks, at least. Of course, he knows nothing. Nobody is to know anything, except you. I want you to do something for me." She reached forward and took out of her vanity bag a tissue-papered packet.

"I've got to have five hundred pounds. We can get a good second-hand machine over there for very little, they say, but we shall want all the rest. Now, look here Dinny, this is an old family thing. It's worth a lot. I want you to pop it for five hundred; if you can't get as much as that by popping, you'll have to sell it. Pop, or sell, in your name, and change the English notes into Belgian money and send it to me registered to the G.P.O. Brussels. You ought to be able to send me the money within three days." She undid the paper, and disclosed an old-fashioned but very beautiful emerald pendant.

"Oh!"

"Yes," said Jean, "it really is good. You can afford to take a high line. Somebody will give you five hundred on it, I'm sure. Emeralds are up."

"But why don't you 'pop' it yourself before you go?"

Jean shook her head.

"No, nothing whatever that awakens suspicion. It doesn't matter what you do, Dinny, because you're not going to break the law. We possibly are, but we're not going to be copped."

"I think," said Dinny, "you ought to tell me more."

Again Jean shook her head.

"Not necessary, and not possible; we don't know enough yet ourselves. But make your mind easy, they're not going to get away with Hubert. You'll take this, then?" And she wrapped up the pendant.

Dinny took the little packet, and, having brought no bag, slipped it down her dress. She leaned forward and said earnestly:

"Promise you won't do anything, Jean, till everything else has failed."

Jean nodded. "Nothing till the very last minute. It wouldn't be good enough."

Dinny grasped her hand. "I oughtn't to have let you in for this, Jean, it was I who brought the young things together, you know."

"My dear, I'd never have forgiven you if you hadn't. I'm in love."

"But it's so ghastly for you."

Jean looked into the distance so that Dinny could almost feel the cub coming round the corner.

"No! I like to think it's up to me to pull him out of it. I've never felt so alive as I feel now."

"Is there much risk for Alan?"

"Not if we work things properly. We've several schemes, according as things shape."

Dinny sighed.

"I hope to God they'll none of them be necessary."

"So do I, but it's impossible to leave things to chance, with a 'just beast' like 'Walter'."

"Well, good-bye, Jean, and good luck!"

They kissed, and Dinny went down into the street with the emerald pendant weighing like lead on her heart. It was drizzling now and she took a cab back to Mount Street. Her father and Sir Lawrence had just come in. Their news was inconsiderable. Hubert, it seemed, did not wish for bail again. 'Jean,' thought Dinny, 'has to do with that.' The Home Secretary was in Scotland and would not be back till Parliament sat, in about a fortnight's time. The warrant could not be issued till after that. In expert opinion they had three weeks at least in which to move heaven and earth. Ah! but it was easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the Law to fail. And yet was it quite nonsense when people talked of 'interest' and 'influence' and 'wangling' and 'getting things through'? Was there not some talismanic way of which they were all ignorant?

Her father kissed her and went dejectedly up to bed, and Dinny was left alone with Sir Lawrence. Even he was in heavy mood.

"No bubble and squeak in the pair of us," he said. "I sometimes think, Dinny, that the Law is overrated. It's really a rough-and-ready system, with about as much accuracy in adjusting penalty to performance as there is to a doctor's diagnosis of a patient he sees for the first time; and yet for some mysterious reason we give it the sanctity of the Holy Grail and treat its dicta as if they were the broadcastings of God. If ever there was a case where a Home Secretary might let himself go and be human, this is one. And yet I don't see him doing it. I don't, Dinny, and Bobbie Ferrar doesn't. It seems that some wrongly-inspired idiot, not long ago, called Walter 'the very spirit of integrity,' and Bobbie says that instead of turning up his stomach, it went to his head, and he hasn't reprieved anybody since. I've been wondering whether I couldn't write to the 'Times' and say: 'This pose of inexorable incorruptibility in certain quarters is more dangerous to justice than the methods of Chicago.' Chicago ought to fetch him. He's been there, I believe. It's an awful thing for a man to cease to be human."

"Is he married?"

"Not even that, now," said Sir Lawrence.

"But some men don't even begin to be human, do they?"

"That's not so bad; you know where you are, and can take a fire-shovel to them. No, it's the blokes who get swelled head that make the trouble. By the way, I told my young man that you would sit for your miniature."

"Oh! Uncle, I simply couldn't sit with Hubert on my mind!"

"No, no! Of course not! But something must turn up." He looked at her shrewdly and added: "By the way, Dinny, young Jean?"

Dinny lifted a wide and simple gaze:

"What about her?"

"She doesn't look to me too easy to bite."

"No, but what can she do, poor dear?"

"I wonder," said Sir Lawrence, raising one eyebrow, "I just wonder. 'They're dear little innocent things, they are, they're angels without any wings, they are. That's 'Punch' before your time, Dinny. And it will continue to be 'Punch' after your time, except that wings are growing on you all so fast."

Dinny, still looking at him innocently, thought: 'He's rather uncanny, Uncle Lawrence!' And soon after she went up to bed.

To go to bed with one's whole soul in a state of upheaval! And yet how many other upheaved souls lay, cheek to pillow, unsleeping! The room seemed full of the world's unreasoning misery. If one were talented, one would get up and relieve oneself in a poem about Azrael, or something! Alas! It was not so easy as all that. One lay, and was sore — sore and anxious and angry. She could remember still how she had felt, being thirteen, when Hubert, not quite eighteen, had gone off to the war. That had been horrid, but this was much worse; and she wondered why. Then he might have been killed at any minute; now he was safer than anybody who was not in prison. He would be preserved meticulously even while they sent him across the world and put him up for trial in a country not his own, before some judge of alien blood. He was safe enough for some months yet. Why, then, did this seem so much worse than all the risks through which he had passed since he first went soldiering, even than that long, bad time on the Hallorsen expedition? Why? If not that those old risks and hardships had been endured of his free will; while the present trouble was imposed on him. He was being held down, deprived of the two great boons of human existence, independence and private life, boons to secure which human beings in communities had directed all their efforts for thousands of years, until — until they went Bolshy! Boons to every human being, but especially to people like themselves, brought up under no kind of whip except that of their own consciences. And she lay there as if she were lying in his cell, gazing into his future, longing for Jean, hating the locked-in feeling, cramped and miserable and bitter. For what had he done, what in God's name had he done that any other man of sensibility and spirit would not do!

The mutter of the traffic from Park Lane formed a sort of ground base to her rebellious misery. She became so restless that she could not lie in bed, and, putting on her dressing gown, stole noiselessly about her room till she was chilled by the late October air coming through the opened window. Perhaps there was something in being married, after all; you had a chest to snuggle against and if need be weep on; you had an ear to pour complaint into; and lips that would make the mooing sounds of sympathy. But worse than being single during this time of trial was being inactive. She envied those who, like her father and Sir Lawrence, were at least taking cabs and going about; greatly she envied Jean and Alan. Whatever they were up to was better than being up to nothing, like herself! She took out the emerald pendant and looked at it. That at least was something to do on the morrow, and she pictured herself with this in her hand forcing large sums of money out of some flinty person with a tendency towards the art of lending.

Placing the pendant beneath her pillow, as though its proximity were an insurance against her sense of helplessness, she fell asleep at last.

Next morning she was down early. It had occurred to her that she could perhaps pawn the pendant, get the money, and take it to Jean before she left. And she decided to consult the butler, Blore. After all, she had known him since she was five; he was an institution and had never divulged any of the iniquities she had confided in him in her childhood.

She went up to him, therefore, when he appeared with her Aunt's special coffee machine.

"Blore."

"Yes, Miss Dinny."

"Will you be frightfully nice and tell me, IN CONFIDENCE, who is supposed to be the best pawnbroker in London?"

Surprised but impassive — for, after all, anybody might have to 'pop' anything in these days — the butler placed the coffee machine at the head of the table and stood reflecting.

"Well, Miss Dinny, of course there's Attenborough's, but I'm told the best people go to a man called Frewen in South Molton Street. I can get you the number from the telephone book. They say he's reliable and very fair."

"Splendid, Blore! It's just a little matter."

"Quite so, Miss."

"Oh! And, Blore, would you — should I give my own name?"

"No, Miss Dinny; if I might suggest: give my wife's name and this address. Then, if there has to be any communication, I could get it to you by telephone, and no one the wiser."

"Oh! that's a great relief. But wouldn't Mrs. Blore mind?"

"Oh! no, Miss, only too glad to oblige you. I could do the matter for you if you wish."

"Thank you, Blore, but I'm afraid I must do it myself."

The butler caressed his chin and regarded her; his eye seemed to Dinny benevolent but faintly quizzical.

"Well, Miss, if I may say so, a little nonchalance goes a long way even with the best of them. There are others if he doesn't offer value."

"Thank you frightfully, Blore; I'll let you know if he doesn't. Would half past nine be too early?"

"From what I hear, Miss, that is the best hour; you get him fresh and hearty."

"Dear Blore!"

"I'm told he's an understanding gent, who can tell a lady when he sees one. He won't confuse you with some of those Tottie madams."

Dinny laid her finger to her lips.

"Cross your heart, Blore."

"Oh! absolutely, Miss. After Mr. Michael you were always my favourite."

"And so were you, Blore." She took up 'The Times' as her father entered, and Blore withdrew.

"Sleep well, Dad?"

The General nodded.

"And Mother's head?"

"Better. She's coming down. We've decided that it's no use to worry, Dinny."

"No, darling, it isn't, of course. D'you think we could begin breakfast?"

"Em won't be down, and Lawrence has his at eight. You make the coffee."

Dinny, who shared her Aunt's passion for good coffee went reverentially to work.

"What about Jean?" asked the General, suddenly. "Is she coming to us?"

Dinny did not raise her eyes.

"I don't think so, Dad; she'll be too restless; I expect she'll just make out by herself. I should want to, if I were her."

"I daresay, poor girl. She's got pluck, anyway. I'm glad Hubert married a girl of spirit. Those Tasburghs have got their hearts in the right place. I remember an uncle of hers in India — daring chap, a Goorkha regiment, they swore by him. Let me see, where was he killed?"

Dinny bent lower over the coffee.

It was barely half past nine when she went out with the pendant in her vanity bag, and her best hat on. At half past nine precisely she was going up to the first floor above a shop in South Molton Street. Within a large room, at a mahogany table, were two seated gentlemen, who might have seemed to her like high-class bookmakers if she had known what such were like. She looked at them anxiously, seeking for signs of heartiness. They appeared, at least, to be fresh, and one of them came towards her.

Dinny passed an invisible tongue over her lips.

"I'm told that you are so good as to lend money on valuable jewellery?"

"Quite, Madam." He was grey, and rather bald, and rather red, with light eyes, and he stood regarding her through a pair of pince-nez which he held in his hand. Placing them on his nose, he drew a chair up to the table, made a motion with one hand, and resumed his seat. Dinny sat down.

"I want rather a lot, five hundred," and she smiled: "It was an heirloom, quite nice."

Both the seated gentlemen bowed slightly.

"And I want it at once, because I have to make a payment. Here it is!" And out of her bag she drew the pendant, unwrapped it and pushed it forward on the table. Then, remembering the needed touch of nonchalance, she leaned back and crossed her knees.

Both of them looked at the pendant for a full minute without movement or speech. Then the second gentleman opened a drawer and took out a magnifying glass. While he was examining the pendant, Dinny was conscious that the first gentleman was examining herself. That — she supposed — was the way they divided labour. Which would they decide was the more genuine piece? She felt rather breathless, but kept her eyebrows slightly raised and her eyelids half closed.

"Your own property, Madam?" said the first gentleman.

Remembering once more the old proverb, Dinny uttered an emphatic: "Yes."

The second gentleman lowered his glass, and seemed to weigh the pendant in his hand.

"Very nice," he said. "Old-fashioned, but very nice. And for how long would you want the money?"

Dinny, who had no idea, said boldly: "Six months; but I suppose I could redeem it before?"

“Oh! yes. Five hundred, did you say?”

“Please.”

“If you are satisfied, Mr. Bondy,” said the second gentleman, “I am.”

Dinny raised her eyes to Mr. Bondy’s face. Was he going to say, ‘No, she’s just told me a lie?’ Instead, he pushed his underlip up over his upper lip, bowed to her and said:

“Quite!”

‘I wonder,’ she thought, ‘if they always believe what they hear, or never? I suppose it’s the same thing, really — THEY get the pendant and it’s I who have to trust them — or, rather, it’s Jean.’

The second gentleman now swept up the pendant, and, producing a book, began to write in it. Mr. Bondy, on the other hand, went towards a safe.

“Did you wish for notes, Madam?”

“Please.”

The second gentleman, who had a moustache and white spats, and whose eyes goggled slightly, passed her the book.

“Your name and address, Madam.”

As she wrote: ‘Mrs. Blore’ and her aunt’s number in Mount Street, the word ‘Help!’ came into her mind, and she cramped her left hand as to hide what should have been the ringed finger. Her gloves fitted dreadfully well and there was no desirable circular protuberance.

“Should you require the article, we shall want £550 on the 29th of April next. After that, unless we hear from you, it will be for sale.”

“Yes, of course. But if I redeem it before?”

“Then the amount will be according. The interest is at 20 per cent., so in a month, say, from now, we should only require £508 6s. 8d.”

“I see.”

The first gentleman detached a slip of paper and gave it to her.

“That is the receipt.”

“Could the pendant be redeemed on payment by anyone with this receipt, in case I can’t come myself?”

“Yes, Madam.”

Dinny placed the receipt in her vanity bag, together with as much of her left hand as would go in, and listened to Mr. Bondy counting notes on the table. He counted beautifully; the notes, too, made a fine crackle, and seemed to be new. She took them with her right hand, inserted them into the bag, and still holding it with her concealed left hand, arose.

“Thank you very much.”

“Not at all, Madam, the pleasure is ours. Delighted to be of service. Good-bye!”

Dinny bowed, and made slowly for the door. There, from under her lashes she distinctly saw the first gentleman close one eye.

She went down the stairs rather dreamily, shutting her bag.

‘I wonder if they think I’m going to have a baby,’ she thought; ‘or it may be only the Cambridgeshire.’ Anyway she had the money, and it was just a quarter to ten. Thomas Cook’s would change it, perhaps, or at least tell her where to get Belgian money.

It took an hour and visits to several places before she had most of it in Belgian money, and she was hot when she passed the barrier at Victoria with a platform ticket. She moved slowly down the train, looking into each carriage. She had gone about two-thirds down when a voice behind had called:

“Dinny!” And, looking round, she saw Jean in the doorway of a compartment.

“Oh! there you are, Jean! I’ve had such a rush. Is my nose shiny?”

“You never look hot, Dinny.”

“Well! I’ve done it; here’s the result, five hundred nearly all in Belgian.”

“Splendid!”

“And the receipt. Anyone can get it on this. The interest’s at 20 per cent, calculated from day to day, but after April 28th, unless redeemed, it’ll be for sale.”

“You keep that, Dinny.” Jean lowered her voice. “If we have to do things, it will mean we shan’t be on hand. There are several places that have no treaties with Bolivia, and that’s where we shall be till things have been put straight somehow.”

“Oh!” said Dinny, blankly, “I could have got more. They lapped it up.”

“Never mind! I must get in. G.P.O. Brussels. Good-bye! Give my dear love to Hubert and tell him all’s well.” She flung her arms round Dinny, gave her a hug, and sprang back into the train. It moved off almost at once, and Dinny stood waving to that brilliant browned face turned back towards her.

❦

CHAPTER 34

This active and successful opening to her day had the most acute drawbacks, for it meant that she was now the more loose-ended.

The absence of the Home Secretary and the Bolivian Minister seemed likely to hold up all activity even if she could have been of use in those directions, which was improbable. Nothing for it but to wait, eating one's heart out! She spent the rest of the morning wandering about, looking at shop windows, looking at the people who looked at shop windows. She lunched off poached eggs at an A.B.C. and went into a cinema, with a vague idea that whatever Jean and Alan were preparing would seem more natural if she could see something of the sort on the screen. She had no luck. In the film she saw were no aeroplanes, no open spaces, no detectives, no escaping from justice whatever; it was the starkest record of a French gentleman, not quite in his first youth, going into wrong bedrooms for an hour and more on end, without anyone actually losing her virtue. Dinny could not help enjoying it — he was a dear, and perhaps the most accomplished liar she had ever watched.

After this warmth and comfort, she set her face again towards Mount Street.

She found that her mother and father had taken the afternoon train back to Condaford, and this plunged her into uncertainty. Ought she to go back, too, and 'be a daughter' to them? Or ought she to remain 'on the spot' in case anything turned up for her to do?

She went up to her room undecided, and began half-heartedly to pack. Pulling open a drawer, she came on Hubert's diary, which still accompanied her. Turning the pages idly, she lighted on a passage which seemed to her unfamiliar, having nothing to do with his hardships:

"Here's a sentence in a book I'm reading: 'We belong, of course, to a generation that's seen through things, seen how futile everything is, and had the courage to accept futility, and say to ourselves: There's nothing for it but to enjoy ourselves as best we can.' Well, I suppose that's my generation, the one that's seen the war and its aftermath; and, of course, it IS the attitude of quite a crowd; but when you come to think of it, it might have been said by any rather unthinking person in any generation; certainly might have been said by the last generation after religion had got the knock that Darwin gave it. For what does it come to? Suppose you admit having seen through religion and marriage and treaties, and commercial honesty and freedom and ideals of every kind, seen that there's nothing absolute about them, that they lead of themselves to no definite reward, either in this world or a next which doesn't exist perhaps, and that the only thing absolute is pleasure and that you mean to have it — are you any farther towards getting pleasure? No! you're a long way farther off. If everybody's creed is consciously and crudely 'grab a good time at all costs,' everybody is going to grab it at the expense of everybody else, and the devil will take the hindmost, and that'll be nearly everybody, especially the sort of slackers who naturally hold that creed, so that THEY, most certainly, aren't going to get a good time. All those things they've so cleverly seen through are only rules of the road devised by men throughout the ages to keep people within bounds, so that we may all have a reasonable chance of getting a good time, instead of the good time going only to the violent, callous, dangerous and able few. All our institutions, religion, marriage, treaties, the law, and the rest, are simply forms of consideration for others necessary to secure consideration for self. Without them we should be a society of feeble motor-bandits and streetwalkers in slavery to a few super-crooks. You can't, therefore, disbelieve in consideration for others without making an idiot of yourself and spoiling your own chances of a good time. The funny thing is that no matter how we all talk, we recognise that perfectly. People who prate like the fellow in that book don't act up to their creed when it comes to the point. Even a motor-bandit doesn't turn King's evidence. In fact, this new philosophy of 'having the courage to accept futility and grab a good time' is simply a shallow bit of thinking; all the same, it seemed quite plausible when I read it."

Dinny dropped the page as if it had stung her, and stood with a transfigured look on her face. Not the words she had been reading caused this change — she was hardly conscious of what they were. No! She had got an inspiration, and she could not think why she had not had it before! She ran downstairs to the telephone and rang up Fleur's house.

"Yes?" came Fleur's voice.

"I want Michael, Fleur; is he in?"

"Yes. Michael — Dinny."

“Michael? Could you by any chance come round at once? It’s about Hubert’s diary. I’ve had a ‘hunch,’ but I’d rather not discuss it on the ‘phone. Or could I come to you? — You CAN come? Good! Fleur too, if she likes; or, if not, bring her wits.”

Ten minutes later Michael arrived alone. Something in the quality of Dinny’s voice seemed to have infected him, for he wore an air of businesslike excitement. She took him into the alcove and sat down with him on a sofa under the parakeet’s cage.

“Michael dear, it came to me suddenly: if we could get Hubert’s diary — about 15,000 words — printed at once, ready for publication, with a good title like ‘Betrayed’— or something —”

“‘Deserted,’” said Michael.

“Yes, ‘Deserted,’ and it could be shown to the Home Secretary as about to come out with a fighting preface, it might stop him from issuing a warrant. With that title and preface and a shove from the Press, it would make a real sensation, and be very nasty for him. We could get the Preface to pitch it strong about desertion of one’s kith and kin, and pusillanimity and truckling to the foreigner and all that. The Press would surely take it up on those lines.”

Michael ruffled his hair.

“It IS a hunch, Dinny; but there are several points: first, how to do it without making it blackmailish. If we can’t avoid that, then it’s no go. If Walter sniffs blackmail, he can’t possibly rise.”

“But the whole point is to make him feel that if he issues the warrant he’s going to regret it.”

“My child,” said Michael, blowing smoke at the parakeet, “it’s got to be much more subtle than that. You don’t know public men. The thing is to make them do of their own accord out of high motives what is for their own good. We must get Walter to do this from a low motive, and feel it to be a high one. That’s indispensable.”

“Won’t it do if he says it’s a high one? I mean need he feel it?”

“He must, at least by daylight. What he feels at three in the morning doesn’t matter. He’s no fool, you know. I believe,” and Michael rumpled his hair again, “that the only man who can work it after all is Bobbie Ferrar. He knows Walter upside down.”

“Is he a nice man? Would he?”

“Bobbie’s a sphinx, but he’s a perfectly good sphinx. And he’s in the know all round. He’s a sort of receiving station, hears everything naturally, so that we shouldn’t have to appear directly in any way.”

“Isn’t the first thing, Michael, to get the diary printed, so that it looks ready to come out on the nail?”

“Yes, but the Preface is the hub.”

“How?”

“What we want is that Walter should read the printed diary, and come to the conclusion from it that to issue the warrant will be damned hard luck on Hubert — as, of course, it will. In other words, we want to sop his private mind. After that, what I see Walter saying to himself is this: ‘Yes, hard luck on young Cherrell, hard luck, but the magistrate committed him, and the Bolivians are pressing, and he belongs to the classes; one must be careful not to give an impression of favouring privilege —’”

“I think that’s so unfair,” interrupted Dinny, hotly. “Why should it be made harder for people just because they happen not to be Tom, Dick and Harry? I call it cowardly.”

“Ah! Dinny, but we are cowardly in that sort of way. But as Walter was saying when you broke out: ‘One must not lightly stretch points. The little Countries look to us to treat them with special consideration.’”

“But why?” began Dinny again: “That seems —”

Michael held up his hand.

“I know, Dinny, I know. And this seems to me the psychological moment when Bobbie, out of the blue as it were, might say: ‘By the way, there’s to be a preface. Someone showed it me. It takes the line that England is always being generous and just at the expense of her own subjects. It’s pretty hot stuff, Sir. The Press will love it. That lay: We can’t stand by our own people, is always popular. And you know’— Bobbie would continue —‘it has often seemed to me, Sir, that a strong man, like you, ought perhaps to do something about this impression that we can’t stand by our own people. It oughtn’t to be true, perhaps it isn’t true, but it exists and very strongly; and you, Sir, perhaps better than anyone, could redress the balance there. This particular case wouldn't afford a bad chance at all of restoring confidence on that point. In itself it would be right, I think'— Bobbie would say —'not to issue a warrant, because that scar, you know, was genuine, the shooting really WAS an act of self-defence; and it would certainly do the country good to feel that it could rely again on the authorities not to let our own people down.' And there he would leave it. And Walter would feel, not that he was avoiding attack, but that he was boldly going to do what was good for the Country — indispensable, that, Dinny, in the case of public men." And Michael rolled his eyes. "You see," he went on, "Walter is quite up to realising, without admitting it, that the preface won't appear if he doesn't issue the warrant. And I daresay he'll be frank with himself in the middle of the night; but if in his 6 p.m. mind he feels he's doing the courageous thing in not issuing the warrant, then what he feels in his 3 a.m. mind won't matter. See?"

"You put it marvellously, Michael. But won't he have to read the preface?"

"I hope not, but I think it ought to be in Bobbie's pocket, in case he has to fortify his line of approach. There are no flies on Bobbie, you know."

"But will Mr. Ferrar care enough to do all this?"

"Yes," said Michael, "on the whole, yes. My Dad once did him a good turn, and old Shropshire's his uncle."

"And who could write that preface?"

"I believe I could get old Blythe. They're still afraid of him in our party, and when he likes he can make livers creep all right."

Dinny clasped her hands.

"Do you think he will like?"

"It depends on the diary."

"Then I think he will."

"May I read it before I turn it over to the printers?"

"Of course! Only, Michael, Hubert doesn't want the diary to come out."

"Well, that's O.K. If it works with Walter and he doesn't issue the warrant, it won't be necessary; and if it doesn't work, it won't be necessary either, because the 'fat will be in the fire,' as old Forsyte used to say."

"Will the cost of printing be much?"

"A few pounds — say twenty."

"I can manage that," said Dinny; and her mind flew to the two gentlemen, for she was habitually hard up.

"Oh! that'll be all right, don't worry!"

"It's my hunch, Michael, and I should like to pay for it. You've no idea how horrible it is to sit and do nothing, with Hubert in this danger! I have the feeling that if he's once given up, he won't have a dog's chance."

"It's ill prophesying," said Michael, "where public men are concerned. People underrate them. They're a lot more complicated than they're supposed to be, and perhaps better principled; they're certainly a lot shrewder. All the same, I believe this will click, if we can work old Blythe and Bobbie Ferrar properly. I'll go for Blythe, and set Bart on to Bobbie. In the meantime this shall be printed," and he took up the diary. "Good-bye, Dinny dear, and don't worry more than you can help."

Dinny kissed him, and he went.

That evening about ten he rang her up.

"I've read it, Dinny. Walter must be pretty hard-boiled if it doesn't fetch him. He won't go to sleep over it, anyway, like the other bloke; he's a conscientious card, whatever else he is. After all this is a sort of reprieve case, and he's bound to recognise its seriousness. Once in his hands, he's got to go through with this diary, and it's moving stuff, apart from the light on the incident itself. So buck up!"

Dinny said: "Bless you!" fervently, and went to bed lighter at heart than she had been for two days.

❦

CHAPTER 35

In the slow long days, and they seemed many, which followed, Dinny remained at Mount Street, to be in command of any situation that might arise. Her chief difficulty lay in keeping people ignorant of Jean's machinations. She seemed to succeed with all except Sir Lawrence, who, raising his eyebrow, said cryptically:

"Pour une gaillarde, c'est une gaillarde!"

And, at Dinny's limpid glance, added: "Quite the Botticellian virgin! Would you like to meet Bobbie Ferrar? We're lunching together underground at Dumourieux's in Druary Lane, mainly on mushrooms."

Dinny had been building so on Bobbie Ferrar that the sight of him gave her a shock, he had so complete an air of caring for none of those things. With his carnation, bass drawl, broad bland face, and slight drop of the underjaw, he did not inspire her.

"Have you a passion for mushrooms, Miss Cherrell?" he said.

"Not French mushrooms."

"No?"

"Bobbie," said Sir Lawrence, looking from one to the other, "no one would take you for one of the deepest cards in Europe. You are going to tell us that you won't guarantee to call Walter a strong man, when you talk about the preface?"

Several of Bobbie Ferrar's even teeth became visible.

"I have no influence with Walter."

"Then who has?"

"No one. Except —"

"Yes?"

"Walter."

Before she could check herself, Dinny said:

"You do understand, Mr. Ferrar, that this is practically death for my brother and frightful for all of us?"

Bobbie Ferrar looked at her flushed face without speaking. He seemed, indeed, to admit or promise nothing all through that lunch, but when they got up and Sir Lawrence was paying his bill, he said to her:

"Miss Cherrell, when I go to see Walter about this, would you like to go with me? I could arrange for you to be in the background."

"I should like it terribly."

"Between ourselves, then. I'll let you know."

Dinny clasped her hands and smiled at him.

"Rum chap!" said Sir Lawrence, as they walked away: "Lots of heart, really. Simply can't bear people being hanged. Goes to all the murder trials. Hates prisons like poison. You'd never think it."

"No," said Dinny, dreamily.

"Bobbie," continued Sir Lawrence, "is capable of being Private Secretary to a Cheka, without their ever suspecting that he's itching to boil them in oil the whole time. He's unique. The diary's in print, Dinny, and old Blythe's writing that preface. Walter will be back on Thursday. Have you seen Hubert yet?"

"No, but I'm to go with Dad tomorrow."

"I've refrained from pumping you, but those young Tasburghs are up to something, aren't they? I happen to know young Tasburgh isn't with his ship."

"Not?"

"Perfect innocence!" murmured Sir Lawrence. "Well, my dear, neither nods nor winks are necessary; but I hope to goodness they won't strike before peaceful measures have been exhausted."

"Oh! surely they wouldn't!"

"They're the kind of young person who still make one believe in history. Has it ever struck you, Dinny, that history is nothing but the story of how people have taken things into their own hands, and got themselves or others into and out of trouble over it? They can cook at that place, can't they? I shall take your aunt there some day when she's thin enough."

And Dinny perceived that the dangers of cross-examination were over.

Her father called for her and they set out for the prison the following afternoon of a windy day charged with the rough melancholy of November. The sight of the building made her feel like a dog about to howl. The Governor, who was an army man, received them with great courtesy and the special deference of one to another of higher rank in his own profession. He made no secret of his sympathy with them over Hubert's position, and gave them more than the time limit allowed by the regulations.

Hubert came in smiling. Dinny felt that if she had been alone he might have shown some of his real feelings, but that in front of his father he was determined to treat the whole thing as just a bad joke. The General, who had been grim and silent all the way there, became at once matter-of-fact and as if ironically amused. Dinny could not help thinking how almost absurdly alike, allowing for age, they were in looks and in manner. There was that in both of them which would never quite grow up, or rather which had grown up in early youth and would never again budge. Neither, from beginning to end of that half-hour, touched on feeling. The whole interview was a great strain, and so far as intimate talk was concerned, might never have taken place. According to Hubert, everything in his life there was perfectly all right, and he wasn't worrying at all; according to the General, it was only a matter of days now, and the coverts were waiting to be shot. He had a good deal to say about India, and the unrest on the frontier. Only when they were shaking hands at the end did their faces change at all, and then only to the simple gravity of a very straight look into each other's eyes. Dinny followed with a hand-clasp and a kiss behind her father's back.

"Jean?" asked Hubert, very low.

"Quite all right, sent her dear love. Nothing to worry about, she says."

The quiver of his lips hardened into a little smile, he squeezed her hand, and turned away.

In the gateway the doorkeeper and two warders saluted them respectfully. They got into their cab, and not one word did they say the whole way home. The thing was a nightmare from which they would awaken some day, perhaps.

Practically the only comfort of those days of waiting was derived by Dinny from Aunt Em, whose inherent incoherence continually diverted thought from logical direction. The antiseptic value, indeed, of incoherence became increasingly apparent as day by day anxiety increased. Her aunt was genuinely worried by Hubert's position, but her mind was too plural to dwell on it to the point of actual suffering. On the fifth of November she called Dinny to the drawing-room window to look at some boys dragging a guy down a Mount Street desolate in wind and lamplight.

"The rector's workin' on that," she said; "there was a Tasburgh who wasn't hanged, or beheaded, or whatever they did with them, and he's tryin' to prove that he ought to have been; he sold some plate or somethin' to buy the gunpowder, and his sister married Catesby, or one of the others. Your father and I and Wilmet, Dinny, used to make a guy of our governess; she had very large feet, Robbins. Children are so unfeelin'. Did you?"

"Did I what, Aunt Em?"

"Make guys?"

"No."

"We used to go out singin' carols, too, with our faces blacked. Wilmet was the corker. Such a tall child, with legs that went down straight like sticks wide apart from the beginning, you know — angels have them. It's all rather gone out. I do think there ought to be somethin' done about it. Gibbets, too. We had one. We hung a kitten from it. We drowned it first — not we — the staff."

"Horrible, Aunt Em!"

"Yes; but not really. Your father brought us up as Red Indians. It was nice for him, then he could do things to us and we couldn't cry. Did Hubert?"

"Oh! no. Hubert only brought himself up as a Red Indian."

"That was your mother; she's a gentle creature, Dinny. Our mother was a Hungerford. You must have noticed."

"I don't remember Grandmother."

"She died before you were born. That was Spain. The germs there are extra special. So did your grandfather. I was thirty-five. He had very good manners. They did, you know, then. Only sixty. Claret and piquet, and a funny little beard thing. You've seen them, Dinny?"

"Imperials?"

"Yes, diplomatic. They wear them now when they write those articles on foreign affairs. I like goats myself, though they butt you rather."

"Their smell, Aunt Em!"

"Penetratin'. Has Jean written to you lately?"

In Dinny's bag was a letter just received. "No," she said. The habit was growing on her.

"This hidin' away is weak-minded. Still, it WAS her honeymoon."

Her Aunt had evidently not been made a recipient of Sir Lawrence's suspicions.

Upstairs she read the letter again before tearing it up.

"Poste restante, Brussels.

"DEAR DINNY,

"All goes on for the best here and I'm enjoying it quite a lot. They say I take to it like a duck to water. There's nothing much to choose now between Alan and me, except that I have the better hands. Thanks awfully for your letters. Terribly glad of the diary stunt, I think it may quite possibly work the oracle. Still we can't afford not to be ready for the worst. You don't say whether Fleur's having any luck. By the way, could you get me a Turkish conversation book, the pronouncing kind? I expect your Uncle Adrian could tell you where to get it. I can't lay hands on one here. Alan sends you his love. Same from me. Keep us informed by wire if necessary.

"Your affte

"JEAN."

A Turkish conversation book! This first indication of how their minds were working set Dinny's working too. She remembered Hubert having told her that he had saved the life of a Turkish officer at the end of the war, and had kept up with him ever since. So Turkey was to be the asylum if —! But the whole plan was desperate. Surely it would not, must not come to that! But she went down to the Museum the next morning.

Adrian, whom she had not seen since Hubert's committal, received her with his usual quiet alacrity, and she was sorely tempted to confide in him. Jean must know that to ask his advice about a Turkish conversation book would surely stimulate his curiosity. She restrained herself, however, and said:

"Uncle, you haven't a Turkish conversation book? Hubert thought he'd like to kill time in prison brushing up his Turkish."

Adrian regarded her, and closed one eye.

"He hasn't any Turkish to brush. But here you are —"

And, fishing a small book from a shelf, he added: "Serpent!"

Dinny smiled.

"Deception," he continued, "is wasted on me, Dinny, I am in whatever know there is."

"Tell me, Uncle!"

"You see," said Adrian, "Hallorsen is in it."

"Oh!"

"And I, whose movements are dependent on Hallorsen's, have had to put two and two together. They make five, Dinny, and I sincerely trust the addition won't be needed. But Hallorsen's a fine chap."

"I know that," said Dinny, ruefully. "Uncle, do tell me exactly what's in the wind."

Adrian shook his head.

"They obviously can't tell themselves till they hear how Hubert is to be exported. All I know is that Hallorsen's Bolivians are going back to Bolivia instead of to the States, and that a very queer padded, well-ventilated case is being made to hold them."

"You mean his Bolivian bones?"

“Or possibly replicas. They’re being made, too.”

Thrilled, Dinny stood gazing at him.

“And,” added Adrian, “the replicas are being made by a man who believes he is repeating Siberians, and not for Hallorsen, and they’ve been very carefully weighed — one hundred and fifty-two pounds, perilously near the weight of a man. How much is Hubert?”

“About eleven stone.”

“Exactly.”

“Go on, Uncle.”

“Having got so far, Dinny, I’ll give you my theory, for what it’s worth. Hallorsen and his case full of replicas will travel by the ship that Hubert travels by. At any port of call in Spain or Portugal, Hallorsen will get off with his case, containing Hubert. He will contrive to have extracted and dropped the replicas overboard. The real bones will be waiting there for him, and he will fill up when Hubert has been switched off to a plane: that’s where Jean and Alan come in. They’ll fly to, well — Turkey, judging from your request just now. I was wondering where before you came. Hallorsen will pop his genuine bones into the case to satisfy the authorities, and Hubert’s disappearance will be put down to a jump overboard — the splash of the replicas, I shouldn’t wonder — or anyway will remain mysterious. It looks to me pretty forlorn.”

“But suppose there’s no port of call?”

“They’re pretty certain to stop somewhere; but, if not, they’ll have some alternative, which will happen on the way down to the ship. Or possibly they may elect to try the case dodge on the arrival in South America. That would really be safest, I think, though it lets out the flying.”

“But why is Professor Hallorsen going to run such a risk?”

“YOU ask me that, Dinny?”

“It’s too much — I— I don’t want him to.”

“Well, my dear, he also has the feeling, I know, that he got Hubert into this, and must get him out. And you must remember that he belongs to a nation that is nothing if not energetic and believes in taking the law into its own hands. But he’s the last man to trade on a service. Besides, it’s a three-legged race he’s running with young Tasburgh, who’s just as deep in it, so you’re no worse off.”

“But I don’t want to owe anything to either of them. It simply mustn’t come to that. Besides, there’s Hubert — do you think he’ll ever consent?”

Adrian said gravely:

“I think he has consented, Dinny; otherwise he’d have asked for bail. Probably he’ll be in charge of Bolivians and won’t feel he’s breaking English law. I fancy they’ve convinced him between them that they won’t run much risk. No doubt he feels fed up with the whole thing and ready for anything. Don’t forget that he’s really being very unjustly treated, and is just married.”

“Yes,” said Dinny, in a hushed voice. “And you, Uncle? How are things?”

Adrian’s answer was no less quiet:

“Your advice was right; and I’m fixed up to go, subject to this business.”

❦

Chapter 36

The feeling that such things did not happen persisted with Dinny even after her interview with Adrian; she had too often read of them in books. And yet, there was history, and there were the Sunday papers! Thought of the Sunday papers calmed her curiously and fortified her resolution to keep Hubert's affair out of them. But she conscientiously posted to Jean the Turkish primer, and took to poring over maps in Sir Lawrence's study when he was out. She also studied the sailing dates of the South American lines.

Two days later Sir Lawrence announced at dinner that 'Walter' was back; but after a holiday it would no doubt take him some time to reach a little thing like Hubert's.

"A little thing!" cried Dinny: "merely his life and our happiness."

"My dear, people's lives and happiness are the daily business of a Home Secretary."

"It must be an awful post. I should hate it."

"That," said Sir Lawrence, "is where your difference from a public man comes in, Dinny. What a public man hates is NOT dealing with the lives and happiness of his fellow-beings. Is our bluff ready, in case he comes early to Hubert?"

"The diary's printed — I've passed the proof; and the preface is written. I haven't seen that, but Michael says it's a 'corker.'"

"Good! Mr. Blythe's corkers give no mean pause. Bobbie will let us know when Walter reaches the case."

"What is Bobbie?" asked Lady Mont.

"An institution, my dear."

"Blore, remind me to write about that sheep-dog puppy."

"Yes, my lady."

"When their faces are mostly white they have a kind of divine madness, have you noticed, Dinny? They're all called Bobbie."

"Anything less divinely mad than our Bobbie — eh, Dinny?"

"Does he always do what he says he will, Uncle?"

"Yes; you may bet on Bobbie."

"I do want to see some sheep-dog trials," said Lady Mont: "Clever creatures. People say they know exactly what sheep not to bite; and so thin, really. All hair and intelligence. Hen has two. About your hair, Dinny?"

"Yes, Aunt Em?"

"Did you keep what you cut off?"

"I did."

"Well, don't let it go out of the family; you may want it. They say we're goin' to be old-fashioned again. Ancient but modern, you know."

Sir Lawrence cocked his eye. "Have you ever been anything else, Dinny? That's why I want you to sit. Permanence of the type."

"What type?" said Lady Mont. "Don't be a type, Dinny; they're so dull. There was a man said Michael was a type; I never could see it."

"Why don't you get Aunt Em to sit instead, Uncle? She's younger than I am any day, aren't you, Auntie?"

"Don't be disrespectful. Blore, my Vichy."

"Uncle, how old is Bobbie?"

"No one really knows. Rising sixty, perhaps. Some day, I suppose, his date will be discovered; but they'll have to cut a section and tell it from his rings. You're not thinking of marrying him, are you, Dinny? By the way, Walter's a widower. Quaker blood somewhere, converted Liberal — inflammable stuff."

"Dinny takes a lot of wooin'," said Lady Mont.

"Can I get down, Aunt Em? I want to go to Michael's."

“Tell her I’m comin’ to see Kit tomorrow mornin’. I’ve got him a new game called Parliament — they’re animals divided into Parties; they all squeak and roar differently, and behave in the wrong places. The Prime Minister’s a zebra, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s a tiger — striped. Blore, a taxi for Miss Dinny.”

Michael was at the House, but Fleur was in. She reported that Mr. Blythe’s preface had already been sent to Bobbie Ferrar. As for the Bolivians — the Minister was not back, but the Attaché in charge had promised to have an informal talk with Bobbie. He had been so polite that Fleur was unable to say what was in his mind. She doubted if there was anything.

Dinny returned on as many tenterhooks as ever. It all seemed to hinge on Bobbie Ferrar, and he ‘rising’ sixty, so used to everything that he must surely have lost all persuasive flame. But perhaps that was for the best. Emotional appeal might be wrong. Coolness, calculation, the power of hinting at unpleasant consequences, of subtly suggesting advantage, might be what was wanted. She felt, indeed, completely at sea as to what really moved the mind of Authority. Michael, Fleur, Sir Lawrence had spoken from time to time as if they knew, and yet she felt that none of them were really wiser than herself. It all seemed to balance on the knife-edge of mood and temper. She went to bed and had practically no sleep.

One more day like that, and then, as a sailor, whose ship has been in the doldrums, wakes to movement under him, so felt Dinny when at breakfast she opened an unstamped envelope with “Foreign Office” imprinted on it.

“DEAR MISS CHERRELL —

“I handed your brother’s diary to the Home Secretary yesterday afternoon. He promised to read it last night, and I am to see him today at six o’clock. If you will come to the Foreign Office at ten minutes to six, we might go round together.

“Sincerely yours,

“R. FERRAR.”

So! A whole day to get through first! By now ‘Walter’ must have read the diary; had perhaps already made up his mind on the case! With the receipt of that formal note, a feeling of being in conspiracy and pledged to secrecy had come to her. Instinctively she said nothing of it; instinctively wanted to get away from everybody till all was over. This must be like waiting for an operation. She walked out into a fine morning, and wondered where on earth she should go; thought of the National Gallery, and decided that pictures required too much mind given to them; thought of Westminster Abbey and the girl Millicent Pole. Fleur had got her a post as mannequin at Frivolle’s. Why not go there, look at the winter models, and perhaps see that girl again? Rather hateful being shown dresses if you were not going to buy, giving all that trouble for nothing. But if only Hubert were released she would ‘go off the deep end’ and buy a real dress, though it took all her next allowance. Hardening her heart, therefore, she turned in the direction of Bond Street, forded that narrow drifting river, came to Frivolle’s, and went in.

“Yes, Madam”; and she was shown up, and seated on a chair. She sat there with her head a little on one side, smiling and saying pleasant things to the saleswoman; for she remembered one day in a big shop an assistant saying: “You’ve no idea, Moddam, what a difference it makes to us when a customer smiles and takes a little interest. We get so many difficult ladies and — oh! well —” The models were very ‘late,’ very expensive, and mostly, she thought, very unbecoming, in spite of the constant assurance: “This frock would just suit you, Madam, with your figure and colouring.”

Not sure whether to ask after her would harm or benefit the girl Millicent Pole, she selected two dresses for parade. A very thin girl, haughty, with a neat little head and large shoulder blades came wearing the first, a creation in black and white; she languished across with a hand on where one hip should have been, and her head turned as if looking for the other, confirming Dinny in the aversion she already had from the dress. Then, in the second dress, of sea green and silver, the one that she really liked except for its price, came Millicent Pole. With professional negligence she took no glance at the client, as who should say: “What do you think! If you lived in underclothes all day — and had so many husbands to avoid!” Then, in turning, she caught Dinny’s smile, answered it with a sudden startled brightness, and moved across again, languid as ever. Dinny got up, and going over to that figure now standing very still, took a fold of the skirt between finger and thumb, as if to feel its quality.

“Nice to see you again.”

The girl’s loose flower-like mouth smiled very sweetly. ‘She’s marvellous!’ thought Dinny.

“I know Miss Pole,” she said to the saleswoman. “That dress looks awfully nice on her.”

“Oh! but Madam, it’s your style completely. Miss Pole has a little too much line for it. Let me slip it on you.”

Not sure that she had been complimented, Dinny said:

"I shan't be able to decide today; I'm not sure I can afford it."

"That is quite all right, Madam. Miss Pole, just come in here and slip it off, and we'll slip it on Madam."

In there the girl slipped it off. 'Even more marvellous,' thought Dinny: 'Wish I looked as nice as that in undies,' and suffered her own dress to be removed.

"Madam is beautifully slim," said the saleswoman.

"Thin as a rail!"

"Oh, no, Madam is well covered."

"I think she's just right!" The girl spoke with a sort of eagerness. "Madam has style."

The saleswoman fastened the hook.

"Perfect," she said. "A little fullness here, perhaps; we can put that right."

"Rather a lot of my skin," murmured Dinny.

"Oh! But so becoming, with a skin like Madam's."

"Would you let me see Miss Pole in that other frock — the black and white?"

This she said, knowing that the girl could not be sent to fetch it in her underclothes.

"Certainly; I'll get it at once. Attend to Madam, Miss Pole."

Left to themselves, the two girls stood smiling at each other.

"How do you like it now you've got it, Millie?"

"Well, it isn't all I thought, Miss."

"Empty?"

"I expect nothing's what you think it. Might be a lot worse, of course."

"It was you I came in to see."

"Did you reely? But I hope you'll have the dress, Miss — suits you a treat. You look lovely in it."

"They'll be putting you in the sales department, Millie, if you don't look out."

"Oh! I wouldn't go there. It's nothing but a lot of soft sawder."

"Where do I unhook?"

"Here. It's very economic — only one. And you can do it for yourself, with a wriggle. I read about your brother, Miss. I do think that's a shame."

"Yes," said Dinny, and stood stony in her underclothes. Suddenly she stretched out her hand and gripped the girl's. "Good luck, Millie!"

"And good luck to you, Miss!"

They had just unclasped hands when the saleswoman came back.

"I'm so sorry to have bothered you," smiled Dinny, "but I've quite made up my mind to have this one, if I can afford it. The price is appalling."

"Do you think so, Madam? It's a Paris model. I'll see if I can get Mr. Better to do what he can for YOU— it's YOUR frock. Miss Pole, find Mr. Better for me, will you?"

The girl, now in the black and white creation, went out.

Dinny, who had resumed her dress, said:

"Do your mannequins stay long with you?"

"Well, no; in and out of dresses all day, it's rather a restless occupation."

"What becomes of them?"

"In one way or another they get married."

How discreet! And soon after, Mr. Better — a slim man with grey hair and perfect manners — having said he would reduce the price 'for Madam' to what still seemed appalling, Dinny went out into the pale November sunlight saying she would decide tomorrow. Six hours to kill. She walked North-East towards the Meads, trying to soothe her own anxiety by thinking that everyone she passed, no matter how they looked, had anxieties of their own. Seven million people, in one way of another all anxious. Some of them seemed so, and some did not. She gazed at her own face in a shop window, and decided that she was one of those who did not; and yet how horrid she felt! The human face was a mask, indeed! She came to Oxford Street and halted on the edge of the pavement, waiting to cross. Close to her was the bony white-nosed head of a van horse. She began stroking its neck, wishing she had a lump of sugar. The horse paid no attention, nor did its driver. Why should they? From year's end to year's end they passed and halted, halted and passed through this maelstrom, slowly, ploddingly, without hope of release, till they both fell down and were cleared away. A policeman reversed the direction of his white sleeves, the driver jerked his reins, and the van moved on, followed by a long line of motor vehicles. The policeman again reversed his sleeves and Dinny crossed, walked on to Tottenham Court Road, and once more stood waiting. What a seething and intricate pattern of creatures, and their cars, moving to what end, fulfilling what secret purpose? To what did it all amount? A meal, a smoke, a glimpse of so-called life in some picture palace, a bed at the end of the day. A million jobs faithfully and unfaithfully pursued, that they might eat, and dream a little, and sleep, and begin again. The inexorability of life caught her by the throat as she stood there, so that she gave a little gasp, and a stout man said:

"Beg pardon, did I tread on your foot, Miss?"

As she was smiling her 'No,' a policeman reversed his white sleeves, and she crossed. She came to Gower Street, and walked rapidly up its singular desolation. 'One more ribber, one more ribber to cross,' and she was in the Meads, that network of mean streets, gutters, and child life. At the Vicarage both her Uncle and Aunt for once were in, and about to lunch. Dinny sat down, too. She did not shrink from discussing the coming 'operation' with them. They lived so in the middle of operations. Hilary said:

"Old Tasburgh and I got Bentworth to speak to the Home Secretary, and I had this note from 'the Squire' last night. 'All Walter would say was that he should treat the case strictly on its merits without reference to what he called your nephew's status — what a word! I always said the fellow ought to have stayed Liberal.'"

"I wish he WOULD treat it on its merits!" cried Dinny; "then Hubert would be safe. I do hate that truckling to what they call Democracy! He'd give a cabman the benefit of the doubt."

"It's the reaction from the old times, Dinny, and gone too far, as reaction always does. When I was a boy there was still truth in the accusation of privilege. Now, it's the other way on; station in life is a handicap before the Law. But nothing's harder than to steer in the middle of the stream — you want to be fair, and you can't."

"I was wondering, Uncle, as I came along. What was the use of you and Hubert and Dad and Uncle Adrian, and tons of others doing their jobs faithfully — apart from bread and butter, I mean?"

"Ask your Aunt," said Hilary.

"Aunt May, what IS the use?"

"I don't know, Dinny. I was bred up to believe there was a use in it, so I go on believing. If you married and had a family, you probably wouldn't ask the question."

"I knew Aunt May would get out of answering. Now, Uncle?"

"Well, Dinny, I don't know either. As she says, we do what we're used to doing; that's about it."

"In his diary Hubert says that consideration for others is really consideration for ourselves. Is that true?"

"Rather a crude way of putting it. I should prefer to say that we're all so interdependent that in order to look after oneself one's got to look after others no less."

"But is one worth looking after?"

"You mean: is life worth while at all?"

"Yes."

"After five hundred thousand years (Adrian says a million at least) of human life, the population of the world is very considerably larger than it has ever been yet. Well, then! Considering all the miseries and struggles of mankind, would human life, self-conscious as it is, have persisted if it wasn't worth while to be alive?"

"I suppose not," mused Dinny; "I think in London one loses the sense of proportion."

At this moment a maid came in.

"Mr. Cameron to see you, Sir."

"Show him in, Lucy. He'll help you to regain it, Dinny. A walking proof of the unquenchable love of life, had every malady under the sun, including black-water, been in three wars, two earthquakes, had all kinds of jobs in all parts of the world, is out of one now, and has heart disease."

Mr. Cameron entered; a short spare man getting on for fifty, with bright Celtic grey eyes, dark grizzled hair, and a slightly hooked nose. One of his hands was bound up, as if he had sprained a thumb.

"Hallo, Cameron," said Hilary, rising. "In the wars again?"

"Well, Vicar, where I live, the way some of those fellows treat horses is dreadful. I had a fight yesterday. Flogging a willing horse, overloaded, poor old feller — never can stand that."

"I hope you gave him beans!"

Mr. Cameron's eyes twinkled.

"Well, I tapped his claret, and sprained my thumb. But I called to tell you, Sir, that I've got a job on the Vestry. It's not much, but it'll keep me going."

"Splendid! Look here, Cameron, I'm awfully sorry, but Mrs. Cherrell and I have to go to a Meeting now. Stay and have a cup of coffee and talk to my niece. Tell her about Brazil."

Mr. Cameron looked at Dinny. He had a charming smile.

The next hour went quickly and did her good. Mr. Cameron had a fine flow. He gave her practically his life story, from boyhood in Australia, and enlistment at sixteen for the South African war, to his experiences since the Great War. Every kind of insect and germ had lodged in him in his time; he had handled horses, Chinamen, Kaffirs, and Brazilians, broken collar-bone and leg, been gassed and shell-shocked, but there was — he carefully explained — nothing wrong with him now but "a touch of this heart disease." His face had a kind of inner light, and his speech betrayed no consciousness that he was out of the common. He was, at the moment, the best antidote Dinny could have taken, and she prolonged him to his limit. When he had gone she herself went away into the medley of the streets with a fresh eye. It was now half-past three, and she had two hours and a half still to put away. She walked towards Regent's Park. Few leaves were left upon the trees, and there was a savour in the air from bonfires of them burning; through their bluish drift she passed, thinking of Mr. Cameron, and resisting melancholy. What a life to have lived! And what a zest at the end of it! From beside the Long Water in the last of the pale sunlight, she came out into Marylebone, and bethought herself that before she went to the Foreign Office she must go where she could titivate. She chose Harridge's and went in. It was half-past four. The stalls were thronged; she wandered among them, bought a new powder-puff, had some tea, made herself tidy, and emerged. Still a good half-hour, and she walked again, though by now she was tired. At a quarter to six precisely she gave her card to a commissionaire at the Foreign Office, and was shown into a waiting-room. It was lacking in mirrors, and taking out her case she looked at herself in its little powder-flecked round of glass. She seemed plain to herself and wished that she didn't; though, after all, she was not going to see 'Walter'— only to sit in the background, and wait again. Always waiting!

"Miss Cherrell!"

There was Bobbie Ferrar in the doorway. He looked just as usual. But of course he didn't care. Why should he?

He tapped his breast pocket. "I've got the preface. Shall we trot? And he proceeded to talk of the Chingford murder. Had she been following it? She had not. It was a clear case — completely! And he added, suddenly:

"The Bolivian won't take the responsibility, Miss Cherrell."

"Oh!"

"Never mind." And his face broadened.

'His teeth ARE real,' thought Dinny, 'I can see some gold filling.'

They reached the Home Office and went in. Up some wide stairs, down a corridor, into a large and empty room, with a fire at the end, their guide took them. Bobbie Ferrar drew a chair up to the table.

"'The Graphic' or this?" and he took from his side pocket a small volume.

"Both, please," said Dinny, wanly. He placed them before her. 'This' was a little flat red edition of some War Poems.

"It's a first," said Bobbie Ferrar; "I picked it up after lunch."

"Yes," said Dinny, and sat down.

An inner door was opened, and a head put in.

"Mr. Ferrar, the Home Secretary will see you."

Bobbie Ferrar turned on her a look, muttered between his teeth: "Cheer up!" and moved squarely away.

In that great waiting-room never in her life had she felt so alone, so glad to be alone, or so dreaded the end of loneliness. She opened the little volume and read:

> "He eyed a neat framed notice there
> Above the fireplace hung to show
> Disabled heroes where to go
> For arms and legs, with scale of price,
> And words of dignified advice
> How officers could get them free —
> Elbow or shoulder, hip or knee.
> Two arms, two legs, though all were lost,
> They'd be restored him free of cost.
>
> Then a girl guide looked in and said . . ."

The fire crackled suddenly and spat out a spark. Dinny saw it die on the hearthrug, with regret. She read more poems, but did not take them in, and, closing the little book, opened 'The Graphic.' Having turned its pages from end to end she could not have mentioned the subject of any single picture. The sinking feeling beneath her heart absorbed every object she looked upon. She wondered if it were worse to wait for an operation on oneself or on someone loved; and decided that the latter must be worse. Hours seemed to have passed; how long had he really been gone? Only half-past six! Pushing her chair back, she got up. On the walls were the effigies of Victorian statesmen, and she roamed from one to the other; but they might all have been the same statesman, with his whiskers at different stages of development. She went back to her seat, drew her chair close in to the table, rested her elbows on it, and her chin on her hands, drawing little comfort from that cramped posture. Thank Heaven! Hubert didn't know his fate was being decided, and was not going through this awful waiting. She thought of Jean and Alan, and with all her heart hoped that they were ready for the worst. For with each minute the worst seemed more and more certain. A sort of numbness began creeping over her. He would never come back — never, never! And she hoped he wouldn't, bringing the death-warrant. At last she laid her arms flat on the table, and rested her forehead on them. How long she had stayed in that curious torpor she knew not, before the sound of a throat being cleared roused her, and she started back.

Not Bobbie Ferrar, but a tall man with a reddish, clean-shaven face and silver hair brushed in a cockscomb off his forehead, was standing before the fire with his legs slightly apart and his hands under his coat tails; he was staring at her with very wide-opened light grey eyes, and his lips were just apart as if he were about to emit a remark. Dinny was too startled to rise, and she sat staring back at him.

"Miss Cherrell! Don't get up." He lifted a restraining hand from beneath a coat-tail. Dinny stayed seated — only too glad to, for she had begun to tremble violently.

"Ferrar tells me that you edited your brother's diary?"

Dinny bowed her head. Take deep breaths!

"As printed, is it in its original condition?"

"Yes."

"Exactly?"

"Yes. I haven't altered or left out a thing."

Staring at his face she could see nothing but the round brightness of the eyes and the slight superior prominence of the lower lip. It was almost like staring at God. She shivered at the queerness of the thought and her lips formed a little desperate smile.

"I have a question to ask you, Miss Cherrell."

Dinny uttered a little sighing: "Yes."

"How much of this diary was written since your brother came back?"

She stared; then the implication in the question stung her.

"None! Oh, none! It was all written out there at the time." And she rose to her feet.

"May I ask how you know that?"

"My brother —" Only then did she realise that throughout she had nothing but Hubert's word —"my brother told me so."

"His word is gospel to you?"

She retained enough sense of humour not to 'draw herself up,' but her head tilted.

"Gospel. My brother is a soldier and —"

She stopped short, and, watching that superior lower lip, hated herself for using that cliché.

"No doubt, no doubt! But you realise, of course, the importance of the point?"

"There is the original —" stammered Dinny. Oh! Why hadn't she brought it! "It shows clearly — I mean, it's all messy and stained. You can see it at any time. Shall —?"

He again put out a restraining hand.

"Never mind that. Very devoted to your brother, Miss Cherrell?"

Dinny's lips quivered.

"Absolutely. We all are."

"He's just married, I hear?"

"Yes, just married."

"Your brother wounded in the war?"

"Yes. He had a bullet through his left leg."

"Neither arm touched?"

Again that sting!

"No!" The little word came out like a shot fired. And they stood looking at each other half a minute — a minute; words of appeal, of resentment, incoherent words were surging to her lips, but she kept them closed; she put her hand over them. He nodded.

"Thank you, Miss Cherrell. Thank you." His head went a little to one side; he turned, and rather as if carrying that head on a charger, walked to the inner door. When he had passed through, Dinny covered her face with her hands. What had she done? Antagonised him? She ran her hands down over her face, over her body, and stood with them clenched at her sides, staring at the door through which he had passed, quivering from head to foot. A minute passed. The door was opened again, and Bobbie Ferrar came in. She saw his teeth. He nodded, shut the door, and said:

"It's all right."

Dinny spun round to the window. Dark had fallen, and if it hadn't, she couldn't have seen. All right! All right! She dashed her knuckles across her eyes, turned round, and held out both hands, without seeing where to hold them.

They were not taken, but his voice said:

"I'm very happy."

"I thought I'd spoiled it."

She saw his eyes then, round as a puppy dog's.

"If he hadn't made up his mind already he wouldn't have seen you, Miss Cherrell. He's not as case-hardened as all that. As a matter of fact, he'd seen the Magistrate about it at lunch time — that helped a lot."

'Then I had all that agony for nothing,' thought Dinny.

"Did he have to see the preface, Mr. Ferrar?"

"No, and just as well — it might have worked the other way. We really owe it to the Magistrate. But you made a good impression on him. He said you were transparent."

"Oh!"

Bobbie Ferrar took the little red book from the table, looked at it lovingly, and placed it in his pocket. "Shall we go?"

In Whitehall Dinny took a breath so deep that the whole November dusk seemed to pass into her with the sensation of a long, and desperately wanted drink.

"A Post Office!" she said. "He couldn't change his mind, could he?"

“I have his word. Your brother will be released to-night.”

“Oh! Mr. Ferrar!” Tears suddenly came out of her eyes. She turned away to hide them, and when she turned back to him, he was not there.

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https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/g/galsworthy/john/maid/chapter36.html
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Chapter 37

When from that Post Office she had despatched telegrams to her father and Jean, and telephoned to Fleur, to Adrian and Hilary, she took a taxi to Mount Street, and opened the door of her Uncle's study. Sir Lawrence, before the fire with a book he was not reading, looked up.

"What's your news, Dinny?"

"Saved!"

"Thanks to you!"

"Bobbie Ferrar says, thanks to the Magistrate. I nearly wrecked it, Uncle."

"Ring the bell!" Dinny rang.

"Blore, tell Lady Mont I want her."

"Good news, Blore; Mr. Hubert's free."

"Thank you, Miss; I was laying six to four on it."

"What can we do to relieve our feelings, Dinny?"

"I must go to Condaford, Uncle."

"Not till after dinner. You shall go drunk. What about Hubert? Anybody going to meet him?"

"Uncle Adrian said I'd better not, and he would go. Hubert will make for the flat, of course, and wait for Jean."

Sir Lawrence gave her a whimsical glance.

"Where will she be flying from?"

"Brussels."

"So that was the centre of operations! The closing down of that enterprise gives me almost as much satisfaction, Dinny, as Hubert's release. You can't get away with that sort of thing, nowadays."

"I think they might have," said Dinny, for with the removal of the need for it, the idea of escape seemed to have become less fantastic. "Aunt Em! What a nice wrapper!"

"I was dressin'. Blore's won four pounds. Dinny, kiss me. Give your Uncle one, too. You kiss very nicely — there's body in it. If I drink champagne, I shall be ill tomorrow."

"But need you, Auntie?"

"Yes. Dinny, promise me to kiss that young man."

"Do you get a commission on kissing, Aunt Em?"

"Don't tell me he wasn't goin' to cut Hubert out of prison, or something. The Rector said he flew in with a beard one day, and took a spirit level and two books on Portugal. They always go to Portugal. The Rector'll be so relieved; he was gettin' thin about it. So I think you ought to kiss him."

"A kiss means nothing nowadays, Auntie. I nearly kissed Bobbie Ferrar; only he saw it coming."

"Dinny can't be bothered to do all this kissing," said Sir Lawrence; "she's got to sit to my miniature painter. The young man will be at Condaford tomorrow, Dinny."

"Your Uncle's got a bee, Dinny; collectin' the Lady. There aren't any, you know. It's extinct. We're all females now."

By the only late evening train Dinny embarked for Condaford. They had plied her with wine at dinner, and she sat in sleepy elation, grateful for everything — the motion, and the moon-ridden darkness flying past the windows. Her exhilaration kept breaking out in smiles. Hubert free! Condaford safe! Her father and mother at ease once more! Jean happy! Alan no longer threatened with disgrace! Her fellow-passengers, for she was travelling third-class, looked at her with the frank or furtive wonderment that so many smiles will induce in the minds of any taxpayers. Was she tipsy, weak-minded, or merely in love? Perhaps all three! And she looked back at them with a benevolent compassion because they were obviously not half-seas-over with happiness. The hour and a half seemed short, and she got out on to the dimly lighted platform, less sleepy, but as elated as when she had got into the train. She had forgotten to add in her telegram that she was coming, so she had to leave her things and walk. She took the main road; it was longer, but she wanted to swing along and breathe home air to the full. In the night, as always, things looked unfamiliar, and she seemed to pass houses, hedges, trees that she had never known. The road dipped through a wood. A car came with its headlights glaring luridly, and in that glare she saw a weasel slink across just in time — queer little low beast, snakily humping its long back. She stopped a moment on the bridge over their narrow twisting little river. That bridge was hundreds of years old, nearly as old as the oldest parts of the Grange, and still very strong. Just beyond it was their gate, and when the river flooded, in very wet years, it crept up the meadow almost to the shrubbery where the moat had once been. Dinny pushed through the gate and walked on the grass edging of the drive between the rhododendrons. She came to the front of the house, which was really its back — long, low, unlighted. They did not expect her, and it was getting on for midnight; and the idea came to her to steal round and see it all grey and ghostly, tree-and-creeper-covered in the moonlight. Past the yew trees, throwing short shadows under the raised garden, she came round on to the lawn, and stood breathing deeply, and turning her head this way and that, so as to miss nothing that she had grown up with. The moon flicked a ghostly radiance on to the windows, and shiny leaves of the magnolias; and secrets lurked all over the old stone face. Lovely! Only one window was lighted, that of her father's study. It seemed strange that they had gone to bed already, with relief so bubbling in them. She stole from the lawn on to the terrace and stood looking in through the curtains not quite drawn. The General was at his desk with a lot of papers spread before him, sitting with his hands between his knees, and his head bent. She could see the hollow below his temple, the hair above it, much greyer of late, the set mouth, the almost beaten look on the face. The whole attitude was that of a man in patient silence, preparing to accept disaster. Up in Mount Street she had been reading of the American Civil War, and she thought that just so, but for his lack of beard, might some old Southern General have looked, the night before Lee's surrender. And, suddenly, it came to her that by an evil chance they had not yet received her telegram. She tapped on the pane. Her father raised his head. His face was ashen grey in the moonlight, and it was evident that he mistook her apparition for confirmation of the worst; he opened the window. Dinny leaned in, and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Dad! Haven't you had my wire? It's all right, Hubert's free."

The General's hands shot up and grasped her wrists, colour came into his face, his lips relaxed, he looked suddenly ten years younger.

"Is it — is it certain, Dinny?"

Dinny nodded. She was smiling, but tears stood in her eyes.

"My God! That's news! Come in! I must go up and tell your Mother!" He was out of the room before she was in it.

In this room, which had resisted her mother's and her own attempts to introduce aestheticism, and retained an office-like barrenness, Dinny stood staring at this and at that evidence of Art's defeat, with the smile that was becoming chronic. Dad with his papers, his military books, his ancient photographs, his relics of India and South Africa, and the old-style picture of his favourite charger, his map of the estate; his skin of the leopard that had mauled him, and the two fox masks — happy again! Bless him!

She had the feeling that her mother and he would rather be left alone to rejoice, and slipped upstairs to Clare's room. That vivid member of the family was asleep with one pyjama-d arm outside the sheet and her cheek resting on the back of the hand. Dinny looked amiably at the dark shingled head and went out again. No good spoiling beauty sleep! She stood at her opened bedroom window, gazing between the nearly bare elm-trees, at the moonlit rise of fields and the wood beyond. She stood and tried hard not to believe in God. It seemed mean and petty to have more belief in God when things were going well than when they were instinct with tragedy; just as it seemed mean and petty to pray to God when you wanted something badly, and not pray when you didn't. But after all God was Eternal Mind that you couldn't understand; God was not a loving Father that you could. The less she thought about all that the better. She was home like a ship after storm; it was enough! She swayed, standing there, and realised that she was nearly asleep. Her bed was not made ready; but getting out an old, thick dressing-gown, she slipped off shoes, dress, and corset belt, put on the gown and curled up under the eiderdown. In two minutes, still with that smile on her lips, she was sleeping . . . .

A telegram from Hubert, received at breakfast next morning, said that he and Jean would be down in time for dinner.

"'The Young Squire Returns!'" murmured Dinny. "'Brings Bride!' Thank goodness it'll be after dark, and we can kill the fatted calf in private. Is the fatted calf ready, Dad?"

"I've got two bottles of your great-grandfather's Chambertin 1865 left. We'll have that, and the old brandy."

“Hubert likes woodcock best, if there are any to be had, Mother, and pancakes. And how about the inland oyster? He loves oysters.”

“I’ll see, Dinny.”

“And mushrooms,” added Clare.

“You’ll have to scour the country, I’m afraid, Mother.”

Lady Cherrell smiled, she looked quite young.

“It’s ‘a mild hunting day,’” said the General: “What about it, Clare? The meet’s at Wyvell’s Cross, eleven.”

“Rather!”

Returning from the stables after seeing her father and Clare depart, Dinny and the dogs lingered. The relief from that long waiting, the feeling of nothing to worry about, was so delicious that she did not resent the singular similarity in the present state of Hubert’s career to the state which had given her so much chagrin two months back. He was in precisely the same position, only worse, because married; and yet she felt as blithe as a ‘sandboy.’ It proved that Einstein was right, and everything relative!

She was singing ‘The Lincolnshire Poacher’ on her way to the raised garden when the sound of a motor-cycle on the drive caused her to turn. Someone in the guise of a cyclist waved his hand, and shooting the cycle into a rhododendron bush came towards her, removing his hood.

Alan, of course! And she experienced at once the sensation of one about to be asked in marriage. Nothing — she felt — could prevent him this morning, for he had not even succeeded in doing the dangerous and heroic thing which might have made the asking for reward too obvious.

‘But perhaps,’ she thought, ‘he still has a beard — that might stop him.’ Alas! He had only a jaw rather paler than the rest of his brown face.

He came up holding out both hands and she gave him hers. Thus grappled, they stood looking at each other.

“Well,” said Dinny, at last, “tell your tale. You’ve been frightening us out of our wits, young man.”

“Let’s go and sit down up there, Dinny.”

“Very well. Mind Scaramouch, he’s under your foot, and the foot large.”

“Not so very. Dinny, you look —”

“No,” said Dinny; “rather worn than otherwise. I know all about the Professor and the special case for his Bolivian bones, and the projected substitution of Hubert on the ship.”

“What!”

“We’re not half-wits, Alan. What was YOUR special lay, beard and all? We can’t sit on this seat without something between us and the stone.”

“I couldn’t be the something?”

“Certainly not. Put your overall there. Now!”

“Well,” he said, looking with disfavour at his boot, “if you really want to know. There’s nothing certain, of course, because it all depended on the way they were going to export Hubert. We had to have alternatives. If there was a port of call, Spanish or Portuguese, we WERE going to use the box trick. Hallorsen was to be on the ship, and Jean and I at the port with a machine and the real bones. Jean was to be the pilot when we got him — she’s a natural flier; and they were to make for Turkey.”

“Yes,” said Dinny; “we guessed all that.”

“How?”

“Never mind. What about the alternative?”

“If there was no port of call it wasn’t going to be easy; we’d thought of a faked telegram to the chaps in charge of Hubert when the train arrived at Southampton or whatever the port was, telling them to take him to the Police Station and await further instructions. On the way there Hallorsen on a cycle would have bumped into the taxi on one side, and I should have bumped in on the other; and Hubert was to slip out into my car and be nipped off to where the machine was ready.”

“Mm!” said Dinny. “Very nice on the screen; but are they so confiding in real life?”

“Well, we really hadn’t got that worked out. We were betting on the other.”

“Has all that money gone?”

“No; only about two hundred, and we can re-sell the machine.” Dinny heaved a long sigh, and her eyes rested on him.

“Well,” she said, “if you ask me, you’re jolly well out of it.”

He grinned. “I suppose so; especially as if it had come off I couldn’t very well have bothered you. Dinny, I’ve got to rejoin today. Won’t you —?”

Dinny said softly: “Absence makes the heart grow fonder, Alan. When you come back next time, I really will see.”

“May I have one kiss?”

“Yes.” She tilted her cheek towards him.

‘Now,’ she thought, ‘is when they kiss you masterfully full on the lips. He hasn’t! He must almost respect me!’ And she got up.

“Come along, dear boy; and thank you ever so for all you luckily didn’t have to do. I really will try and become less virginal.”

He looked at her ruefully, as though repenting of his self-control, then smiled at her smile. And soon the splutter of his motor-cycle faded into the faintly sighing silence of the day.

Still with the smile on her lips Dinny went back to the house. He was a dear! But really one must have time! Such a lot of repenting at leisure could be done even in these days!

After their slight and early lunch Lady Cherrell departed in the Ford driven by the groom in search of the fatted calf. Dinny was preparing to hunt the garden for whatever flowers November might yield when a card was brought to her:

> “Mr. Neil Wintney,
> Ferdinand Studios,
> Orchard Street,
> Chelsea.”

‘Help!’ she thought; ‘Uncle Lawrence’s young man!’ “Where is he, Amy?”

“In the hall, Miss.”

“Ask him into the drawing-room; I’ll be there in a minute.”

Divested of her gardening gloves and basket, she looked at her nose in her little powdery mirror; then, entering the drawing-room through the French window, saw with surprise the ‘young man’ sitting up good in a chair with some apparatus by his side. He had thick white hair, and an eyeglass on a black ribbon; and when he stood she realised that he must be at least sixty. He said:

“Miss Cherrell? Your Uncle, Sir Lawrence Mont, has commissioned me to do a miniature of you.”

“I know,” said Dinny; “only I thought —” She did not finish. After all, Uncle Lawrence liked his little joke, or possibly this was his idea of youth.

The ‘young man’ had screwed his monocle into a comely red cheek, and through it a full blue eye scrutinized her eagerly. He put his head on one side and said: “If we can get the outline, and you have some photographs, I shan’t give you much trouble. What you have on — that flax-blue — is admirable for colour; background of sky — through that window — yes, not too blue — an English white in it. While the light’s good, can we —?” And, talking all the time, he proceeded to make his preparations.

“Sir Lawrence’s idea,” he said, “is the English lady; culture deep but not apparent. Turn a little sideways. Thank you — the nose —”

“Yes,” said Dinny; “hopeless.”

“Oh! no, no! Charming. Sir Lawrence, I understand, wants you for his collection of types. I’ve done two for him. Would you look down? No! Now full at me! Ah! The teeth — admirable!”

“All mine, so far.”

“That smile is just right, Miss Cherrell: it gives us the sense of spoof we want; not too much spoof, but just spoof enough.”

"You don't want me to hold a smile with exactly three ounces of spoof in it?"

"No, no, my dear young lady; we shall chance on it. Now suppose you turn three-quarters. Ah! Now I get the line of the hair; the colour of it admirable."

"Not too much ginger, but just ginger enough?"

The 'young man' was silent. He had begun with singular concentration to draw and to write little notes on the margin of the paper.

Dinny, with crinkled eyebrows, did not like to move. He paused and smiled at her with a sort of winey sweetness.

"Yes, yes, yes," he said. "I see, I see."

What did he see? The nervousness of the victim seized her suddenly, and she pressed her open hands together.

"Raise the hands, Miss Cherrell. No! Too Madonnaish. We must think of the devil in the hair. The eyes to me, full."

"Glad?" asked Dinny.

"Not too glad; just — Yes, an English eye; candid but reserved. Now the turn of the neck. Ah! A leetle tilt. Ye — es. Almost stag-like; almost — a touch of the — not startled — no, of the aloof."

He again began to draw and write with a sort of remoteness, as if he were a long way off.

And Dinny thought: 'If Uncle Lawrence wants self-consciousness he'll get it all right.'

The 'young man' stopped and stood back, his head very much on one side, so that all his attention seemed to come out of his eyeglass.

"The expression," he muttered.

"I expect," said Dinny, "you want an unemployed look."

"Naughty!" said the 'young man': "Deeper. Could I play that piano for a minute?"

"Of course. But I'm afraid it's not been played on lately."

"It will serve." He sat down, opened the piano, blew on the keys, and began playing. He played strongly, softly, well. Dinny stood in the curve of the piano, listening, and speedily entranced. It was obviously Bach, but she did not know what. An endearing, cool, and lovely tune, coming over and over and over, monotonous, yet moving as only Bach could be.

"What is it?"

"A Chorale of Bach, set by a pianist." And the 'young man' nodded his eyeglass towards the keys.

"Glorious! Your ears on heaven and your feet in flowery fields," murmured Dinny.

The 'young man' closed the piano and stood up.

"That's what I want, that's what I want, young lady!"

"Oh!" said Dinny. "Is that all?"

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FLOWERING WILDERNESS

CHAPTER 1

In 1930, shortly after the appearance of the Budget, the eighth wonder of the world might have been observed in the neighbourhood of Victoria Station — three English people, of wholly different type, engaged in contemplating simultaneously a London statue. They had come separately, and stood a little apart from each other in the south-west corner of the open space clear of the trees, where the drifting late afternoon light of spring was not in their eyes. One of these three was a young woman of about twenty-six, one a youngish man of perhaps thirty-four, and one a man of between fifty and sixty. The young woman, slender and far from stupid-looking, had her head tilted slightly upward to one side, and a faint smile on her parted lips. The younger man, who wore a blue overcoat with a belt girt tightly round his thin middle, as if he felt the spring wind chilly, was sallow from fading sunburn; and the rather disdainful look of his mouth was being curiously contradicted by eyes fixed on the statue with real intensity of feeling. The elder man, very tall, in a brown suit and brown buckskin shoes, lounged, with his hands in his trouser pockets, and his long, weathered, good-looking face masked in a sort of shrewd scepticism.

In the meantime the statue, which was that of Marshal Foch on his horse, stood high up among those trees, stiller than any of them.

The youngish man spoke suddenly.

"He delivered us."

The effect of this breach of form on the others was diverse; the elder man's eyebrows went slightly up, and he moved forward as if to examine the horse's legs. The young woman turned and looked frankly at the speaker, and instantly her face became surprised.

"Aren't you Wilfrid Desert?"

The youngish man bowed.

"Then," said the young woman, "we've met. At Fleur Mont's wedding. You were best man, if you remember, the first I'd seen. I was only sixteen. You wouldn't remember me — Dinny Cherrell, baptized Elizabeth. They ran me in for bridesmaid at the last minute."

The youngish man's mouth lost its disdain.

"I remember your hair perfectly."

"Nobody ever remembers me by anything else."

"Wrong! I remember thinking you'd sat to Botticelli. You're still sitting, I see."

Dinny was thinking: 'His eyes were the first to flutter me. And they really are beautiful.'

The said eyes had been turned again upon the statue.

"He DID deliver us," said Desert.

"You were there, of course."

"Flying, and fed up to the teeth."

"Do you like the statue?"

"The horse."

"Yes," murmured Dinny, "it IS a horse, not just a prancing barrel, with teeth, nostrils and an arch."

"The whole thing's workmanlike, like Foch himself."

Dinny wrinkled her brow.

"I like the way it stands up quietly among those trees."

"How is Michael? You're a cousin of his, if I remember."

"Michael's all right. Still in the House; he has a seat he simply can't lose."

"And Fleur?"

"Flourishing. Did you know she had a daughter last year?"

"Fleur? H'm! That makes two, doesn't it?"

"Yes; they call this one Catherine."

"I haven't been home since 1927. Gosh! It's a long time since that wedding."

"You look," said Dinny, contemplating the sallow darkness of his face, "as if you had been in the sun."

"When I'm not in the sun I'm not alive."

"Michael once told me you lived in the East."

"Well, I wander about there." His face seemed to darken still more, and he gave a little shiver. "Beastly cold, the English spring!"

"And do you still write poetry?"

"Oh! you know of that weakness?"

"I've read them all. I like the last volume best."

He grinned. "Thank you for stroking me the right way; poets, you know, like it. Who's that tall man? I seem to know his face."

The tall man, who had moved to the other side of the statue, was coming back.

"Somehow," murmured Dinny, "I connect him with that wedding, too."

The tall man came up to them.

"The hocks aren't all that," he said.

Dinny smiled.

"I always feel so thankful I haven't got hocks. We were just trying to decide whether we knew you. Weren't you at Michael Mont's wedding some years ago?"

"I was. And who are you, young lady?"

"We all met there. I'm his first cousin on his mother's side, Dinny Cherrell. Mr. Desert was his best man."

The tall man nodded.

"Oh! Ah! My name's Jack Muskham, I'm a first cousin of his father's." He turned to Desert. "You admired Foch, it seems."

"I did."

Dinny was surprised at the morose look that had come on his face.

"Well," said Muskham, "he was a soldier all right; and there weren't too many about. But I came here to see the horse."

"It is, of course, the important part," murmured Dinny.

The tall man gave her his sceptical smile.

"One thing we have to thank Foch for, he never left us in the lurch."

Desert suddenly faced round:

"Any particular reason for that remark?"

Muskham shrugged his shoulders, raised his hat to Dinny, and lounged away.

When he had gone there was a silence as over deep waters.

"Which way were you going?" said Dinny at last.

"Any way that you are."

"I thank you kindly, sir. Would an aunt in Mount Street serve as a direction?"

"Admirably."

"You must remember her, Michael's mother; she's a darling, the world's perfect mistress of the ellipse — talks in stepping stones, so that you have to jump to follow her."

They crossed the road and set out up Grosvenor Place on the Buckingham Palace side.

"I suppose you find England changed every time you come home, if you'll forgive me for making conversation?"

"Changed enough."

"Don't you 'love your native land,' as the saying is?"

"She inspires me with a sort of horror."

"Are you by any chance one of those people who wish to be thought worse than they are?"

"Not possible. Ask Michael."

"Michael is incapable of slander."

"Michael and all angels are outside the count of reality."

"No," said Dinny, "Michael is very real, and very English."

"That is his contradictory trouble."

"Why do you run England down? It's been done before."

"I never run her down except to English people."

"That's something. But why to me?"

Desert laughed.

"Because you seem to be what I should like to feel that England is."

"Flattered and fair, but neither fat nor forty."

"What I object to is England's belief that she is still 'the goods.'"

"And isn't she, really?"

"Yes," said Desert, surprisingly, "but she has no reason to think so."

Dinny thought:

> 'You're perverse, brother Wilfrid, the young woman said,
> And your tongue is exceedingly wry;
> You do not look well when you stand on your head —
> Why will you continually try?'

She remarked, more simply:

"If England is still 'the goods,' has no reason to think so and yet does, she would seem to have intuition, anyway. Was it by intuition that you disliked Mr. Muskham?" Then, looking at his face, she thought: 'I'm dropping a brick.'

"Why should I dislike him? He's just the usual insensitive type of hunting, racing man who bores me stiff."

'That wasn't the reason,' thought Dinny, still regarding him. A strange face! Unhappy from deep inward disharmony, as though a good angel and a bad were for ever seeking to fire each other out; but his eyes sent the same thrill through her as when, at sixteen, with her hair still long, she had stood near him at Fleur's wedding.

"And do you really like wandering about in the East?"

"The curse of Esau is on me."

'Some day,' she thought, 'I'll make him tell me why. Only probably I shall never see him again.' And a little chill ran down her back.

"I wonder if you know my Uncle Adrian. He was in the East during the war. He presides over bones at a museum. You probably know Diana Ferse, anyway. He married her last year."

"I know nobody to speak of."

"Our point of contact, then, is only Michael."

"I don't believe in contacts through other people. Where do you live, Miss Cherrell?"

Dinny smiled.

"A short biographical note seems to be indicated. Since the umpteenth century, my family has been 'seated' at Condaford Grange in Oxfordshire. My father is a retired General; I am one of two daughters; and my only brother is a married soldier just coming back from the Soudan on leave."

"Oh!" said Desert, and again his face had that morose look.

"I am twenty-six, unmarried but with no children as yet. My hobby seems to be attending to other people's business. I don't know why I have it. When in Town I stay at Lady Mont's in Mount Street. With a simple upbringing I have expensive instincts and no means of gratifying them. I believe I can see a joke. Now you?"

Desert smiled and shook his head.

"Shall I?" said Dinny. "You are the second son of Lord Mullyon, you had too much war; you write poetry; you have nomadic instincts and are your own enemy; the last item has the only news value. Here we are in Mount Street; do come in and see Aunt Em."

"Thank you — no. But will you lunch with me tomorrow and go to a matinée?"

"I will. Where?"

"Dumourieux's, one-thirty."

They exchanged hand-grips and parted, but as Dinny went into her aunt's house she was tingling all over, and she stood still outside the drawing-room to smile at the sensation.

❦

CHAPTER 2

The smile faded off her lips under the fire of noises coming through the closed door.

'My goodness!' she thought: 'Aunt Em's birthday "pawty," and I'd forgotten.'

Someone playing the piano stopped, there was a rush, a scuffle, the scraping of chairs on the floor, two or three squeals, silence, and the piano-playing began again.

'Musical chairs!' she thought, and opened the door quietly. She who had been Diana Ferse was sitting at the piano. To eight assorted chairs, facing alternatively east and west, were clinging one large and eight small beings in bright paper hats, of whom seven were just rising to their feet and two still sitting on one chair. Dinny saw from left to right: Ronald Ferse; a small Chinese boy; Aunt Alison's youngest, little Anne; Uncle Hilary's youngest, Tony; Celia and Dingo (children of Michael's married sister Celia Moriston); Sheila Ferse; and on the single chair Uncle Adrian and Kit Mont. She was further conscious of Aunt Em panting slightly against the fireplace in a large headpiece of purple paper, and of Fleur pulling a chair from Ronald's end of the row.

"Kit, get up! You were out."

Kit sat firm and Adrian rose.

"All right, old man, you're up against your equals now. Fire away!"

"Keep your hands off the backs," cried Fleur. "Wu Fing, you mustn't sit till the music stops. Dingo, don't stick at the end chair like that."

The music stopped. Scurry, hustle, squeals, and the smallest figure, little Anne, was left standing.

"All right, darling," said Dinny, "come here and beat this drum. Stop when the music stops, that's right. Now again. Watch Auntie Di!"

Again, and again, and again, till Sheila and Dingo and Kit only were left.

'I back Kit,' thought Dinny.

Sheila out! Off with a chair! Dingo, so Scotch-looking, and Kit, so bright-haired, having lost his paper cap, were left padding round and round the last chair. Both were down; both up and on again, Diana carefully averting her eyes, Fleur standing back now with a little smile; Aunt Em's face very pink. The music stopped, Dingo was down again; and Kit left standing, his face flushed and frowning.

"Kit," said Fleur's voice, "play the game!"

Kit's head was thrown up and he rammed his hands into his pockets.

'Good for Fleur!' thought Dinny.

A voice behind her said:

"Your aunt's purple passion for the young, Dinny, leads us into strange riots. What about a spot of quiet in my study?"

Dinny looked round at Sir Lawrence Mont's thin, dry, twisting face, whose little moustache had gone quite white, while his hair was still only sprinkled.

"I haven't done my bit, Uncle Lawrence."

"Time you learned not to. Let the heathen rage. Come down and have a quiet Christian talk."

Subduing her instinct for service with the thought: 'I SHOULD like to talk about Wilfrid Desert!' Dinny went.

"What are you working on now, Uncle?"

"Resting for the minute and reading the Memoirs of Harriette Wilson — a remarkable young woman, Dinny. In the days of the Regency there were no reputations in high life to destroy; but she did her best. If you don't know about her, I may tell you that she believed in love and had a great many lovers, only one of whom she loved."

"And yet she believed in love?"

"Well, she was a kind-hearted baggage, and the others loved her. All the difference in the world between her and Ninon de l'Enclos, who loved them all; both vivid creatures. A duologue between those two on 'virtue'? It's to be thought of. Sit down!"

"While I was looking at Foch's statue this afternoon, Uncle Lawrence, I met a cousin of yours, Mr. Muskham."

"Jack?"

"Yes."

"Last of the dandies. All the difference in the world, Dinny, between the 'buck,' the 'dandy,' the 'swell,' the 'masher,' the 'blood,' the 'knut,' and what's the last variety called? — I never know. There's been a steady decrescendo. By his age Jack belongs to the 'masher' period, but his cut was always pure dandy — a dyed-inthe-wool Whyte Melville type. How did he strike you?"

"Horses, piquet and imperturbability."

"Take your hat off, my dear. I like to see your hair."

Dinny removed her hat.

"I met someone else there, too; Michael's best man."

"What! Young Desert? He back again?" And Sir Lawrence's loose-eyebrow mounted.

A slight colour had stained Dinny's cheeks.

"Yes," she said.

"Queer bird, Dinny."

Within her rose a feeling rather different from any she had ever experienced. She could not have described it, but it reminded her of a piece of porcelain she had given to her father on his birthday, two weeks ago; a little china group, beautifully modelled, of a vixen and four fox cubs tucked in under her. The look on the vixen's face, soft yet watchful, so completely expressed her own feeling at this moment.

"Why queer?"

"Tales out of school, Dinny. Still, to YOU— There's no doubt in my mind that that young man made up to Fleur a year or two after her marriage. That's what started him as a rolling stone."

Was that, then, what he had meant when he mentioned Esau? No! By the look of his face when he spoke of Fleur, she did not think so.

"But that was ages ago," she said.

"Oh, yes! Ancient story; but one's heard other things. Clubs are the mother of all uncharitableness."

The softness of Dinny's feeling diminished, the watchfulness increased.

"What other things?"

Sir Lawrence shook his head.

"I rather like the young man; and not even to you, Dinny, do I repeat what I really know nothing of. Let a man live an unusual life, and there's no limit to what people invent about him. He looked at her rather suddenly; but Dinny's eyes were limpid.

"Who's the little Chinese boy upstairs?"

"Son of a former Mandarin, who left his family here because of the ructions out there — quaint little image. A likeable people, the Chinese. When does Hubert arrive?"

"Next week. They're flying from Italy. Jean flies a lot, you know."

"What's become of her brother?" And again he looked at Dinny.

"Alan? He's out on the China station."

"Your aunt never ceases to bemoan your not clicking there."

"Dear Uncle, almost anything to oblige Aunt Em; but, feeling like a sister to him, the prayer-book was against me."

"*I* don't want you to marry," said Sir Lawrence, "and go out to some Barbary or other."

Through Dinny flashed the thought: 'Uncle Lawrence is uncanny,' and her eyes became more limpid than ever.

"This confounded officialism," he continued, "seems to absorb all our kith and kin. My two daughters, Celia in China, Flora in India; your brother Hubert in the Soudan; your sister Clare off as soon as she's spliced — Jerry Corven's been given a post in Ceylon. I hear Charlie Muskham's got attached to Government House, Cape Town; Hilary's eldest boy's going into the Indian Civil, and his youngest into the Navy. Dash it all, Dinny, you and Jack Muskham seem to be the only pelicans in my wilderness. Of course there's Michael."

"Do you see much of Mr. Muskham, then, Uncle?"

"Quite a lot at 'Burton's,' and he comes to me at 'The Coffee House'; we play piquet — we're the only two left. That's in the illegitimate season — from now on I shall hardly see him till after the Cambridgeshire."

"Is he a terribly good judge of a horse?"

"Yes. Of anything else, Dinny — no. They seldom are. The horse is an animal that seems to close the pores of the spirit. He makes you too watchful. You don't only have to watch him, but everybody connected with him. How was young Desert looking?"

"Oh!" said Dinny, almost taken aback: "a sort of dark yellow."

"That's the glare of the sand. He's a kind of Bedouin, you know. His father's a recluse, so it's a bit in his blood. The best thing I know about him is that Michael likes him, in spite of that business."

"His poetry?" said Dinny.

"Disharmonic stuff, he destroys with one hand what he gives with the other."

"Perhaps he's never found his home. His eyes are rather beautiful, don't you think?"

"It's his mouth I remember best, sensitive and bitter."

"One's eyes are what one is, one's mouth what one becomes."

"That and the stomach."

"He hasn't any," said Dinny. "I noticed."

"The handful of dates and cup of coffee habit. Not that the Arabs drink coffee — green tea is their weakness, with mint in it. My God! Here's your aunt. When I said 'My God!' I was referring to the tea with mint."

Lady Mont had removed her paper headdress and recovered her breath.

"Darling," said Dinny, "I DID forget your birthday, and I haven't got anything for you."

"Then give me a kiss, Dinny. I always say your kisses are the best. Where have you sprung from?"

"I came up to shop for Clare at the Stores."

"Have you got your night things with you?"

"No."

"That doesn't matter. You can have one of mine. Do you still wear nightdresses?"

"Yes," said Dinny.

"Good girl! I don't like pyjamas for women — your uncle doesn't either. It's below the waist, you know. You can't get over it — you try to, but you can't. Michael and Fleur will be stayin' on to dinner."

"Thank you, Aunt Em; I do want to stay up. I couldn't get half the things Clare needs today."

"I don't like Clare marryin' before you, Dinny."

"But she naturally would, Auntie."

"Fiddle! Clare's brilliant — they don't as a rule. I married at twenty-one."

"You see, dear!"

"You're laughin' at me. I was only brilliant once. You remember, Lawrence — about that elephant — I wanted it to sit, and it would kneel. All their legs bend one way, Dinny. And I said it WOULD follow its bent."

"Aunt Em! Except for that one occasion you're easily the most brilliant woman I know. Women are so much too consecutive."

"Your nose is a comfort, Dinny, I get so tired of beaks, your Aunt Wilmet's, and Hen Bentworth's, and my own."

"Yours is only faintly aquiline, darling."

"I was terrified of its gettin' worse, as a child. I used to stand with the tip pressed up against a wardrobe."

"I've tried that too, Auntie, only the other way."

"Once while I was doin' it your father was lyin' concealed on the top, like a leopard, you know, and he hopped over me and bit through his lip. He bled all down my neck."

"How nasty!"

"Yes. Lawrence, what are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking that Dinny has probably had no lunch. Have you, Dinny?"

"I was going to have it tomorrow, Uncle."

"There you are!" said Lady Mont. "Ring for Blore. You'll never have enough body until you're married."

"Let's get Clare over first, Aunt Em."

"St. George's. I suppose Hilary's doin' them?"

"Of course!"

"I shall cry."

"Why, exactly, do you cry at weddings, Auntie?"

"She'll look like an angel; and the man'll be in black tails and a toothbrush moustache, and not feelin' what she thinks he is. Saddenin'!"

"But perhaps he's feeling more. I'm sure Michael was about Fleur, or Uncle Adrian when he married Diana."

"Adrian's fifty-three and he's got a beard. Besides, he's Adrian."

"I admit that makes a difference. But I think we ought rather to cry over the man. The woman's having the hour of her life and the man's waistcoat is almost certain to be too tight."

"Lawrence's wasn't. He was always a thread-paper, and I was as slim as you, Dinny."

"You must have looked lovely in a veil, Aunt Em. Didn't she, Uncle?" The whimsically wistful look on both those mature faces stopped her, and she added: "Where did you first meet?"

"Out huntin', Dinny. I was in a ditch, and your uncle didn't like it, he came and pulled me out."

"I think that's ideal."

"Too much mud. We didn't speak to each other all the rest of the day."

"Then what brought you together?"

"One thing and another. I was stayin' with Hen's people, the Corderoys, and your uncle called to see some puppies. What are you catechisin' me for?"

"I only just wanted to know how it was done in those days."

"Go and find out for yourself how it's done in these days."

"Uncle Lawrence doesn't want to get rid of me."

"All men are selfish, except Michael and Adrian."

"Besides, I should hate to make you cry."

"Blore, a cocktail and a sandwich for Miss Dinny, she's had no lunch. And, Blore, Mr. and Mrs. Adrian and Mr. and Mrs. Michael to dinner. And, Blore, tell Laura to put one of my nightdresses and the other things in the blue spare room. Miss Dinny'll stay the night. Those children!" And, swaying slightly, Lady Mont preceded her butler through the doorway.

"What a darling, Uncle!"

"I've never denied it, Dinny."

"I always feel better after her. Was she ever out of temper?"

"She can begin to be, but she always goes on to something else before she's finished."

"What saving grace . . .!"

At dinner that evening, Dinny listened for any allusion by her uncle to Wilfred Desert's return. There was none.

After dinner, she seated herself by Fleur in her habitual, slightly mystified admiration of this cousin by marriage, whose pretty poise was so assured, whose face and figure so beautifully turned out, whose clear eyes were so seeing, whose knowledge of self was so disillusioned, and whose attitude to Michael seemed at once that of one looking up and looking down.

'If I ever married,' thought Dinny, 'I could never be like that to him. I would have to look him straight in the face as one sinner to another.’

“Do you remember your wedding, Fleur?” she said.

“I do, my dear. A distressing ceremony!”

“I saw your best man today.”

The clear white round Fleur’s eyes widened.

“Wilfrid? How did you remember him?”

“I was only sixteen, and he fluttered my young nerves.”

“That is, of course, the function of a best man. Well, and how was he?”

“Very dark and dissolvent.”

Fleur laughed. “He always was.”

Looking at her, Dinny decided to press on.

“Yes. Uncle Lawrence told me he tried to carry dissolution rather far.”

Fleur looked surprised. “I didn’t know Bart ever noticed that.”

“Uncle Lawrence,” said Dinny, “is a bit uncanny.”

“Wilfrid,” murmured Fleur, with a little reminiscent smile, “really behaved quite well. He went East like a lamb.”

“But surely that hasn’t kept him East ever since?”

“No more than measles keep you permanently to your room. Oh! no, he likes it. He’s probably got a harem.”

“No,” said Dinny, “he’s fastidious, or I should be surprised.”

“Quite right, my dear; and one for my cheap cynicism. Wilfrid’s the queerest sort of person, and rather a dear. Michael loved him. But,” she said, suddenly looking at Dinny, “he’s impossible to be in love with — disharmony personified. I studied him pretty closely at one time — had to, you know. He’s elusive. Passionate, and a bundle of nerves. Soft-hearted and bitter. And search me for anything he believes in.”

“Except,” queried Dinny, “beauty, perhaps; and truth if he could find it?”

Fleur made the unexpected answer, “Well, my dear, we all believe in those, when they’re about. The trouble is they aren’t, unless — unless they lie in oneself, perhaps. And if you happen to be disharmonic, what chance have you? Where did you see him?”

“Staring at Foch.”

“Ah! I seem to remember he rather idolised Foch. Poor Wilfrid, he hasn’t much chance. Shell-shock, poetry, and his breeding — a father who’s turned his back on life; a mother who was half an Italian, and ran off with another. Not restful. His eyes were his best point, they made you sorry for him; and they’re beautiful — rather a fatal combination. Did the young nerves flutter again?” She looked rather more broadly into Dinny’s face.

“No, but I wondered if yours would still if I mentioned him.”

“Mine? My child, I’m nearly thirty. I have two children, and”— her face darkened —“I have been inoculated. If I ever told anyone about THAT, Dinny, I might tell you, but there are things one doesn’t tell.”

Up in her room, somewhat incommoded by the amplitude of Aunt Em’s nightgown, Dinny stared into a fire lighted against protest. She felt that what she was feeling was absurd — a queer eagerness, at once shy and bold, the sensations, as it were, of direct action impending. And why? She had seen again a man who ten years before had made her feel silly; from all accounts a most unsatisfactory man. Taking a looking-glass, she scrutinised her face above the embroidery on the too ample gown. She saw what might have satisfied but did not.

‘One gets tired of it,’ she thought —‘always the same Botticellian artifact,

‘The nose that’s snub,
The eyes of blue!
‘Ware self, you red-haired nymph,
And shun the image that is you!’

HE was so accustomed to the East, to dark eyes through veils, languishing; to curves enticingly disguised; to sex, mystery, teeth like pearls — vide houri! Dinny showed her own teeth to the glass. There she was on safe ground — the best teeth in her family. Nor was her hair really red — more what Miss Braddon used to call auburn. Nice word! Pity it had gone out.

With all that embroidery it was no good examining herself below the Victorian washing line. Remember that tomorrow before her bath! For what she was about to examine might the Lord make her truly thankful! Putting down the glass with a little sigh, she got into bed.

❦

Chapter 3

Wilfred Desert still maintained his chambers in Cork Street. They were, in fact, paid for by Lord Mullyon, who used them on the rare occasions when he emerged from rural retreat. It was not saying much that the secluded peer had more in common with his second than with his eldest son, who was in Parliament. It gave him, however, no particular pain to encounter Wilfrid; but as a rule the chambers were occupied only by Stack, who had been Wilfrid's batman in the war, and had for him one of those sphinx-like habits which wear better than expressed devotions. When Wilfrid returned, at a moment or two's notice, his rooms were ever exactly as he left them, neither more or less dusty and unaired; the same clothes hung on the same clothes-stretchers; and the same nicely cooked steak and mushrooms appeased his first appetite. The ancestral 'junk,' fringed and dotted by Eastern whims brought home, gave to the large sitting-room the same castled air of immutable possession. And the divan before the log fire received Wilfrid as if he had never left it. He lay there the morning after his encounter with Dinny, wondering why he could only get really good coffee when Stack made it. The East was the home of coffee, but Turkish coffee was a rite, a toy; and, like all rites and toys, served but to titillate the soul. This was his third day in London after three years; and in the last two years he had been through a good deal more than he would ever care to speak of, or even wish to remember; including one experience which still divided him against himself, however much he affected to discredit its importance. In other words, he had come back with a skeleton in his cupboard. He had brought back, too, enough poems for a fourth slender volume. He lay there, debating whether its slender bulk could not be increased by inclusion of the longest poem he had ever written, the outcome of that experience; in his view, too, the best poem he had ever written — a pity it should not be published, but —! And the 'but' was so considerable that he had many times been on the point of tearing the thing up, obliterating all trace of it, as he would have wished to blot remembrance from his mind. Again, but —! The poem expressed his defence for allowing what he hoped no one knew had happened to him. To tear it up would be parting with his defence. For he could never again adequately render his sensations in that past dilemma. He would be parting with his best protection from his own conscience, too; and perhaps with the only means of laying a ghost. For he sometimes thought that, unless he proclaimed to the world what had happened to him, he would never again feel quite in possession of his soul.

Reading it through, he thought: 'It's a damned sight better and deeper than Lyall's confounded poem.' And without any obvious connection he began to think of the girl he had met the day before. Curious that he had remembered her from Michael's wedding, a transparent slip of a young thing like a Botticelli Venus, Angel, or Madonna — so little difference between them. A charming young thing, then! Yes, and a charming young woman now, of real quality, with a sense of humour and an understanding mind. Dinny Cherrell! Charwell they spelled it, he remembered. He wouldn't mind showing her his poems; he would trust her reactions.

Partly because he was thinking of her, and partly because he took a taxi, he was late for lunch, and met Dinny on the doorstep of Dumourieux's just as she was about to go away.

There is perhaps no better test of woman's character than to keep her waiting for lunch in a public place. Dinny greeted him with a smile.

"I thought you'd probably forgotten."

"It was the traffic. How can philosophers talk of time being space or space time? It's disproved whenever two people lunch together. I allowed ten minutes for under a mile from Cork Street, and here I am ten minutes late. Terribly sorry!"

"My father says you must add ten per cent to all timing since taxis took the place of hansoms. Do you remember the hansom?"

"Rather!"

"I never was in London till they were over."

"If you know this place, lead on! I was told of it, but I've not yet been here."

"It's underground. The cooking's French."

Divested of their coats, they proceeded to an end table.

"Very little for me, please," said Dinny. "Say cold chicken, a salad, and some coffee."

"Anything the matter?"

"Only a spare habit."

"I see. We both have it. No wine?"

"No, thanks. Is eating little a good sign, do you think?"

"Not if done on principle."

"You don't like things done on principle?"

"I distrust the people who do them — self-righteous."

"I think that's too sweeping. You are rather sweeping, aren't you?"

"I was thinking of the sort of people who don't eat because it's sensual. That's not your reason, is it?"

"Oh! no," said Dinny, "I only dislike feeling full. And very little makes me feel that. I don't know very much about them so far, but I think the senses are good things."

"The only things, probably."

"Is that why you write poetry?"

Desert grinned.

"I should think YOU might write verse, too."

"Only rhymes."

"The place for poetry is a desert. Ever seen one?"

"No. I should like to." And, having said that, she sat in slight surprise, remembering her negative reaction to the American professor and his great open spaces. But no greater contrast was possible than between Hallorsen and this dark, disharmonic young man, who sat staring at her with those eyes of his till she had again that thrill down her spine. Crumbling her roll, she said: "I saw Michael and Fleur last night at dinner."

"Oh!" His lips curled. "I made a fool of myself over Fleur once. Perfect, isn't she — in her way?"

"Yes," and her eyes added: 'Don't run her down!'

"Marvellous equipment and control."

"I don't think you know her," said Dinny, "and I'm sure I don't."

He leaned forward. "You seem to me a loyal sort of person. Where did you pick that up?"

"Our family motto is the word 'Leal.' That ought to have cured me, oughtn't it?"

"I don't know," he said, abruptly, "whether I understand what loyalty is. Loyalty to what? To whom? Nothing's fixed in this world; everything's relative. Loyalty's the mark of the static mind, or else just a superstition, and anyway the negation of curiosity."

"There ARE things worth being loyal to, surely. Coffee, for instance, or one's religion."

He looked at her so strangely that Dinny was almost scared.

"Religion? Have you one?"

"Well, roughly, I suppose."

"What? Can you swallow the dogmas of any religious creed? Do you believe one legend more true than another? Can you suppose one set of beliefs about the Unknowable has more value than the rest? Religion! You've got a sense of humour. Does it leave you at the word?"

"No; only religion, I suppose, may be just a sense of an all-pervading spirit, and the ethical creed that seems best to serve it."

"H'm! A pretty far cry from what's generally meant, and even then how do you know what best serves an all-pervading spirit?"

"I take that on trust."

"There's where we differ. Look!" he said, and it seemed to her that excitement had crept into his voice: "What's the use of our reasoning powers, our mental faculties? I take each problem as it comes, I do the sum, I return the answer, and so I act. I act according to a reasoned estimate of what is best."

"For whom?"

“For myself and the world at large.”

“Which first?”

“It’s the same thing.”

“Always? I wonder. And, anyway, that means doing so long a sum every time that I can’t think how you ever get to acting. And surely ethical rules are just the result of countless decisions on those same problems made by people in the past, so why not take them for granted?”

“None of those decisions were made by people of my temperament or in my circumstances.”

“No, I see that. You follow what they call case law, then. But how English!”

“Sorry!” said Desert, abruptly: “I’m boring you. Have a sweet?”

Dinny put her elbows on the table and, leaning her chin on her hands, looked at him earnestly.

“You weren’t boring me. On the contrary, you’re interesting me frightfully. Only I suppose that women act much more instinctively; I suppose that really means they accept themselves as more like each other than men do, and are more ready to trust their instinctive sense of general experience.”

“That HAS been women’s way; whether it will be much longer, I don’t know.”

“I think it will,” said Dinny. “I don’t believe we shall ever much care for sums. I WILL have a sweet, please. Stewed prunes, I think.”

Desert stared at her, and began to laugh.

“You’re wonderful. We’ll both have them. Is your family a very formal one?”

“Not exactly formal, but they do believe in tradition and the past.”

“And do you?”

“I don’t know. I definitely like old things, and old places, and old people. I like anything that’s stamped like a coin. I like to feel one has roots. I was always fond of history. All the same one can’t help laughing. There’s something very comic about the way we’re all tied — like a hen by a chalk mark to its beak.”

Desert stretched out his hand and she put hers into it.

“Shake hands on that saving grace.”

“Some day,” said Dinny, “you’re going to tell me something. But at the moment what play are we going to?”

“Is there anything by a man called Shakespeare?”

With some difficulty they discovered that a work by the world’s greatest dramatist was being given in a theatre beyond the pale of the river. They went to it, and, when the show was over, Desert said, hesitating: “I wonder if you would come and have tea at my rooms?”

Dinny smiled and nodded, and from that moment was conscious of a difference in his manner. It was at once more intimate yet more respectful, as if he had said to himself: ‘This is my equal.’

That hour of tea, brought by Stack, a man with strange, understanding eyes and something monk-like in his look, seemed to her quite perfect. It was like no other hour she had ever spent, and at the end of it she knew she was in love. The tiny seed planted ten years before had flowered. This was such a marvel, so peculiar to one who at twenty-six had begun to think she would never be in love, that every now and then she drew in her breath and looked wonderingly at his face. Why on earth did she feel like this? It was absurd! And it was going to be painful, because he wasn’t going to love her. Why should he? And if he wasn’t, she mustn’t show, and how was she to help showing?

“When am I going to see you again?” he said, when she stood up to go.

“Do you want to?”

“Extraordinarily.”

“But why?”

“Why not? You’re the first lady I’ve spoken to for ten years. I’m not at all sure you’re not the first lady I’ve ever spoken to.”

“If we are going to see each other again, you mustn’t laugh at me.”

“Laugh at you! One couldn’t. So when?”

“Well! At present I’m sleeping in a foreign night-gown at Mount Street. By rights I ought to be at Condaford. But my sister’s going to be married in town next week, and my brother’s coming back from Egypt on Monday, so perhaps I’ll send for things and stay up. Where would you like to see me?”

“Will you come for a drive tomorrow? I haven’t been to Richmond or Hampton Court for years.”

“I’ve never been.”

“All right! I’ll pick you up in front of Foch at two o’clock, wet or fine.”

“I will be pleased to come, young sir.”

“Splendid!” And, suddenly bending, he raised her hand and put his lips to it.

“Highly courteous,” said Dinny. “Good-bye!”

❦

Chapter 4

Preoccupied with this stupendous secret, Dinny's first instinct was for solitude, but she was booked for dinner with the Adrian Cherrells. On her uncle's marriage with Diana Ferse the house of painful memories in Oakley Street had been given up, and they were economically installed in one of those spacious Bloomsbury squares now successfully regaining the gentility lost in the eighteen-thirties and forties. The locality had been chosen for its proximity to Adrian's 'bones,' for at his age he regarded as important every minute saved for the society of his wife. The robust virility which Dinny had predicted would accrue to her uncle from a year spent in the presence of Professor Hallorsen and New Mexico was represented by a somewhat deeper shade of brown in his creased cheeks, and a more frequent smile on his long face. It was a lasting pleasure to Dinny to think that she had given him the right advice, and that he had taken it. Diana, too, was fast regaining the sparkle which, before her marriage with poor Ferse, had made her a member of 'Society.' But the hopeless nature of Adrian's occupation and the extra time he needed from her had precluded her from any return to that sacred ring. She inclined more and more, in fact, to be a wife and mother. And this seemed natural to one with Dinny's partiality for her uncle. On her way there she debated whether or not to say what she had been doing. Having little liking for shifts and subterfuge, she decided to be frank. 'Besides,' she thought, 'a maiden in love always likes to talk about the object of her affections.' Again, if not to have a confidant became too wearing, Uncle Adrian was the obvious choice; partly because he knew at first hand something of the East, but chiefly because he was Uncle Adrian.

The first topics at dinner, however, were naturally Clare's marriage and Hubert's return. Dinny was somewhat exercised over her sister's choice. Sir Gerald (Jerry) Corven was forty, active and middle-sized, with a daring face. She recognised that he had great charm, and her fear was, rather, that he had too much. He was high in the Colonial service, one of those men who — people instinctively said — would go far. She wondered also whether Clare was not too like him, daring and brilliant, a bit of a gambler, and, of course, seventeen years younger. Diana, who had known him well, said:

"The seventeen years' difference is the best thing about it. Jerry wants steadying. If he can be a father to her as well, it may work. He's had infinite experiences. I'm glad it's Ceylon."

"Why?"

"He won't meet his past."

"Has he an awful lot of past?"

"My dear, he's very much in love at the moment; but with men like Jerry you never know; all that charm, and so much essential liking for thin ice."

"Marriage doth make cowards of us all," murmured Adrian.

"It won't have that effect on Jerry Corven; he takes to risk as a goldfish takes to mosquito larvae. Is Clare very smitten, Dinny?"

"Yes, but Clare loves thin ice, too."

"And yet," said Adrian, "I shouldn't call either of them really modern. They've both got brains and like using them."

"That's quite true, uncle. Clare gets all she can out of life, but she believes in life terribly. She might become another Hester Stanhope."

"Good for you, Dinny! But to be that she'd have to get rid of Gerald Corven first. And if I read Clare, I think she might have scruples."

Dinny regarded her uncle with wide eyes.

"Do you say that because you know Clare, or because you're a Cherrell, Uncle?"

"I think because SHE'S a Cherrell, my dear."

"Scruples," murmured Dinny. "I don't believe Aunt Em has them. Yet she's as much of a Cherrell as any of us."

"Em," said Adrian, "reminds me of nothing so much as a find of bones that won't join up. You can't say of what she's the skeleton. Scruples are emphatically co-ordinate."

"No! Adrian," murmured Diana, "not bones at dinner. When does Hubert arrive? I'm really anxious to see him and young Jean. After eighteen months of bliss in the Soudan which will be top dog?"

“Jean, surely,” said Adrian.

Dinny shook her head. “I don’t think so, Uncle.”

“That’s your sisterly pride.”

“No. Hubert’s got more continuity. Jean rushes at things and must handle them at once, but Hubert steers the course, I’m pretty sure. Uncle, where is a place called Darfur? And how do you spell it?”

“With an ‘r’ or without. It’s west of the Soudan; much of it is desert and pretty inaccessible, I believe. Why?”

“I was lunching today with Mr. Desert, Michael’s best man, you remember, and he mentioned it.”

“Has he been there?”

“I think he’s been everywhere in the Near East.”

“I know his brother,” said Diana, “Charles Desert, one of the most provocative of the younger politicians. He’ll almost certainly be Minister of Education in the next Tory Government. That’ll put the finishing touch to Lord Mullyon’s retirement. I’ve never met Wilfrid. Is he nice?”

“Well,” said Dinny, with what she believed to be detachment, “I only met him yesterday. He seems rather like a mince pie, you take a spoonful and hope. If you can eat the whole, you have a happy year.”

“I should like to meet the young man,” said Adrian. “He did good things in the war, and I know his verse.”

“Really, Uncle? I could arrange it; so far we are in daily communication.”

“Oh!” said Adrian, and looked at her. “I’d like to discuss the Hittite type with him. I suppose you know that what we are accustomed to regard as the most definitely Jewish characteristics are pure Hittite according to ancient Hittite drawings?”

“But weren’t they all the same stock, really?”

“By no means, Dinny. The Israelites were Arabs. What the Hittites were we have yet to discover. The modern Jew in this country and in Germany is probably more Hittite than Semite.”

“Do you know Mr. Jack Muskham, Uncle?”

“Only by repute. He’s a cousin of Lawrence’s and an authority on bloodstock. I believe he advocates a reintroduction of Arab blood into our race-horses. There’s something in it if you could get the very best strain. Has young Desert been to Nejd? You can still only get it there, I believe.”

“I don’t know. Where is Nejd?”

“Centre of Arabia. But Muskham will never get his idea adopted, there’s no tighter mind than the pukka racing man’s. He’s a pretty pure specimen himself, I believe, except for this bee in his bonnet.”

“Jack Muskham,” said Diana, “was once romantically in love with one of my sisters; it’s made him a misogynist.”

“H’m! That’s a bit cryptic!”

“He’s rather fine-looking, I think,” said Dinny.

“Wears clothes wonderfully and has a reputation for hating everything modern. I haven’t met him for years, but I used to know him rather well. Why, Dinny?”

“I just happened to see him the other day, and wondered.”

“Talking of Hittites,” said Diana, “I’ve often thought those very old Cornish families, like the Deserts, have a streak of Phoenician in them. Look at Lord Mullyon. There’s a queer type!”

“Fanciful, my love. You’d be more likely to find that streak in the simple folk. The Deserts must have married into non-Cornish stock for hundreds of years. The higher you go in the social scale, the less chance of preserving a primitive strain.”

“ARE they a very old family?” said Dinny.

“Hoary and pretty queer. But you know my views about old families, Dinny, so I won’t enlarge.”

Dinny nodded. She remembered very well that nerve-racked walk along Chelsea Embankment just after Ferse returned. And she looked affectionately into his face. It WAS nice to think that he had come into his own at last . . . .

When she got back to Mount Street that night her uncle and aunt had gone up, but the butler was seated in the hall. He rose as she entered.

“I didn’t know you had a key, Miss.”

“I’m terribly sorry, Blore, you were having such a nice snooze.”

“I was, Miss Dinny. After a certain age, as you’ll find out, one gets a liking for dropping off at improper moments. Now Sir Lawrence, he’s not a good sleeper, but, give you my word, if I go into his study almost any time when he’s at work, I’ll find him opening his eyes. And my Lady, she can do her eight hours, but I’ve known her to drop off when someone’s talking to her, especially the old Rector at Lippinghall, Mr. Tasburgh — a courtly old gentleman, but he has that effect. Even Mr. Michael — but then he’s in Parliament, and they get the ‘abit. Still, I do think, Miss, whether it was the war, or people not having any hope of anything, and running about so, that there’s a tendency, as the saying is, towards sleep. Well, it does you good. Give you my word, Miss; I was dead to the world before I had that forty winks, and now I could talk to you for hours.”

“That would be lovely, Blore. Only I find, so far, that I’m sleepiest at bedtime.”

“Wait till you’re married, Miss. Only I do hope you won’t be doing that yet awhile. I said to Mrs. Blore last night: ‘If Miss Dinny gets taken off, it’ll be the life and soul of the party gone!’ I’ve never seen much of Miss Clare, so that leaves me cold; but I heard my Lady yesterday telling you to go and find out for yourself how it was done, and, as I said to Mrs. Blore, ‘Miss Dinny’s like a daughter of the house, and’— well — you know my sentiments, Miss.”

“Dear Blore! I’m afraid I must go up now, I’ve had rather a tiring day.”

“Quite, Miss. Pleasant dreams!”

“Good-night!”

Pleasant dreams! Perhaps the dreams might be, but would reality? What uncharted country was she not entering with just a star to guide! And was it a fixed star, or some flaring comet? At least five men had wanted to marry her, all of whom she had felt she could sum up, so that a marriage would have been no great risk. And now she only wanted to marry one, but there he was, an absolutely uncertain quantity except that he could rouse in her a feeling she had never had before. Life was perverse. You dipped your finger in a lucky bag, and brought out — what? To-morrow she would walk with him. They would see trees and grass together; scenery and gardens, pictures, perhaps; the river, and fruit blossom. She would know at least how his spirit and her own agreed about many things she cared for. And yet, if she found they didn’t agree, would it make any difference to her feeling? It would not.

‘I understand now,’ she thought, ‘why we call lovers dotty. All I care about is that he should feel what I feel, and be dotty too. And of course he won’t — why should he?’

❦

CHAPTER 5

The drive to Richmond Park, over Ham Common and Kingston Bridge to Hampton Court, and back through Twickenham and Kew, was remarkable for alternation between silence and volubility. Dinny was, as it were, the observer, and left to Wilfrid all the piloting. Her feelings made her shy, and it was apparent that he was only able to expand if left to his free will — the last person in the world to be drawn out. They duly lost themselves in the maze at Hampton Court, where, as Dinny said,

"Only spiders who can spin threads out of themselves, or ghosts who can tails unfold, would have a chance."

On the way back they got out at Kensington Gardens, dismissed the hired car, and walked to the tea kiosk. Over the pale beverage he asked her suddenly whether she would mind reading his new poems in manuscript.

"Mind? I should love it."

"I want a candid opinion."

"You will get it," said Dinny. "When can I have them?"

"I'll bring them round to Mount Street and drop them in your letter-box after dinner."

"Won't you come in this time?"

He shook his head.

When he left her at Stanhope Gate, he said abruptly:

"It's been a simply lovely afternoon. Thank you!"

"It is for me to thank you."

"You! You've got more friends than quills upon the fretful porpentine. It's I who am the pelican."

"Adieu, pelican!"

"Adieu, flowering wilderness!"

The words seemed musical all the way down Mount Street.

A fat unstamped envelope was brought in about half-past nine with the last post. Dinny took it from Blore, and slipping it under The Bridge of San Luis Rey, went on listening to her aunt.

"When I was a girl I squeezed my own waist, Dinny. We suffered for a principle. They say it's comin' in again. I shan't do it, so hot and worryin'; but you'll have to."

"Not I."

"When the waist has settled down there'll be a lot of squeezin'."

"The really tight waist will never come in again, Auntie."

"And hats. In 1900 we were like eggstands with explodin' eggs in them. Cauliflowers and hydrangeas, and birds of a feather, enormous. They stuck out. The Parks were comparatively pure. Sea-green suits you, Dinny; you ought to be married in it."

"I think I'll go up, Aunt Em. I'm rather tired."

"That's eatin' so little."

"I eat enormously. Good-night, dear."

Without undressing she sat down to the poems, nervously anxious to like them, for she knew that he would see through any falsity. To her relief they had the tone she remembered in his other volumes, but were less bitter and more concerned with beauty. When she had finished the main sheaf, she came on a much longer poem entitled 'The Leopard,' wrapped round in a blank sheet of paper. Was it so wrapped to keep her from reading it; why, then, had he enclosed it? She decided that he had been doubtful, and wanted her verdict. Below the title was written the line:

> "Can the leopard change its spots?"

It was the story of a young monk, secretly without faith, sent on a proselytising expedition. Seized by infidels, and confronted with the choice between death or recantation, he recants and accepts the religion of his captors. The poem was seared with passages of such deep feeling that they hurt her. It had a depth and fervour which took her breath away; it was a paean in praise of contempt for convention faced with the stark reality of the joy in living, yet with a haunting moan of betrayal running through it. It swayed her this way and that; and she put it down with a feeling almost of reverence for one who could so express such a deep and tangled spiritual conflict. With that reverence were mingled a compassion for the stress he must have endured before he could have written this and a feeling, akin to that which mothers feel, of yearning to protect him from his disharmonies and violence.

They had arranged to meet the following day at the National Gallery, and she went there before time, taking the poems with her. He came on her in front of Gentile Bellini's 'Mathematician.' They stood for some time looking at it without a word.

"Truth, quality, and decorative effect. Have you read my stuff?"

"Yes. Come and sit down, I've got them here."

They sat down, and she gave him the envelope.

"Well?" he said; and she saw his lips quivering.

"Terribly good, I think."

"Really?"

"Even truly. One, of course, is much the finest."

"Which?"

Dinny's smile said: "You ask that?"

"The Leopard?"

"Yes. It hurt me, here."

"Shall I throw it out?"

By intuition she realised that on her answer he would act, and said feebly: "You wouldn't pay attention to what I said, would you?"

"What you say shall go."

"Then of course you can't throw it out. It's the finest thing you've done."

"Inshallah!"

"What made you doubt?"

"It's a naked thing."

"Yes," said Dinny, "naked — but beautiful. When a thing's naked it must be beautiful."

"Hardly the fashionable belief."

"Surely a civilised being naturally covers deformities and sores. There's nothing fine in being a savage that I can see, even in art."

"You run the risk of excommunication. Ugliness is a sacred cult now."

"Reaction from the chocolate box," murmured Dinny.

"Ah! Whoever invented those lids sinned against the holy ghost — he offended the little ones."

"Artists are children, you mean?"

"Well, aren't they? or would they carry on as they do?"

"Yes, they do seem to love toys. What gave you the idea for that poem?" His face had again that look of deep waters stirred, as when Muskham had spoken to them under the Foch statue.

"Tell you some day, perhaps. Shall we go on round?"

When they parted, he said: "To-morrow's Sunday. I shall be seeing you?"

"If you will."

"What about the Zoo?"

"No, not the Zoo. I hate cages."

"Quite right. The Dutch garden near Kensington Palace?"

"Yes."

And that made the fifth consecutive day of meeting.

For Dinny it was like a spell of good weather, when every night you go to sleep hoping it will last, and every morning wake up and rub your eyes seeing that it has.

Each day she responded to his: "Shall I see you tomorrow?" with an "If you will;" each day she concealed from everybody with care whom she was seeing, and how, and when; and it all seemed to her so unlike herself that she would think: 'Who is this young woman who goes out stealthily like this, and meets a young man, and comes back feeling as if she had been treading on air? Is it some kind of a long dream I'm having?' Only, in dreams one didn't eat cold chicken and drink tea.

The moment most illuminative of her state of mind was when Hubert and Jean walked into the hall at Mount Street, where they were to stay till after Clare's wedding. This first sight for eighteen months of her beloved brother should surely have caused her to feel tremulous. But she greeted him steady as a rock, even to the power of cool appraisement. He seemed extremely well, brown, and less thin, but more commonplace. She tried to think that was because he was now safe and married and restored to soldiering, but she knew that comparison with Wilfrid had to do with it. She seemed to know suddenly that in Hubert there had never been capacity for any deep spiritual conflict; he was of the type she knew so well, seeing the trodden path and without real question following. Besides, Jean made all the difference! One could never again be to him, or he to her, as before his marriage. Jean was brilliantly alive and glowing. They had come the whole way from Khartoum to Croydon by air with four stops. Dinny was troubled by the inattention which underlay her seeming absorption in their account of life out there, till a mention of Darfur made her prick her ears. Darfur was where something had happened to Wilfrid. There were still followers of the Mahdi there, she gathered. The personality of Jerry Corven was discussed. Hubert was enthusiastic about 'a job of work' he had done. Jean filled out the gap. The wife of a Deputy Commissioner had gone off her head about him. It was said that Jerry Corven had behaved badly.

"Well, well!" said Sir Lawrence, "Jerry's a privateer, and women ought not to go off their heads about him."

"Yes," said Jean. "It's silly to blame men nowadays."

"In old days," murmured Lady Mont, "men did the advancing and women were blamed; now women do it and the men are blamed."

The extraordinary consecutiveness of the speech struck with a silencing effect on every tongue, until she added: "I once saw two camels, d'you remember, Lawrence, so pretty."

Jean looked rather horrified, and Dinny smiled.

Hubert came back to the line. "I don't know," he said; "he's marrying our sister."

"Clare'll give and take," said Lady Mont. "It's only when their noses are curved. The Rector," she added to Jean, "says there's a Tasburgh nose. You haven't got it. It crinkles. Your brother Alan had it a little." And she looked at Dinny. "In China, too," she added. "I said he'd marry a purser's daughter."

"Good God, Aunt Em, he hasn't!" cried Jean.

"No. Very nice girls, I'm sure. Not like clergymen's."

"Thank you!"

"I mean the sort you find in the Park. They call themselves that when they want company. I thought everybody knew."

"Jean was rectory-bred, Aunt Em," said Hubert.

"But she's been married to you two years. Who was it said: 'And they shall multiply exceedin'ly'?"

"Moses?" said Dinny.

"And why not?"

Her eyes rested on Jean, who flushed. Sir Lawrence remarked quickly: "I hope Hilary will be as short with Clare as he was with you and Jean, Hubert. That was a record."

"Hilary preaches beautifully," said Lady Mont. "At Edward's death he preached on 'Solomon in all his glory.' Touchin'! And when we hung Casement, you remember — so stupid of us! — on the beam and the mote. We had it in our eye."

"If I could love a sermon," said Dinny, "it would be Uncle Hilary's."

"Yes," said Lady Mont, "he could borrow more barley-sugar than any little boy I ever knew and look like an angel. Your

Aunt Wilmet and I used to hold him upside down — like puppies, you know — hopin', but we never got it back."

"You must have been a lovely family, Aunt Em."

"Tryin'. Our father that was not in Heaven took care not to see us much. Our mother couldn't help it — poor dear! We had no sense of duty."

"And now you all have so much; isn't it queer?"

"Have I a sense of duty, Lawrence?"

"Emphatically not, Em."

"I thought so."

"But wouldn't you say as a whole, Uncle Lawrence, that the Cherrells have too much sense of duty?"

"How can they have TOO much?" said Jean.

Sir Lawrence fixed his monocle.

"I scent heresy, Dinny."

"Surely duty's narrowing, Uncle? Father and Uncle Lionel and Uncle Hilary, and even Uncle Adrian, always think first of what they ought to do. They despise their own wants. Very fine, of course, but rather dull."

Sir Lawrence dropped his eyeglass.

"Your family, Dinny," he said, "perfectly illustrate the mandarin. They hold the Empire together. Public schools, Osborne, Sandhurst; oh! ah! and much more. From generation to generation it begins in the home. Mother's milk with them. Service to Church and State — very interesting, very rare now, very admirable."

"Especially when they've kept on top by means of it," murmured Dinny.

"Shucks!" said Hubert: "As if anyone thought of that in the Services!"

"You don't think of it because you don't have to; but you would fast enough if you did have to."

"Somewhat cryptic, Dinny," put in Sir Lawrence; "you mean if anything threatened them, they'd think: 'We simply mustn't be removed, we're It.'"

"But are they It, Uncle?"

"With whom have you been associating, my dear?"

"Oh! no one. One must think sometimes."

"Too depressin'," said Lady Mont. "The Russian revolution, and all that."

Dinny was conscious that Hubert was regarding her as if thinking: 'What's come to Dinny?'

"If one wants to take out a linch-pin," he said, "one always can, but the wheel comes off."

"Well put, Hubert," said Sir Lawrence; "it's a mistake to think one can replace type or create it quickly. The sahib's born, not made — that is, if you take the atmosphere of homes as part of birth. And, if you ask me, he's dying out fast. A pity not to preserve him somehow; we might have National Parks for them, as they have for bisons."

"No," said Lady Mont, "I won't."

"What, Aunt Em?"

"Drink champagne on Wednesday, nasty bubbly stuff!"

"Must we have it at all, dear?"

"I'm afraid of Blore. He's so used. I might tell him not, but it'd be there."

"Have you heard of Hallorsen lately, Dinny?" asked Hubert suddenly.

"Not since Uncle Adrian came back. I believe he's in Central America."

"He WAS large," said Lady Mont. "Hilary's two girls, Sheila, Celia, and little Anne, five — I'm glad you're not to be, Dinny. It's superstition, of course."

Dinny leaned back and the light fell on her throat.

"To be a bridesmaid once is quite enough, Aunt Em . . ."

When next morning she met Wilfrid at the Wallace Collection, she said:

"Would you by any chance like to be at Clare's wedding tomorrow?"

“No hat and no black tails; I gave them to Stack.”

“I remember how you looked, perfectly. You had a grey cravat and a gardenia.”

“And you had on sea-green.”

“Eau-de-nil. I’d like you to have seen my family, though, they’ll all be there; and we could have discussed them afterwards.”

“I’ll turn up among the ‘also ran’ and keep out of sight.”

‘Not from me,’ thought Dinny. So she would not have to go a whole day without seeing him!

With every meeting he seemed less, as it were, divided against himself; and sometimes would look at her so intently that her heart would beat. When she looked at him, which was seldom, except when he wasn’t aware, she was very careful to keep her gaze limpid. How fortunate that one always had that pull over men, knew when they were looking at one, and was able to look at them without their knowing!

When they parted this time, he said: “Come down to Richmond again on Thursday. I’ll pick you up at Foch — two o’clock as before.”

And she said: “Yes.”

❦

Chapter 6

Clare Cherrell's wedding, in Hanover Square, was 'fashionable' and would occupy with a list of names a quarter of a column in the traditional prints. As Dinny said:

"So delightful for them!"

With her father and mother Clare came to Mount Street from Condaford overnight. Busy with her younger sister to the last, and feeling an emotion humorously disguised, Dinny arrived with Lady Cherrell at the Church not long before the bride. She lingered to speak to an old retainer at the bottom of the aisle, and caught sight of Wilfrid. He was on the bride's side, far back, gazing at her. She gave him a swift smile, then passed up the aisle to join her mother in the left front pew. Michael whispered as she went by:

"People HAVE rolled up, haven't they?"

They had. Clare was well known and popular, Jerry Corven even better known, if not so popular. Dinny looked round at the "audience"— one could never credit a wedding with the word congregation. Irregular and with a good deal of character, their faces refused generalisation. They looked like people with convictions and views of their own. The men conformed to no particular type, having none of that depressing sameness which used to characterise the German officer caste. With herself and her mother in the front pew were Hubert and Jean, Uncle Lawrence and Aunt Em; in the pew behind sat Adrian with Diana, Mrs. Hilary, and Lady Alison. Dinny caught sight of Jack Muskham at the end of two or three rows back, tall, well-dressed, rather bored-looking. He nodded to her, and she thought: Odd, his remembering me!

On the Corven side of the aisle were people of quite as much diversity of face and figure. Except Jack Muskham, the bridegroom, and his best man, hardly a man gave the impression of being well-dressed or of having thought about his clothes. But from their faces Dinny received the impression that they were all safe in the acceptance of a certain creed. Not one gave her the same feeling that Wilfrid's face brought of spiritual struggle and disharmony, of dreaming, suffering, and discovery. 'I'm fanciful,' she thought. And her eyes came to rest on Adrian, who was just behind her. He was smiling quietly above that goatee beard of his, which lengthened his thin brown visage. 'He has a dear face,' she thought, 'not conceited, like the men who wear those pointed beards as a rule. He always will be the nicest man in the world.' And she whispered: "Fine collection of bones here, Uncle."

"I should like your skeleton, Dinny."

"I mean to be burned and scattered. H'ssh!"

The choir was coming in, followed by the officiating priests. Jerry Corven turned. Those lips smiling like a cat's beneath that thin-cut moustache, those hardwood features and daring, searching eyes! Dinny thought with sudden dismay: 'How could Clare! But after all I'd think the same of any face but one, just now. I'm going potty.' Then Clare came swaying up the aisle on her father's arm! 'Looking a treat! Bless her!' A gush of emotion caught Dinny by the throat, and she slipped her hand into her mother's. Poor mother! She was awfully pale! Really the whole thing was stupid! People WOULD make it long and trying and emotional. Thank goodness Dad's old black tail-coat really looked quite decent — she had taken out the stains with ammonia; and he stood as she had seen him when reviewing troops. If Uncle Hilary happened to have a button wrong, Dad would notice it. Only there wouldn't be any buttons. She longed fervently to be beside Wilfrid away at the back. He would have nice unorthodox thoughts, and they would soothe each other with private smiles.

Now the bridesmaids! Hilary's two girls, her cousins Monica and Joan, slender and keen, Little Celia Moriston, fair as a seraph (if that was female), Sheila Ferse, dark and brilliant; and toddly little Anne — a perfect dumpling!

Once on her knees, Dinny quietened down. She remembered how they used to kneel, night-gowned, against their beds, when Clare was a tiny of three and she herself a 'big girl' of six. She used to hang on to the bed-edge by the chin so as to save the knees; and how ducky Clare had looked when she held her hands up like the child in the Reynolds picture! 'That man,' thought Dinny, 'will hurt her! I know he will!' Her thoughts turned again to Michael's wedding all those ten years ago. There she had stood, not three yards from where she was kneeling now, alongside a girl she didn't know — some relative of Fleur's. And her eyes, taking in this and that with the fluttered eagerness of youth, had lighted on Wilfrid standing sideways, keeping watch on Michael. Poor Michael! He had seemed rather daft that day, from excessive triumph! She could remember quite distinctly thinking: 'Michael and his lost angel!' There had been in Wilfrid's face something which suggested that he had been cast out of happiness, a scornful and yet yearning look. That was only two years after the Armistice, and she knew now what utter disillusionment and sense of wreckage he had suffered after the war. He had been talking to her freely the last two days; had even dwelled with humorous contempt on his infatuation for Fleur eighteen months after that marriage which had sent him flying off to the East. Dinny, but ten when the war broke out, remembered it chiefly as meaning that mother had been anxious about father, had knitted all the time, and been a sort of sock depot; that everybody hated the Germans; that she had been forbidden sweets because they were made with saccharine, and finally the excitement and grief when Hubert went off to the war and letters from him didn't often come. From Wilfrid these last few days she had gathered more clearly and poignantly than ever yet what the war had meant to some who, like Michael and himself, had been in the thick of it for years. With his gift of expression he had made her feel the tearing away of roots, the hopeless change of values, and the gradual profound mistrust of all that age and tradition had decreed and sanctified. He had got over the war now, he said. He might think so, but there were in him still torn odds and ends of nerves not yet mended up. She never saw him without wanting to pass a cool hand over his forehead.

The ring was on now, the fateful words said, the exhortations over; they were going to the vestry. Her mother and Hubert followed. Dinny sat motionless, her eyes fixed on the East window. Marriage! What an impossible state, except — with a single being.

A voice in her ear said:

"Lend me your hanky, Dinny. Mine's soakin', and your uncle's is blue."

Dinny passed her a scrap of lawn, and surreptitiously powdered her own nose.

"Be done at Condaford, Dinny," continued her aunt. "All these people — so fatiguin', rememberin' who they aren't. That was his mother, wasn't it? She isn't dead, then."

Dinny was thinking: 'Shall I get another look at Wilfrid?'

"When I was married everybody kissed me," whispered her aunt, "so promiscuous. I knew a girl who married to get kissed by his best man. Aggie Tellusson. I wonder. They're comin' back!"

Yes! How well Dinny knew that bride's smile! How could Clare feel it, not married to Wilfrid! She fell in behind her father and mother, alongside Hubert, who whispered: "Buck up, old girl, it might be a lot worse!" Divided from him by a secret that absorbed her utterly, Dinny squeezed his arm. And, even as she did so, saw Wilfrid, with his arms folded, looking at her. Again she gave him a swift smile, and then all was hurly-burly, till she was back at Mount Street and Aunt Em saying to her, just within the drawing-room door:

"Stand by me, Dinny, and pinch me in time." Then came the entry of the guests and her aunt's running commentary.

"It IS his mother — kippered. Here's Hen Bentworth! . . . Hen, Wilmet's here, she's got a bone to pick. . . . How d'you do? Yes, isn't it — so tirin'. . . . How d'you do? The ring was so well done, don't you think? Conjurers! . . . Dinny, who's this? . . . How do you do? Lovely! No! Cherrell. Not as it's spelled, you know — so awkward! . . . The presents are over there by the man with the boots, tryin' not to. Silly, I think! But they will. . . . How d'you do? You ARE Jack Muskham? Lawrence dreamed the other night you were goin' to burst. . . . Dinny, get me Fleur, too, she knows everybody."

Dinny went in search of Fleur and found her talking to the bridegroom.

As they went back to the door Fleur said: "I saw Wilfrid Desert in the church. How did he come there?"

Really Fleur was too sharp for anything!

"Here you are!" said Lady Mont. "Which of these three comin' is the Duchess? The scraggy one. Ah! . . . How d'you do? Yes, charmin'. Such a bore, weddin's! Fleur, take the Duchess to have some presents. . . . How d'you do? No, my brother Hilary. He does it well, don't you think? Lawrence says he keeps his eye on the ball. Do have an ice, they're downstairs. . . . Dinny, is this one after the presents, d'you think? — Oh! How d'you do, Lord Beevenham? My sister-inlaw ought to be doin' this. She ratted. Jerry's in there. . . . Dinny, who was it said: 'The drink, the drink!' Hamlet? He said such a lot. Not Hamlet? . . . Oh! How d'you do? . . . How d'you do? . . . How d'you do, or don't you? Such a crush! . . . Dinny, your hanky!"

"I've put some powder on it, Auntie."

"There! Have I streaked? . . . How d'you do? Isn't it silly, the whole thing? As if they wanted anybody but themselves, you know. . . . Oh! Here's Adrian! Your tie's on one side, dear. Dinny, put it right. How d'you do? Yes, they are. I don't like flowers at funerals — poor things, lyin' there, and dyin'. . . . How's your dear dog? You haven't one? Quite! . . . Dinny, you ought to have pinched me. . . . How d'you do? How d'you do? I was tellin' my niece she ought to pinch me. Do you get faces right? No. How nice! How d'you do? How d'you do? How d'you do? . . . That's three! Dinny, who's the throwback just comin'? Oh! . . . How d'you do? So you got here? I thought you were in China. . . . Dinny, remind me to ask your uncle if it was China. He gave me such a dirty look. Could I give the rest a miss? Who is it's always sayin' that? Tell Blore 'the drink,' Dinny. Here's a covey! . . . How d'you do? . . . How de do? . . . How do? . . . Do! . . . Do! . . . How? . . . So sweet! . . . Dinny, I want to say: Blast!"

On her errand to Blore Dinny passed Jean talking to Michael, and wondered how anyone so vivid and brown had patience to stand about in this crowd. Having found Blore, she came back. Michael's queer face, which she thought grew pleasanter every year, as if from the deepening impress of good feeling, looked strained and unhappy.

"I don't believe it, Jean," she heard him say.

"Well," said Jean, "the bazaars do buzz with rumour. Still, without fire of some sort there's never smoke."

"Oh! yes, there is — plenty. He's back in England, anyway. Fleur saw him in the church today. I shall ask him."

"I wouldn't," said Jean: "if it's true he'll probably tell you, and if it isn't, it'll only worry him for nothing."

So! They were talking of Wilfrid. How find out why without appearing to take interest? And suddenly she thought: 'Even if I could, I wouldn't. Anything that matters he must tell me himself. I won't hear it from anyone else.' But she felt disturbed, for instinct was always warning her of something heavy and strange on his mind.

When that long holocaust of sincerity was over and the bride had gone, she subsided into a chair in her uncle's study, the only room which showed no signs of trouble. Her father and mother had started back to Condaford, surprised that she wasn't coming too. It was not like her to cling to London when the tulips were out at home, the lilacs coming on, the apple blossom thickening every day. But the thought of not seeing Wilfrid daily had become a positive pain.

'I HAVE got it badly,' she thought, 'worse than I ever believed was possible. Whatever is going to happen to me?'

She was lying back with her eyes closed when her uncle's voice said:

"Ah! Dinny, how pleasant after those hosts of Midian! The mandarin in full feather! Did you know a quarter of them? Why do people go to weddings? A registrar's, or under the stars, there's no other way of preserving decency. Your poor aunt has gone to bed. There's a lot to be said for Mohammedanism, except that it's the fashion now to limit it to one wife, and she not in Purdah. By the way, there's a story going round that young Desert's become a Moslem. Did he say anything to you about it?"

Dinny raised her startled head.

"I've only twice known it happen to fellows in the East, and they were Frenchmen and wanted harems."

"Money's the only essential for that, Uncle."

"Dinny, you're getting cynical. Men like to have the sanction of religion. But that wouldn't be Desert's reason; a fastidious creature, if I remember."

"Does religion matter, Uncle, so long as people don't interfere with each other?"

"Well, some Moslems' notions of woman's rights are a little primitive. He's liable to wall her up if she's unfaithful. There was a sheikh when I was in Marakesh — gruesome."

Dinny shuddered.

"'From time immemorial,' as they say," went on Sir Lawrence, "religion has been guilty of the most horrifying deeds that have happened on this earth. I wonder if young Desert has taken up with it to get him access to Mecca. I shouldn't think he believes anything. But you never know — it's a queer family."

Dinny thought: 'I can't and won't talk about him.'

"What proportion of people in these days do you think really have religion, Uncle?"

"In northern countries? Very difficult to say. In this country ten to fifteen per cent of the adults, perhaps. In France and southern countries, where there's a peasantry, more, at least on the surface."

"What about the people who came this afternoon?"

"Most of them would be shocked if you said they weren't Christians, and most of them would be still more shocked if you asked them to give half their goods to the poor, and that would only make them well disposed Pharisees, or was it Sadducees?"

“Are you a Christian, Uncle Lawrence?”

“No, my dear; if anything a Confucian, who, as you know, was simply an ethical philosopher. Most of our caste in this country, if they only knew it, are Confucian rather than Christian. Belief in ancestors, and tradition, respect for parents, honesty, moderation of conduct, kind treatment of animals and dependents, absence of self-obtrusion, and stoicism in face of pain and death.”

“What more,” murmured Dinny, wrinkling her nose, “does one want except the love of beauty?”

“Beauty? That’s a matter of temperament.”

“But doesn’t it divide people more than anything?”

“Yes, but willy nilly. You can’t make yourself love a sunset.”

“‘You are wise, Uncle Lawrence, the young niece said.’ I shall go for a walk and shake the wedding-cake down.”

“And I shall stay here, Dinny, and sleep the champagne off.”

Dinny walked and walked. It seemed an odd thing to be doing alone. But the flowers in the Park were pleasing, and the waters of the Serpentine shone and were still, and the chestnut trees were coming alight. And she let herself go on her mood, and her mood was of love.

❦

Chapter 7

Looking back on that second afternoon in Richmond Park, Dinny never knew whether she had betrayed herself before he said so abruptly:

"If you believe in it, Dinny, will you marry me?"

It had so taken her breath away that she sat growing paler and paler, then colour came to her face with a rush.

"I'm wondering why you ask me. You know nothing of me."

"You're like the East. One loves it at first sight, or not at all, and one never knows it any better."

Dinny shook her head: "Oh! I am not mysterious."

"I should never get to the end of you; no more than of one of those figures over the staircase in the Louvre. Please answer me, Dinny."

She put her hand in his, nodded, and said: "That must be a record."

At once his lips were on hers, and when they left her lips she fainted.

This was without exception the most singular action of her life so far, and, coming to almost at once, she said so.

"It's the sweetest thing you could have done."

If she had thought his face strange before, what was it now? The lips, generally contemptuous, were parted and quivering, the eyes, fixed on her, glowed; he put up his hand and thrust back his hair, so that she noticed for the first time a scar at the top of his forehead. Sun, moon, stars, and all the works of God stood still while they were looking each into the other's face.

At last she said:

"The whole thing is most irregular. There's been no courtship; not even a seduction."

He laughed and put his arm around her. Dinny whispered:

"'Thus the two young people sat wrapped in their beatitude.' My poor mother!"

"Is she a nice woman?"

"A darling. Luckily she's fond of father."

"What is your father like?"

"The nicest General I know."

"Mine is a hermit. You won't have to realise him. My brother is an ass. My mother ran away when I was three, and I have no sisters. It's going to be hard for you, with a nomadic, unsatisfactory brute like me."

"'Where thou goest, I go.' We seem to be visible to that old gentleman over there. He'll write to the papers about the awful sights to be seen in Richmond Park."

"Never mind!"

"I don't. There's only one first hour. And I was beginning to think I should never have it."

"Never been in love?"

She shook her head.

"How wonderful! When shall it be, Dinny?"

"Don't you think our families ought first to know?"

"I suppose so. They won't want you to marry me."

"Certainly you are my social superior, young sir."

"One can't be superior to a family that goes back to the twelfth century. We only go back to the fourteenth. A wanderer and a writer of bitter verse. They'll know I shall want to cart you off to the East. Besides, I only have fifteen hundred a year, and practically no expectations."

"Fifteen hundred a year! Father may be able to spare me two — he's doing it for Clare."

"Well, thank God there'll be no obstacle from your fortune."

Dinny turned to him, and there was a touching confidence in her eyes.

"Wilfrid, I heard something about your having turned Moslem. That wouldn't matter to me."

"It would matter to them."

His face had become drawn and dark. She clasped his hand tight in both of hers.

"Was that poem 'The Leopard' about yourself?"

He tried to draw his hand away.

"Was it?"

"Yes. Out in Darfur. Fanatical Arabs. I recanted to save my skin. Now you can chuck me." Exerting all her strength, Dinny pulled his hand to her heart.

"What you did or didn't do is nothing. You are YOU!" To her dismay and yet relief, he fell on his knees and buried his face in her lap.

"Darling!" she said. Protective tenderness almost annulled the wilder, sweeter feeling in her.

"Does anyone know of that but me?"

"It's known in the bazaars that I've turned Moslem, but it's supposed of my free will."

"I know there are things you would die for, Wilfrid, and that's enough. Kiss me!"

The afternoon drew on while they sat there. The shadows of the oak trees splayed up to their log; the crisp edge of the sunlight receded over the young fern: some deer passed, moving slowly towards water. The sky, of a clear bright blue, with white promising clouds, began to have the evening look; a sappy scent of fern fronds and horse chestnut bloom crept in slow whiffs; and dew began to fall. The sane and heavy air, the grass so green, the blue distance, the branching, ungraceful solidity of the oak trees, made a trysting hour as English as lovers ever loved in.

"I shall break into cockney if we sit here much longer," said Dinny, at last; "besides, dear heart, 'fast falls the dewy eve.'" . . .

Late that evening in the drawing-room at Mount Street her aunt said suddenly:

"Lawrence, look at Dinny! Dinny, you're in love."

"You take me flat aback, Aunt Em. I am."

"Who is it?"

"Wilfrid Desert."

"I used to tell Michael that young man would get into trouble. Does he love you too?"

"He is good enough to say so."

"Oh! dear. I WILL have some lemonade. Which of you proposed?"

"As a fact, he did."

"His brother has no issue, they say."

"For heaven's sake, Aunt Em!"

"Why not? Kiss me!"

But Dinny was regarding her uncle across her aunt's shoulder.

He had said nothing.

Later, he stopped her as she was following out.

"Are your eyes open, Dinny?"

"Yes, this is the ninth day."

"I won't come the heavy uncle; but you know the drawbacks?"

"His religion; Fleur; the East? What else?"

Sir Lawrence shrugged his thin shoulders.

"That business with Fleur sticks in my gizzard, as old Forsyte would have said. One who could do that to the man he has led to the altar can't have much sense of loyalty."

Colour rose in her cheeks.

"Don't be angry, my dear, we're all too fond of you."

"He's been quite frank about everything, Uncle."

Sir Lawrence sighed.

"Then there's no more to be said, I suppose. But I beg you to look forward before it's irrevocable. There's a species of china which it's almost impossible to mend. And I think you're made of it."

Dinny smiled and went up to her room, and instantly she began to look back.

The difficulty of imagining the physical intoxication of love was gone. To open one's soul to another seemed no longer impossible. Love stories she had read, love affairs she had watched, all seemed savourless compared with her own. And she had only known him nine days, except for that glimpse ten years ago! Had she had what was called a complex all this time? Or was love always sudden like this? A wild flower seeding on a wild wind?

Long she sat half dressed, her hands clasped between her knees, her head drooping, steeped in the narcotic of remembrance, and with a strange feeling that all the lovers in the world were sitting within her on that bed bought at Pullbred's in the Tottenham Court Road.

❦

Chapter 8

Condaford resented this business of love, and was, with a fine rain, as if sorrowing for the loss of its two daughters.

Dinny found her father and mother elaborately ‘making no bones’ over the loss of Clare, and only hoped they would continue the motion in her own case. Feeling, as she said, ‘very towny,’ she prepared for the ordeal of disclosure by waterproofing herself and going for a tramp. Hubert and Jean were expected in time for dinner, and she wished to kill all her birds with one stone. The rain on her face, the sappy fragrance, the call of the cuckoos, and that state of tree when each has leaves in different stage of opening, freshened her body but brought a little ache to her heart. Entering a covert, she walked along a ride. The trees were beech and ash, with here and there an English yew, the soil being chalky. A woodpecker’s constant tap was the only sound, for the rain was not yet heavy enough for leaf-dripping to have started. Since babyhood she had been abroad but three times — to Italy, to Paris, to the Pyrenees, and had always come home more in love with England and Condaford than ever. Henceforth her path would lie she knew not where; there would, no doubt, be sand, fig-trees, figures by wells, flat roofs, voices calling the Muezzin, eyes looking through veils. But surely Wilfrid would feel the charm of Condaford and not mind if they spent time there now and then. His father lived in a show place, half shut up and never shown, which gave everyone the blues. And that, apart from London and Eton, was all he seemed to know of England, for he had been four years away in the war and eight years away in the East.

‘For me to discover England to him,’ she thought; ‘for him to discover the East to me.’

A gale of last November had brought down some beech trees. Looking at their wide flat roots exposed, Dinny remembered Fleur saying that selling timber was the only way to meet death duties. But Dad was only sixty-two! Jean’s cheeks the night of their arrival, when Aunt Em quoted the ‘multiply exceedingly.’ A child coming! Surely a son. Jean was the sort to have sons. Another generation of Cherrells in direct line! If Wilfrid and she had a child! What then? One could not wander about with babes. A tremor of insecurity went through her. The future, how uncharted! A squirrel crossed close to her still figure and scampered up a trunk. Smiling, she watched it, lithe, red, bushy-tailed. Thank God, Wilfrid cared for animals! ‘When to God’s fondouk the donkeys are taken.’ Condaford, its bird life, woods and streams, mullions, magnolias, fantails, pastures green, surely he would like it! But her father and mother, Hubert and Jean; would he like them? Would they like him? They would not — too unshackled, too fitful, and too bitter; all that was best in him he hid away, as if ashamed of it; and his yearning for beauty they would not understand! And his change of religion, even though they would not know what he had told her, would seem to them strange and disconcerting!

Condaford Grange had neither butler nor electric light, and Dinny chose the moment when the maids had set decanters and dessert on the polished chestnut wood, lit by candles.

“Sorry to be personal,” she said, quite suddenly; “but I’m engaged.”

No one answered. Each of those four was accustomed to say and think — not always the same thing — that Dinny was the ideal person to marry, so none was happier for the thought that she was going to be married. Then Jean said:

“To whom, Dinny?”

“Wilfrid Desert, the second son of Lord Mullyon — he was Michael’s best man.”

“Oh! but —!”

Dinny was looking hard at the other three. Her father’s face was impassive, as was natural, for he did not know the young man from Adam; her mother’s gentle features wore a fluttered and enquiring look; Hubert’s an air as if he were biting back vexation.

Then Lady Cherrell said: “But, Dinny, when did you meet him?”

“Only ten days ago, but I’ve seen him every day since. I’m afraid it’s a first-sight case like yours, Hubert. We remembered each other from Michael’s wedding.”

Hubert looked at his plate. “You know he’s become a Moslem, or so they say in Khartoum.”

Dinny nodded.

“What!” said the General.

“That’s the story, sir.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know, I’ve never seen him. He’s been a lot about in the East.”

On the point of saying: ‘One might just as well be Moslem as Christian, if one’s not a believer,’ Dinny stopped. It was scarcely a testimonial to character.

“I can’t understand a man changing his religion,” said the General bluntly.

“There doesn’t seem to be much enthusiasm,” murmured Dinny.

“My dear, how can there be when we don’t know him?”

“No, of course, Mother. May I ask him down? He CAN support a wife; and Aunt Em says his brother has no issue.”

“Dinny!” said the General.

“I’m not serious, darling.”

“What is serious,” said Hubert, “is that he seems to be a sort of Bedouin — always wandering about.”

“Two can wander about, Hubert.”

“You’ve always said you hate to be away from Condaford.”

“I remember when you said you couldn’t see anything in marriage, Hubert. And I’m sure both you and Father said that at one time, Mother. Have any of you said it since?”

“Cat!”

With that simple word Jean closed the scene.

But at bedtime in her mother’s room, Dinny said:

“May I ask Wilfrid down, then?”

“Of course, when you like. We shall be only too anxious to see him.”

“I know it’s a shock, Mother, coming so soon after Clare; still, you did expect me to go some time.”

Lady Cherrell sighed: “I suppose so.”

“I forgot to say that he’s a poet, a real one.”

“A poet?” repeated her mother, as if this had put the finishing touch to her disquiet.

“There are quite a lot in Westminster Abbey. But don’t worry, HE’LL never be there.”

“Difference in religion is serious, Dinny, especially when it comes to children.”

“Why, Mother? No child has any religion worth speaking of till it’s grown up, and then it can choose for itself. Besides, by the time my children, if I have any, are grown up, the question will be academic.”

“Dinny!”

“It’s nearly so even now, except in ultra-religious circles. Ordinary people’s religion becomes more and more just ethical.”

“I don’t know enough about it to say, and I don’t think you do.”

“Mother, dear, stroke my head.”

“Oh! Dinny, I do hope you’ve chosen wisely.”

“Darling, it chose me.”

That she perceived was not the way to reassure her mother, but as she did not know one, she took her good-night kiss and went away.

In her room she sat down and wrote:

“Condaford Grange: Friday.

“DARLING,

“This is positively and absolutely my first love-letter, so you see I don’t know how to express myself. I think I will just say ‘I love you’ and leave it at that. I have spread the good tidings. They have, of course, left everyone guessing, and anxious to see you as soon as possible. When will you come? Once you are here the whole thing will seem to me less like a very real and very lovely dream. This is quite a simple place. Whether we should live in style if we could, I can’t say. But three maids, a groom-chauffeur, and two gardeners are all our staff. I believe you will like my mother, and I don’t believe you will get on very well with my father or brother, though I expect his wife Jean will tickle your poetic fancy, she's such a vivid creature. Condaford itself I'm sure you'll love. It has the real 'old' feeling. We can go riding; and I want to walk and talk with you and show you my pet nooks and corners. I hope the sun will shine, as you love it so much. For me almost any sort of day does down here; and absolutely any will do if I can be with you. The room you will have is away by itself and supernaturally quiet; you go up to it by five twisty steps, and it's called the priest's room, because Anthony Charwell, brother of the Gilbert who owned Condaford under Elizabeth, was walled up there and fed from a basket let down nightly to his window. He was a conspicuous Catholic priest, and Gilbert was a Protestant, but he put his brother first, as any decent body would. When he'd been there three months they took the wall down one night, and got him across country all the way south to the Beaulieu river and 'aboard the lugger.' The wall was put up again to save appearances and only done away with by my great-grandfather, who was the last of us to have any money to speak of. It seemed to prey on his nerves, so he got rid of it. They still speak of him in the village, probably because he drove four-inhand. There's a bath-room at the bottom of the twisty steps. The window was enlarged, of course and the view's jolly from it, especially now, at lilac and apple-blossom time. My own room, if it interests you to know, is somewhat cloistral and narrow, but it looks straight over the lawns to the hill-rise and the woods beyond. I've had it ever since I was seven, and I wouldn't change for anything, until you're making me

'brooches and toys for my delight
Of birds' song at morning and starshine at night.'

I almost think that little 'Stevenson' is my favourite poem; so you see, in spite of my homing tendency, I must have a streak of the wanderer in me. Dad, by the way, has a great feeling for Nature, likes beasts and birds and trees. I think most soldiers do — it's rather odd. But, of course, their love is on the precise and knowledgeable rather than the aesthetic side. Any dreaminess they incline to look on as 'a bit barmy.' I have been wondering whether to put my copies of your poems under their noses. On the whole I don't think; they might take you too seriously. There is always something about a person more ingratiating than his writings. I don't expect to sleep much to-night, for this is the first day that I haven't seen you since the world began. Goodnight, my dear, be blessed and take my kiss.

"Your Dinny.

"P.S. — I have looked you out the photo where I approximate most to the angels, or rather where my nose turns up least — to send tomorrow. In the meantime here are two snaps. And when, sir, do I get some of you?

"D."

And that was the end of this to her far from perfect day.

❦

Chapter 9

Sir Lawrence Mont, recently elected to Burton's Club whereon he had resigned from the Aeroplane, retaining besides only 'Snooks' (so-called), The Coffee House and the Parthenæum, was accustomed to remark that, allowing himself another ten years of life, it would cost him twelve shillings and sixpence every time he went into any of them.

He entered Burton's, however, on the afternoon after Dinny had told him of her engagement, took up a list of the members, and turned to D. 'Hon. Wilfrid Desert.' Quite natural, seeing the Club's pretension to the monopoly of travellers. "Does Mr. Desert ever come in here?" he said to the porter.

"Yes, Sir Lawrence, he's been in this last week; before that I don't remember him for years."

"Usually abroad. When does he come in as a rule?"

"For dinner, mostly, Sir Lawrence."

"I see. Is Mr. Muskham in?"

The porter shook his head. "Newmarket today, Sir Lawrence."

"Oh! Ah! How on earth you remember everything!"

"Matter of 'abit, Sir Lawrence."

"Wish I had it." Hanging up his hat, he stood for a moment before the tape in the hall. Unemployment and taxation going up all the time, and more money to spend on cars and sports than ever. A pretty little problem! He then sought the Library as the room where he was least likely to see anybody; and the first body he saw was that of Jack Muskham, who was talking, in a voice hushed to the level of the locality, to a thin dark little man in a corner.

'That,' thought Sir Lawrence, cryptically, 'explains to me why I never find a lost collar-stud. My friend the porter was so certain Jack would be at Newmarket, and not under that chest of drawers, that he took him for someone else when he came in.'

Reaching down a volume of Burton's Arabian Nights, he rang for tea. He was attending to neither when the two in the corner rose and came up to him.

"Don't get up, Lawrence," said Jack Muskham with some languor; "Telfourd Yule, my cousin Sir Lawrence Mont."

"I've read thrillers of yours, Mr. Yule," said Sir Lawrence, and thought: 'Queer-looking little cuss!'

The thin, dark, smallish man, with a face rather like a monkey's, grinned. "Truth whips fiction out of the field," he said.

"Yule," said Jack Muskham, with his air of superiority to space and time, "has been out in Arabia, going into the question of how to corkscrew a really pure-strain Arab mare or two out of them for use here. It's always baffled us, you know. Stallions, yes; mares never. It's much the same now in Nejd as when Palgrave wrote. Still, we think we've got a rise. The owner of the best strain wants an aeroplane, and if we throw in a billiard table we believe he'll part with at least one daughter of the sun."

"Good God!" said Sir Lawrence. "By what base means? We're all Jesuits, Jack!"

"Yule has seen some queer things out there. By the way, there's one I want to talk about. May we sit down?"

He stretched his long body out in a long chair, and the dark little man perched himself on another, with his black twinkling eyes fixed on Sir Lawrence, who had come to uneasy attention without knowing why.

"When," said Jack Muskham, "Yule here was in the Arabian desert, he heard a vague yarn among some Bedouins about an Englishman having been held up somewhere by Arabs and forced to become a Moslem. He had rather a row with them, saying no Englishman would do that. But when he was back in Egypt he went flying into the Libyan desert, met another lot of Bedouins coming from the south, and came on precisely the same yarn, only more detailed, because they said it happened in Darfur, and they even had the man's name — Desert. Then, when he was up in Khartoum, Yule found it was common talk that young Desert had changed his religion. Naturally he put two and two together. But there's all the difference in the world, of course, between voluntarily swapping religions and doing it at the pistol's point. An Englishman who does that lets down the lot of us."

Sir Lawrence, who during this recital had tried every motion for his monocle with which he was acquainted, dropped it and said: "But, my dear Jack, if a man is rash enough to become a Mohammedan in a Mohammedan country, do you suppose for a minute that gossip won't say he was forced to?"

Yule, who had wriggled on to the very verge of his chair, said:

"*I* thought that; but the second account was extremely positive. Even to the month and the name of the Sheikh who forced the recantation; and I found that Mr. Desert had in fact returned from Darfur soon after the month mentioned. There may be nothing in it; but whether there is or not, I needn't tell you that an undenied story of that kind grows by telling and does a lot of harm, not only to the man himself, but to our prestige. There seems to me a sort of obligation on one to let Mr. Desert know what the Bedawi are spreading about him."

"Well, he's over here," said Sir Lawrence, gravely.

"I know," said Jack Muskham, "I saw him the other day, and he's a member of this Club."

Through Sir Lawrence were passing waves of infinite dismay. What a sequel to Dinny's ill-starred announcement! To his ironic, detached personality, capricious in its likings, Dinny was precious. She embroidered in a queer way his plain-washed feelings about women; as a young man he might even have been in love with her, instead of being merely her uncle by marriage. During this silence he was fully conscious that both the other two were thoroughly uncomfortable. And the knowledge of their disquiet deepened the significance of the matter in an odd way.

At last he said: "Desert was my boy's best man. I'd like to talk to Michael about it, Jack. Mr. Yule will say nothing further at present, I hope."

"Not on your life," said Yule. "I hope to God there's nothing in it. I like his verse."

"And you, Jack?"

"I don't care for the look of him; but I'd refuse to believe that of an Englishman till it was plainer than the nose on my face, which is saying a good bit. You and I must be getting on, Yule, if we're to catch that train to Royston."

This speech of Jack Muskham's further disturbed Sir Lawrence, left alone in his chair. It seemed so entirely to preclude leniency of judgment among the 'pukka sahibs' if the worst were true.

At last he rose, found a small volume, sat down again and turned its pages. The volume was Sir Alfred Lyall's Verses Written in India, and he looked for the poem called 'Theology in Extremis.'

He read it through, restored the volume, and stood rubbing his chin. Written, of course, more than forty years ago, and yet doubtful if its sentiments were changed by an iota! There was that poem, too, by Doyle, about the Corporal in the Buffs who, brought before a Chinese General and told to 'kow-tow' or die, said: 'We don't do that sort of thing in the Buffs,' and died. Well! That was the standard even today, among people of any caste or with any tradition. The war had thrown up innumerable instances. Could young Desert really have betrayed the tradition? It seemed improbable. And yet, in spite of his excellent war record, might there be a streak of yellow in him? Or was it, rather, that at times a flow of revolting bitterness carried him on to complete cynicism, so that he flouted almost for the joy of flouting?

With a strong mental effort Sir Lawrence tried to place himself in a like dilemma. Not being a believer, his success was limited to the thought: 'I should immensely dislike being dictated to in such a matter.' Aware that this was inadequate, he went down to the hall, shut himself up in a box, and rang up Michael's house. Then, feeling that if he lingered in the Club he might run into Desert himself, he took a cab to South Square.

Michael had just come in from the House; they met in the hall; and, with the instinct that Fleur, however acute, was not a fit person to share this particular consultation, Sir Lawrence demanded to be taken to his son's study. He commenced by announcing Dinny's engagement, which Michael heard with as strange a mixture of gratification and disquietude as could be seen on human visage.

"What a little cat, keeping it so dark!" he said. "Fleur did say something about her being too limpid just now; but I never thought! One's got so used to Dinny being single. To Wilfrid, too? Well, I hope the old son has exhausted the East."

"There's this question of his religion," said Sir Lawrence gravely.

"I don't know why that should matter much; Dinny's not fervent. But I never thought Wilfrid cared enough to change his. It rather staggered me."

"There's a story."

When his father had finished, Michael's ears stood out and his face looked haggard.

"You know him better than anyone," Sir Lawrence concluded: "What do you think?"

“I hate to say it, but it might be true. It might even be natural for HIM; but no one would ever understand why. This is pretty ghastly, Dad, with Dinny involved.”

“Before we fash ourselves, my dear, we must find out if it’s true. Could you go to him?”

“In old days — easily.”

Sir Lawrence nodded. “Yes, I know all about that, but it’s a long time ago.”

Michael smiled faintly. “I never knew whether you spotted that, but I rather thought so. I’ve seen very little of Wilfrid since he went East. Still, I could —” He stopped, and added: “If it IS true, he must have told Dinny. He couldn’t ask her to marry him with that untold.”

Sir Lawrence shrugged. “If yellow in one way, why not in the other?”

“Wilfrid is one of the most perverse, complex, unintelligible natures one could come across. To judge him by ordinary standards is a wash-out. But if he HAS told Dinny, she’ll never tell us.”

And they stared at each other.

“Mind you,” said Michael, “there’s a streak of the heroic in him. It comes out in the wrong places. That’s why he’s a poet.”

Sir Lawrence began twisting at an eyebrow, always a sign that he had reached decision.

“The thing’s got to be faced; it’s not in human nature for a sleeping dog like that to be allowed to lie. I don’t care about young Desert —”

“I do,” said Michael.

“It’s Dinny I’m thinking of.”

“So am I. But there again, Dad, Dinny will do what she will do, and you needn’t think we can deflect her.”

“It’s one of the most unpleasant things,” said Sir Lawrence slowly, “that I’ve ever come across. Well, my boy, are you going to see him, or shall I?”

“I’ll do it,” said Michael, and sighed.

“Will he tell you the truth?”

“Yes. Won’t you stay to dinner?”

Sir Lawrence shook his head.

“Daren’t face Fleur with this on my mind. Needless to say, no one ought to know until you’ve seen him, not even she.”

“No. Dinny still with you?”

“She’s gone back to Condaford.”

“Her people!” and Michael whistled.

Her people! The thought remained with him all through a dinner during which Fleur discussed the future of Kit. She was in favour of his going to Harrow, because Michael and his father had been at Winchester. He was down for both, and the matter had not yet been decided.

“All your mother’s people,” she said, “were at Harrow. Winchester seems to me so superior and dry. And they never get any notoriety. If you hadn’t been at Winchester you’d have been a pet of the newspapers by now.”

“D’you want Kit to have notoriety?”

“Yes, the nice sort, of course, like your Uncle Hilary. You know, Michael, Bart’s a dear, but I prefer the Cherrell side of your family.”

“Well, I was wondering,” said Michael, “whether the Cherrel’s weren’t too straight-necked and servicey for anything,”

“Yes, they’re that, but they’ve got a quirk in them, and they look like gentlemen.”

“I believe,” said Michael, “that you really want Kit to go to Harrow because they play at Lords.”

Fleur straightened her own neck.

“Well, I do. I should have chosen Eton, only it’s so obvious, and I hate light blue.”

“Well,” said Michael, “I’m prejudiced in favour of my own school, so the choice is up to you. A school that produced Uncle Adrian will do for me, anyway.”

“No school produced your Uncle Adrian, dear,” said Fleur; “he’s palæolithic. The Cherrells are the oldest strain in Kit’s make-up, anyway, and I should like to breed to it, as Mr. Jack Muskham would say. Which reminds me that when I saw him at Clare’s wedding he wanted us to come down and see his stud farm at Royston. I should like to. He’s like an advertisement for shooting capes — divine shoes and marvellous control of his facial muscles.”

Michael nodded.

“Jack’s an example of so much stamp on the coin that there’s hardly any coin behind it.”

“Don’t you believe it, my dear. There’s plenty of metal at the back.”

“The ‘pukka sahib,’” said Michael. “I never can make up my mind whether that article is to the good or to the bad. The Cherrells are the best type of it, because there’s no manner to them as there is to Jack; but even with them I always have the feeling of too much in heaven and earth that isn’t dreamed of in their philosophy.”

“We can’t all have divine sympathy, Michael.”

Michael looked at her fixedly. He decided against malicious intent and went on: “I never know where understanding and tolerance ought to end.”

“That’s where men are inferior to us. We wait for the mark to fix itself; we trust our nerves. Men don’t, poor things. Luckily you’ve a streak of woman in you, Michael. Give me a kiss. Mind Coaker, he’s very sudden. It’s decided, then: Kit goes to Harrow.”

“If there’s a Harrow to go to by the time he’s of age.”

“Don’t be foolish. No constellations are more fixed than the public schools. Look at the way they flourished on the war.”

“They won’t flourish on the next war.”

“There mustn’t be one, then.”

“Under ‘pukka sahibism’ it couldn’t be avoided.”

“My dear, you don’t suppose that keeping our word and all that was not just varnish? We simply feared German preponderance.”

Michael rumpled his hair.

“It was a good instance, anyway, of what I said about there being more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of by the ‘pukka sahib’; yes, and of many situations that he’s not adequate to handle.”

Fleur yawned.

“We badly want a new dinner service, Michael.”

❦

Chapter 10

After dinner Michael set forth, without saying where he was going. Since the death of his father-inlaw, and the disclosure then made to him about Fleur and John Forsyte, his relations with her had been the same, with a slight but deep difference. He was no longer a tied but a free agent in his own house. Not a word had ever been spoken between them on a matter now nearly four years old, nor had there been in his mind any doubt about her since; the infidelity was scotched and buried. But, though outwardly the same, he was inwardly emancipated, and she knew it. In this matter of Wilfrid, for instance, his father's warning had not been needed. He would not have told her of it, anyway. Not because he did not trust her discretion — he could always trust that — but because he secretly felt that in a matter such as this he would not get any real help from her.

He walked, 'Wilfrid's in love,' he thought, 'so he ought to be in by ten, unless he's got an attack of verse; but even then you can't write poetry in this traffic or in a club, the atmosphere stops the flow.' He crossed Pall Mall and threaded the maze of narrow streets dedicated to unattached manhood till he came to Piccadilly, quiet before its storm of after-theatre traffic. Passing up a side street devoted to those male ministering angels — tailors, bookmakers and moneylenders — he rounded into Cork Street. It was ten o'clock exactly when he paused before the well-remembered house. Opposite was the gallery where he had first met Fleur, and he stood for a moment almost dizzy from past feelings. For three years, before Wilfrid's queer infatuation for Fleur had broken it all up, he had been Wilfrid's fidus Achates. 'Regular David and Jonathan stunt,' he thought, and all his old feelings came welling up as he ascended the stairs.

The monastic visage of the henchman Stack relaxed at sight of him.

"Mr. Mont? Pleasure to see you, sir."

"And how are you, Stack?"

"A little older, sir; otherwise in fine shape, thank you. Mr. Desert IS in."

Michael resigned his hat, and entered.

Wilfrid, lying on the divan in a dark dressing-gown, sat up.

"Hallo!"

"How are you, Wilfrid?"

"Stack! Drinks!"

"Congratulations, old man!"

"I met her first at your wedding, you know."

"Ten years ago, nearly. You've plucked the flower of our family, Wilfrid; we're all in love with Dinny."

"I won't talk about her, but I think the more."

"Any verse, old man?"

"Yes, a booklet going in tomorrow, same publisher. Remember the first?"

"Don't I? My only scoop."

"This is better. There's one that IS a poem."

Stack re-entered with a tray.

"Help yourself, Michael."

Michael poured out a little brandy and diluted it but slightly. Then with a cigarette he sat down.

"When's it to be?"

"Registrar's, as soon as possible."

"Oh! And then?"

"Dinny wants to show me England. While there's any sun I suppose we shall hang around."

"Going back to Syria?"

Desert wriggled on his cushions.

"I don't know: further afield, perhaps — she'll say."

Michael looked at his feet, beside which on the Persian rug some cigarette ash had fallen.

"Old man," he said.

"Well?"

"D'you know a bird called Telfourd Yule?"

"His name — writer of sorts."

"He's just come back from Arabia and the Soudan; he brought a yarn with him." Without raising his eyes, he was conscious that Wilfrid was sitting upright.

"It concerns you; and it's queer and damaging. He thinks you ought to know."

"Well?"

Michael uttered an involuntary sigh.

"Shortly: The Bedouin are saying that your conversion to Islam was at the pistol's point. He was told the yarn in Arabia, and again in the Libyan desert, with the name of the Sheikh, and the place in Darfur, and the Englishman's name." And, still without looking up, he knew that Wilfrid's eyes were fixed on him, and that there was sweat on his forehead.

"Well?"

"He wanted you to know, so he told my dad at the Club this afternoon, and Bart told me. I said I'd see you about it. Forgive me."

Then, in the silence, Michael raised his eyes. What a strange, beautiful, tortured, compelling face!

"Nothing to forgive; it's true."

"My dear old man!" The words burst from Michael, but no others would follow.

Desert got up, went to a drawer and took out a manuscript.

"Here, read this!"

During the twenty minutes Michael took to read the poem, there was not a sound, except from the sheets being turned. Michael put them down at last.

"Magnificent!"

"Yes, but YOU'D never have done it."

"I haven't an idea what I should have done."

"Oh, yes, you have. You'd never have let sophistication and God knows what stifle your first instinct, as I did. My first instinct was to say: 'Shoot and be damned,' and I wish to God I'd kept to it, then I shouldn't be here. The queer thing is, if he'd threatened torture I'd have stood out. Yet I'd much rather be killed than tortured."

"Torture's caddish."

"Fanatics aren't cads. I'd have sent him to hell, but he really hated shooting me; he begged me — stood there with the pistol and begged me not to make him. His brother's a friend of mine. Fanaticism's a rum thing! He stood there ready to loose off, begging me. Damned human. I can see his eyes. He was under a vow. I never saw a man so relieved."

"There's nothing of that in the poem," said Michael.

"Being sorry for your executioner is hardly an excuse. I'm not proud of it, especially when it saved my life. Besides, I don't know if that WAS the reason. Religion, if you haven't got it, is a fake. To walk out into everlasting dark for the sake of a fake! If I must die I want a reality to die for."

"You don't think," said Michael miserably, "that you'd be justified in denying the thing?"

"I'll deny nothing. If it's come out, I'll stand by it."

"Does Dinny know?"

"Yes. She's read the poem. I didn't mean to tell her, but I did. She behaved as people don't. Marvellous!"

"Yes. I'm not sure that you oughtn't to deny it for her sake."

"No, but I ought to give her up."

"She would have something to say about that. If Dinny's in love, it's over head and ears, Wilfrid."

"Same here!"

Overcome by the bleakness of the situation, Michael got up and helped himself to more brandy.

"Exactly!" said Desert, following him with his eyes. "Imagine if the Press gets hold of it!" and he laughed.

"I gather," said Michael, with a spurt of cheerfulness, "that it was only in the desert both times that Yule heard the story."

"What's in the desert today is in the bazaars tomorrow. It's no use, I shall have to face the music."

Michael put a hand on his shoulder. "Count on me, anyway. I suppose the bold way is the only way. But I feel all you're up against."

"Yellow. Labelled: 'Yellow'— might give any show away. And they'll be right."

"Rot!" said Michael.

Wilfrid went on without heeding: "And yet my whole soul revolts against dying for a gesture that I don't believe in. Legends and superstitions — I hate the lot. I'd sooner die to give them a death-blow than to keep them alive. If a man tried to force me to torture an animal, to hang another man, to violate a woman, of course I'd die rather than do it. But why the hell should I die to gratify those whom I despise for believing outworn creeds that have been responsible for more misery in the world than any other mortal thing? Why? Eh?"

Michael had recoiled before the passion in this outburst, and was standing miserable and glum.

"Symbol," he muttered.

"Symbol! For conduct that's worth standing for, honesty, humanity, courage, I hope I'd stand; I went through with the war, anyway; but why should I stand for what I look on as dead wood?"

"It simply mustn't come out," said Michael violently. "I loathe the idea of a lot of swabs looking down their noses at you."

Wilfrid shrugged. "I look down my nose at myself, I assure you. Never stifle your instinct, Michael."

"But what are you going to DO?"

"What does it matter what I do? Things will be as they will be. Nobody will understand, or side with me if they did understand. Why should they? I don't even side with myself."

"I think lots of people might nowadays."

"The sort I wouldn't be seen dead with. No, I'm outcast."

"And Dinny?"

"I'll settle that with her."

Michael took up his hat.

"If there's anything I can do, count on me. Good night, old man!"

"Good night, and thanks!"

Michael was out of the street before any thinking power returned to him. Wilfrid had been caught, as it were, in a snare! One could see how his rebellious contempt for convention and its types had blinded him to the normal view. But one could not dissociate this or that from the general image of an Englishman: betrayal of one feature would be looked on as betrayal of the whole. As for that queer touch of compassion for his would-be executioner, who would see that who didn't know Wilfrid? The affair was bitter and tragic. The 'yellow' label would be stuck on indiscriminately for all eyes to see.

'Of course,' thought Michael, 'he'll have his supporters — egomaniacs, and Bolshies, and that'll make him feel worse than ever.' Nothing was more galling than to be backed up by people you didn't understand, and who didn't understand you. And how was support like that going to help Dinny, more detached from it even than Wilfrid? The whole thing was —!

And with that blunt reflection he crossed Bond Street and went down Hay Hill into Berkeley Square. If he did not see his father before he went home, he would not sleep.

At Mount Street his mother and father were receiving a special pale negus, warranted to cause slumber, from the hands of Blore.

"Catherine?" said Lady Mont: "Measles?"

"No, Mother; I want to have a talk with Dad."

"About that young man — changin' his religion. He always gave me a pain — defyin' the lightnin', and that."

Michael stared. “It IS about Wilfrid.”

“Em,” said Sir Lawrence, “this is dead private. Well, Michael?”

“The story’s true; he doesn’t and won’t deny it. Dinny knows.”

“What story?” asked Lady Mont.

“He recanted to some fanatical Arabs on pain of death.”

“What a bore!”

Michael thought swiftly: ‘My God! If only everyone would take that view!’

“D’you mean, then,” said Sir Lawrence, gravely, “that I’ve got to tell Yule there’s no defence?”

Michael nodded.

“But if so, dear boy, it won’t stop there.”

“No, but he’s reckless.”

“The lightnin’,” said Lady Mont, suddenly.

“Exactly, Mother. He’s written a poem on it, and a jolly good one it is. He’s sending it in a new volume to his publisher tomorrow. But, Dad, at any rate, get Yule and Jack Muskham to keep their mouths shut. After all, what business is it of theirs?”

Sir Lawrence shrugged the thin shoulders which at seventy-two were only beginning to suggest age.

“There are two questions, Michael, and so far as I can see they’re quite separate. The first is how to muzzle club gossip. The second concerns Dinny and her people. You say Dinny knows; but her people don’t, except ourselves; and as she didn’t tell us, she won’t tell them. Now that’s not fair. And it’s not wise,” he went on without waiting for an answer, “because this thing’s dead certain to come out later, and they’d never forgive Desert for marrying her without letting them know. I wouldn’t myself, it’s too serious.”

“Agitatin’,” murmured Lady Mont. “Ask Adrian.”

“Better Hilary,” said Sir Lawrence.

Michael broke in: “That second question, Dad, seems to me entirely up to Dinny. She must be told that the story’s in the wind, then either she or Wilfrid will let her people know.”

“If only she’d let him drop her! Surely he can’t want to go on with it, with this story going about?”

“I don’t see Dinny droppin’ him,” murmured Lady Mont. “She’s been too long pickin’ him up. Love’s young dream.”

“Wilfrid said he knew he ought to give her up. Oh! damn!”

“Come back to question one, then, Michael. I can try, but I’m very doubtful, especially if this poem is coming out. What is it, a justification?”

“Or explanation.”

“Bitter and rebellious, like his early stuff?”

Michael nodded.

“Well, they might keep quiet out of charity, but they’ll never stomach that sort of attitude, if I know Jack Muskham. He hates the bravado of modern scepticism like poison.”

“We can’t tell what’s going to happen in any direction, but it seems to me we ought all to play hard for delay.”

“Hope the Hermit,” murmured Lady Mont. “Good night, dear boy; I’m goin’ up. Mind the dog — he’s not been out.”

“Well, I’ll do what I can,” said Sir Lawrence.

Michael received his mother’s kiss, wrung his father’s hand, and went.

He walked home, uneasy and sore at heart, for this concerned two people of whom he was very fond, and he could see no issue that was not full of suffering to both. And continually there came back to him the thought: ‘What should I have done in Wilfrid’s place?’ And he concluded, as he walked, that no man could tell what he would do if he were in the shoes of another man. And so, in the spring wind of a night not devoid of beauty, he came to South Square and let himself in.

❦

CHAPTER 11

Wilfred sat in his rooms with two letters before him, one that he had just written to Dinny, and one that he had just received from her. He stared at the snapshots and tried to think clearly, and since he had been trying to think clearly ever since Michael's visit of the previous evening, he was the less successful. Why had he chosen this particular moment to fall really in love, to feel that he had found the one person with whom he could bear to think of permanent companionship? He had never intended to marry, he had never supposed he would feel towards women anything but a transient urge that soon died in satisfaction. Even at the height of his infatuation with Fleur he had never supposed it would last. On the whole he was as profoundly sceptical about women as about religion, patriotism, or the qualities popularly attributed to the Englishman. He had thought himself armoured in scepticism, but in his armour was a joint so weak that he had received a fatal thrust. With bitter amusement he perceived that the profound loneliness left by that experience in Darfur had started in him an involuntary craving for spiritual companionship of which Dinny had, as involuntarily, availed herself. The thing that should have kept them apart had brought them together.

After Michael had left he had spent half the night going over and over it, and always coming back to the crude thought that, when all was said and done, he would be set down as a coward. And yet, but for Dinny, would even that matter? What did he care for society and its opinion? What did he care for England and the English? Even if they had prestige, was it deserved, any more than the prestige of any other country? The war had shown all countries and their inhabitants to be pretty much alike, capable of the same heroisms, basenesses, endurance, and absurdities. The war had shown mob feeling in every country to be equally narrow, void of discrimination, and generally contemptible. He was a wanderer by nature, and even if England and the nearer East were closed to him, the world was wide, the sun shone in many places, the stars wheeled over one, books could be read, women had beauty, flowers scent, tobacco its flavour, music its moving power, coffee its fragrance, horses and dogs and birds were the same seductive creatures, and thought and feeling brought an urge to rhythmic expression, almost wherever one went. Save for Dinny he could strike his tent and move out, and let tongues wag behind him! And now he couldn't! Or could he? Was he not, indeed, in honour bound to? How could he saddle her with a mate at whom fingers were pointed? If she had inspired him with flaming desire, it would have been much simpler; they could have had their fling and parted, and no one the worse. But he had a very different feeling for her. She was like a well of sweet water met with in a desert; a flower with a scent coming up among the dry vegetation of the wilderness. She gave him the reverent longing that some tunes and pictures inspire; roused the same ache of pleasure as the scent of new-mown grass. She was a cool refreshment to a spirit sun-dried, wind-dried, and dark. Was he to give her up because of this damned business?

In the morning when he woke the same confused struggle of feeling had gone on. He had spent the afternoon writing her a letter, and had barely finished it when her first love-letter came. And he sat now with the two before him.

'I can't send this,' he thought suddenly; 'it goes over and over and gets nowhere. Rotten!' He tore it up, and read her letter a third time.

'Impossible!' he thought; 'to go down there! God and the King and the rest of it. Impossible!' And seizing a piece of paper, he wrote:

"Cork Street: Saturday.

"Bless you for your letter. Come up here to lunch Monday. We must talk. — WILFRID."

Having sent Stack out with this missive, he felt a little more at peace . . . .

Dinny did not receive this note till Monday morning, and was the more relieved to get it. The last two days had been spent by her in avoiding any mention of Wilfrid, listening to Hubert and Jean's account of their life in the Soudan, walking and inspecting the state of trees with her father, copying his income-tax return, and going to church with him and her mother. The tacit silence about her engagement was very characteristic of a family whose members were mutually devoted and accustomed to spare each other's feelings; it was all the more ominous.

After reading Wilfrid's note she said to herself blankly: 'For a love-letter it's not a love-letter.' And she said to her mother:

"Wilfrid's shy of coming, dear. I must go up and talk to him. If I can, I will bring him down with me. If I can't, I'll try and arrange for you to see him at Mount Street. He's lived alone so much that seeing people is a real strain."

Lady Cherrell's answer was a sigh, but it meant more to Dinny than words; she took her mother's hand and said: "Cheer up, Mother dear. It's something that I'm happy, isn't it?"

"That would be everything, Dinny."

Dinny was too conscious of implications in the 'would be' to answer.

She walked to the station, reached London at noon, and set out for Cork Street across the Park. The day was fine, the sun shone; spring was established to the full, with lilac and with tulips, young green of plane-tree leaves, songs of birds, and the freshness of the grass. But though she looked in tune, she suffered from presentiment. Why she should feel so, going to a private lunch with her lover, she could not have explained. There could be but few people in all the great town at such an hour of day with prospect before them so closely joyful; but Dinny was not deceived: all was not well — she knew it. Being before her time, she stopped at Mount Street to titivate. According to Blore, Sir Lawrence was out, but his lady in. Dinny left the message that she might be in to tea.

Passing the pleasant smell at the corner of Burlington Street, she had that peculiar feeling, experienced by all at times, of having once been someone else which accounts for so much belief in the transmigration of souls.

'It only means,' she thought, 'something I've forgotten. Oh! here's the turning!' And her heart began to beat.

She was nearly breathless when Stack opened the door to her. "Lunch will be ready in five minutes, miss." His eyes, dark, prominent above his jutting nose, and yet reflective, and the curly benevolence of his lips always gave her the impression that he was confessing her before she had anything to confess. He opened the inner door, shut it behind her, and she was in Wilfrid's arms. That was a complete refutation of presentiment; the longest and most satisfactory moment of the sort she had yet experienced. So long that she was afraid he would not let her go in time. At last she said gently:

"Lunch has already been in a minute, darling, according to Stack."

"Stack has tact."

Not until after lunch, when they were alone once more with coffee, did discomfiture come with the suddenness of a thunderclap in a clear sky.

"That business has come out, Dinny."

What! That? THAT! She mastered the rush of her dismay.

"How?"

"A man called Telfourd Yule has brought the story back with him. They talk of it among the tribes. It'll be in the bazaars by now, in the London clubs tomorrow. I shall be in Coventry in a few weeks' time. Nothing can stop a thing like that."

Without a word Dinny got up, pressed his head against her shoulder, then sat down beside him on the divan.

"I'm afraid you don't understand," he said gently.

"That this makes any difference? No, I don't. The only difference could have been when you told me yourself. That made none. How can this, then?"

"How can I marry you?"

"That sort of thing is only in books, Wilfrid. WE won't have linkéd misery long drawn out."

"False heroics are not in my line either; but I don't think you see yet."

"I do. Now you can stand up straight again, and those who can't understand — well, they don't matter."

"Then don't your people matter?"

"Yes, they matter."

"But you don't suppose for a minute that they'll understand?"

"I shall make them."

"My poor dear!"

It struck her, ominously, how quiet and gentle he was being. He went on:

"I don't know your people, but if they're the sort you've described — charm ye never so wisely, they won't rise. They can't, it's against their root convictions."

"They're fond of me."

"That will make it all the more impossible for them to see you tied to me."

Dinny drew away a little and sat with her chin on her hands. Then, without looking at him, she said:

"Do you want to get rid of me, Wilfrid?"

"Dinny!"

"Yes, but do you?"

He drew her into his arms. Presently she said:

"I see. Then if you don't, you must leave this to me. And anyway it's no good going to meet trouble. It isn't known yet in London. We'll wait until it is. I know you won't marry me till then, so I MUST wait. After that it will be a clear issue, but you mustn't be heroic then, Wilfrid, because it'll hurt me too much — too much." She clutched him suddenly; and he stayed silent.

With her cheek to his she said quietly:

"Do you want me to be everything to you before you marry me? If so, I can."

"Dinny!"

"Very forward, isn't it?"

"No! But we'll wait. You make me feel too reverent."

She sighed. "Perhaps it's best."

Presently she said: "Will you leave it to me to tell my people everything or not?"

"I will leave anything to you."

"And if I want you to meet any one of them, will you?"

Wilfrid nodded.

"I won't ask you to come to Condaford — yet. That's all settled, then. Now tell me exactly how you heard about this."

When he had finished, she said reflectively:

"Michael and Uncle Lawrence. That will make it easier. Now, darling, I'm going. It'll be good for Stack, and I want to think. I can only think when I'm insulated from you."

"Angel!"

She took his head between her hands. "Don't be tragic, and I won't either. Could we go joy-riding on Thursday? Good! Foch at noon! I'm far from an angel, I'm your love."

She went dizzily down the stairs, now that she was alone, terribly conscious of the ordeal before them. She turned suddenly towards Oxford Street. 'I'll go and see Uncle Adrian,' she thought.

Adrian's thoughts at his Museum had been troubled of late by the claim of the Gobi desert to be the cradle of Homo Sapiens. The idea had been patented and put on the market, and it bid fair to have its day. He was reflecting on the changeability of anthropological fashions, when Dinny was announced.

"Ah! Dinny! I've been in the Gobi desert all the afternoon, and was just thinking of a nice cup of 'hot' tea. What do you say?"

"China tea always gives me an 'ick feeling, Uncle."

"We don't go in for so-called luxuries. My duenna here makes good old Dover tea with leaves in it, and we have the homely bun."

"Perfect! I came to tell you that I've given my young heart."

Adrian stared.

"It's really rather a terrible tale, so can I take off my hat?"

"My dear," said Adrian, "take off anything. Have tea first. Here it is."

While she was having tea Adrian regarded her with a rueful smile, caught, as it were, between his moustache and goatee. Since the tragic Ferse affair she had been more than ever his idea of a niece; and he perceived that she was really troubled.

Lying back in the only easy chair, with her knees crossed and the tips of her fingers pressed together, she looked, he thought, ethereal, as if she might suddenly float, and his eyes rested with comfort on the cap of her chestnut hair. But his face grew perceptibly longer while she was telling him her tale, leaving nothing out. She stopped at last and added:

"Uncle, please don't look like that!"

"Was I?"

"Yes."

"Well, Dinny, is it surprising?"

"I want your 'reaction,' as they call it, to what he did." And she looked straight into his eyes.

"My personal reaction? Without knowing him — judgment reserved."

"If you wouldn't mind, you SHALL know him."

Adrian nodded, and she said:

"Tell me the worst. What will the others who don't know him think and do?"

"What was your own reaction, Dinny?"

"I knew him."

"Only a week."

"And ten years."

"Oh! don't tell me that a glimpse and three words at a wedding —"

"The grain of mustard-seed, dear. Besides, I'd read the poem, and knew from that all his feelings. He isn't a believer; it must have seemed to him like some monstrous practical joke."

"Yes, yes, I've read his verse — scepticism and love of beauty. His type blooms after long national efforts, when the individual's been at a discount, and the State has exacted everything. Ego crops out and wants to kick the State and all its shibboleths. I understand all that. But — You've never been out of England, Dinny."

"Only Italy, Paris, and the Pyrenees."

"They don't count. You've never been where England has to have a certain prestige. For Englishmen in such parts of the world it's all for one and one for all."

"I don't think he realised that at the time, Uncle."

Adrian looked at her, and shook his head.

"I still don't," said Dinny. "And thank God he didn't, or I should never have known him. Ought one to sacrifice oneself for false values?"

"That's not the point, my dear. In the East, where religion still means everything, you can't exaggerate the importance attached to a change of faith. Nothing could so damage the Oriental's idea of the Englishman as a recantation at the pistol's point. The question before him was: Do I care enough for what is thought of my country and my people to die sooner than lower that conception? Forgive me, Dinny, but that was, brutally, the issue."

She was silent for a minute and then said:

"I'm perfectly sure Wilfrid would have died sooner than do lots of things that would have lowered that conception; but he simply couldn't admit that the Eastern conception of an Englishman ought to rest on whether he's a Christian or not."

"That's special pleading; he not only renounced Christianity, he accepted Islam — one set of superstitions for another."

"But, can't you see, Uncle, the whole thing was a monstrous jest to him?"

"No, my dear, I don't think I can."

Dinny leaned back, and he thought how exhausted she looked.

"Well, if YOU can't, no one else will. I mean no one of our sort, and that's what I wanted to know."

A bad ache started in Adrian's midriff. "Dinny, there's a fortnight of this behind you, and the rest of your life before you; you told me he'd give you up — for which I respect him. Now, doesn't it need a wrench, if not for your sake — for his?"

Dinny smiled.

"Uncle, you're so renowned for dropping your best pals when they're in a mess. And you know so little about love! You only waited eighteen years. Aren’t you rather funny?”

“Admitted,” said Adrian. “I suppose the word ‘Uncle’ came over me. If I knew that Desert was likely to be as faithful as you, I should say: ‘Go to it and be damned in your own ways, bless you!’”

“Then you simply MUST see him.”

“Yes; but I’ve seen people seem so unalterably in love that they were divorced within the year. I knew a man so completely satisfied by his honeymoon that he took a mistress two months later.”

“We,” murmured Dinny, “are not of that devouring breed. Seeing so many people on the screen examining each other’s teeth has spiritualised me, I know.”

“Who has heard of this development?”

“Michael and Uncle Lawrence, possibly Aunt Em. I don’t know whether to tell them at Condaford.”

“Let me talk to Hilary. He’ll have another point of view; and it won’t be orthodox.”

“Oh! Yes, I don’t mind Uncle Hilary.” And she rose. “May I bring Wilfrid to see you, then?”

Adrian nodded, and, when she had gone, stood again in front of a map of Mongolia, where the Gobi desert seemed to bloom like the rose in comparison with the wilderness across which his favourite niece was moving.

❦

Chapter 12

Dinny stayed on at Mount Street for dinner to see Sir Lawrence. She was in his study when he came in, and said at once: “Uncle Lawrence, Aunt Em knows what you and Michael know, doesn’t she?”

“She does, Dinny. Why?”

“She’s been so discreet. I’ve told Uncle Adrian; he seems to think Wilfrid has lowered English prestige in the East. Just what is this English prestige? I thought we were looked on as a race of successful hypocrites. And in India as arrogant bullies.”

Sir Lawrence wriggled.

“You’re confusing national with individual reputation. The things are totally distinct. The individual Englishman in the East is looked up to as a man who isn’t to be rattled, who keeps his word, and sticks by his own breed.”

Dinny flushed. The implication was not lost on her.

“In the East,” Sir Lawrence went on, “the Englishman, or rather the Briton, because as often as not he’s a Scot or a Welshman or a North Irishman, is generally isolated: traveller, archæologist, soldier, official, civilian, planter, doctor, engineer, or missionary, he’s almost always head man of a small separate show; he maintains himself against odds on the strength of the Englishman’s reputation. If a single Englishman is found wanting, down goes the stock of all those other isolated Englishmen. People know that and recognise its importance. That’s what you’re up against, and it’s no use underestimating. You can’t expect Orientals, to whom religion means something, to understand that to some of us it means nothing. An Englishman to them is a believing Christian, and if he recants, he’s understood as recanting his most precious belief.”

Dinny said drily: “In fact, then, Wilfrid has no case in the eyes of our world.”

“In the eyes of the world that runs the Empire, I’m afraid — none, Dinny. Could it be otherwise? Unless there were complete mutual confidence between these isolated beings that none of them will submit to dictation, take a dare, or let the others down, the thing wouldn’t work at all. Now would it?”

“I never thought about it.”

“Well, you can take it from me. Michael has explained to me how Desert’s mind worked; and from the point of view of a disbeliever like myself, there’s a lot to be said. I should intensely dislike being wiped out over such an issue. But it wasn’t the real issue; and if you say: ‘He didn’t see that,’ then I’m afraid my answer is he didn’t because he has too much spiritual pride. And that won’t help him as a defence, because spiritual pride is anathema to the Services, and indeed to the world generally. It’s the quality, you remember, that got Lucifer into trouble.”

Dinny, who had listened with her eyes fixed on her uncle’s twisting features, said:

“It’s extraordinary the things one can do without.”

Sir Lawrence screwed in a puzzled eyeglass.

“Have you caught the jumping habit from your aunt?”

“If one can’t have the world’s approval, one can do without it.”

“‘The world well lost for love,’ sounds gallant, Dinny, but it’s been tried out and found wanting. Sacrifice on one side is the worst foundation for partnership, because the other side comes to resent it.”

“I don’t expect more happiness than most people get.”

“That’s not as much as I want for you, Dinny.”

“Dinner!” said Lady Mont, in the doorway: “Have you a vacuum, Dinny? They use those cleaners,” she went on, as they went towards the dining-room, “for horses now.”

“Why not for human beings,” murmured Dinny, “and clear out their fears and superstitions? Uncle wouldn’t approve, though.”

“You’ve been talkin’, then. Blore, go away!”

When he had gone, she added: “I’m thinkin’ of your father, Dinny.”

“So am I.”

“I used to get over him. But daughters! Still, he must.”

“Em!” said Sir Lawrence, warningly, as Blore came back.

“Well,” said Lady Mont, “beliefs and that — too fatiguin’. I never liked christenin’s — so unfeelin’ to the baby; and puttin’ it upon other people; only they don’t bother, except for cups and Bibles. Why do they put fern-leaves on cups? Or is that archery? Uncle Cuffs won a cup at archery when he was a curate. They used. It’s all very agitatin’.”

“Aunt Em,” said Dinny, “all I hope and want is that no one will agitate themselves over me and my small affair. If people won’t agitate we can be happy.”

“So wise! Lawrence, tell Michael that. Blore! Give Miss Dinny some sherry.”

Dinny, putting her lips to the sherry, looked across at her aunt’s face. It was comforting — slightly raised in the eyebrows, drooped in the lids, curved in the nose, and as if powdered in the hair above the comely neck, shoulders and bust.

In the taxi for Paddington she had such a vivid vision of Wilfrid, alone, with this hanging over him, that she very nearly leaned out to say: “Cork Street.” The cab turned a corner. Praed Street? Yes, it would be! All the worry in the world came from the conflict of love against love. If only her people didn’t love her, and she them, how simple things would be!

A porter was saying: “Any luggage, Miss?”

“None, thank you.” As a little girl she had always meant to marry a porter! That was before her music master came from Oxford. He had gone off to the war when she was ten. She bought a magazine and took her seat in the train. But she was very tired and lay back in her corner of the third-class carriage; railway travelling was a severe tax on her always slender purse. With head tilted, she went to sleep.

When she alighted from the train there was a nearly full moon, and the night was blowy and sweet-smelling. She would have to walk. It was light enough to take the short cut, and she climbed the first stile into the field path. She thought of the night, nearly two years ago, when she came back by this train with the news of Hubert’s release and found her father sitting up, grey and worn, in his study, and how years had seemed to drop off him when she told him the good news. And now she had news that must grieve him. It was her father she really dreaded facing. Her mother, yes! Mother, though gentle, was stubborn; but women had not the same hard-and-fast convictions about what was not ‘done’ as men. Hubert? In old days she would have minded him most. Curious how lost he was to her! Hubert would be dreadfully upset. He was rigid in his views of what was ‘the game.’ Well! she could bear his disapproval. But Father! It seemed so unfair to him, after his forty years of hard service!

A brown owl floated from the hedge over to some stacks. These moony nights were owl-nights, and there would be the screams of captured victims, so dreadful in the night-time. Yet who could help liking owls, their blunt soft floating flight, their measured stirring calls? The next stile led her on to their own land. There was a linhay in this field where her father’s old charger sheltered at night. Was it Plutarch or Pliny who had said: ‘For my part I would not sell even an old ox who had laboured for me’? Nice man! Now that the sound of the train had died away it was very quiet: only the brushing of a little wind on young leaves, and the stamp of old Kismet’s foot in the linhay. She crossed a second field and came to the narrow tree-trunk bridge. The night’s sweetness was like the feeling always within her now. She crossed the plank and slipped in among the apple-trees. They seemed to live brightly between her and the moving, moonlit, wind-brushed sky. They seemed to breathe, almost to be singing in praise at the unfolding of their blossoms. They were lit in a thousand shapes of whitened branches, and all beautiful, as if someone had made each with a rapt and moonstruck pleasure and brightened it with starshine. And this had been done in here each spring for a hundred years and more. The whole world seemed miraculous on a night like this, but always the yearly miracle of the apple blooming was to Dinny most moving of all. The many miracles of England thronged her memory, while she stood among the old trunks inhaling the lichen-bark-dusted air. Upland grass with larks singing; the stilly drip in coverts when sun came after rain; gorse on wind-blown commons; horses turning and turning at the end of the long mole-coloured furrows; river waters now bright, now green-tinged beneath the willows; thatch and its wood smoke; swathed hay meadows, tawnied cornfields; the bluish distances beyond; and the ever-changing sky — all these were as jewels in her mind, but the chief was this white magic of the spring. She became conscious that the long grass was drenched and her shoes and stockings wet through; there was light enough to see in that grass the stars of jonquil, grape hyacinth and the pale cast-out tulips; there would be polyanthus, too, bluebells and cowslips — a few. She slipped on upward, cleared the trees, and stood a moment to look back at the whiteness of the whole. ‘It might have dropped from the moon,’ she thought: ‘My best stockings, too!’

Across the low-walled fruit garden and lawn she came to the terrace. Past eleven! Only her father’s study window lighted on the ground floor! How like that other night!

‘Shan’t tell him,’ she thought, and tapped on it.

He let her in.

“Hallo, Dinny, you didn’t stop the night at Mount Street, then?”

“No, Dad, there’s a limit to my powers of borrowing nightgowns.”

“Sit down and have some tea. I was just going to make some.”

“Darling, I came through the orchard, and I’m wet to the knees.”

“Take off your stockings; here’s an old pair of slippers.”

Dinny stripped off the stockings and sat contemplating her legs in the lamplight, while the General lit the etna. He liked to do things for himself. She watched him bending over the tea-things, and thought how trim he still was, and how quick and precise his movements. His browned hands, with little dark hairs on them, had long, clever fingers. He stood up, motionless, watching the flame.

“Want’s a new wick,” he said. “There’s going to be bad trouble in India, I’m afraid.”

“India seems to be getting almost more trouble than it’s worth to us.”

The General turned his face with its high but small cheekbones; his eyes rested on her, and his thin lips beneath the close little grey moustache smiled.

“That often happens with trusts, Dinny. You’ve got very nice legs.”

“So I ought, dear, considering you and mother.”

“Mine are all right for a boot — stringy. Did you ask Mr. Desert down?”

“No, not today.”

The General put his hands into his side-pockets. He had taken off his dinner jacket and was wearing an old snuff-coloured shooting coat; Dinny noticed that the cuffs were slightly frayed, and one leather button missing. His dark, high-shaped eyebrows contracted till there were three ridges right in the centre of his forehead; he said gently:

“I don’t understand that change of religion, you know, Dinny. Milk or lemon?”

“Lemon, please.”

She was thinking: ‘Now is the moment, after all. Courage!’

“Two lumps?”

“Three, with lemon, Dad.”

The General took up the tongs. He dropped three lumps into the cup, then a slice of lemon, put back the tongs, and bent down to the kettle.

“Boiling,” he said, and filled up the cup; he put a covered spoonful of tea into it, withdrew the spoon and handed the cup to his daughter.

Dinny sat stirring the thin golden liquid. She took a sip, rested the cup on her lap, and turned her face up to him.

“I can explain it, Dad,” she said, and thought: ‘It will only make him understand even less.’

The General filled his own cup, and sat down. Dinny clutched her spoon.

“You see, when Wilfrid was far out in Darfur he ran into a nest of fanatical Arabs, remaining from the Mahdi times. The chief of them had him brought into his tent and offered him his life if he would embrace Islam.”

She saw her father make a little convulsive movement, so that some of the tea was spilled into his saucer. He raised the cup and poured it back. Dinny went on:

“Wilfrid is like most of us nowadays about belief, only a great deal more so. It isn’t only that he doesn’t believe in Christianity, he actually hates any set forms of religion, he thinks they divide mankind and do more harm and bring more suffering than anything else. And then, you know — or you would if you’d read his poetry, Dad — the war left him very bitter about the way lives are thrown away, simply spilled out like water at the orders of people who don’t know what they're about."

Again the General made that slight convulsive movement.

"Yes, Dad, but I've heard Hubert talk in much the same way about that. Anyway, it has left Wilfrid with a horror of wasting life, and the deepest distrust of all shibboleths and beliefs. He only had about five minutes to decide in. It wasn't cowardice, it was just bitter scorn that men can waste each other's lives for beliefs that to him seem equally futile. And he just shrugged and accepted. Having accepted, he had to keep his word and go through the forms. Of course, you don't know him, so I suppose it's useless." She sighed and drank thirstily.

The General had put his own cup down; he rose, filled a pipe, lit it, and stood by the hearth. His face was lined and dark and grave. At last he said:

"I'm out of my depth. Is the religion of one's fathers for hundreds of years to go for nothing, then? Is all that has made us the proudest people in the world to be chucked away at the bidding of an Arab? Have men like the Lawrences, John Nicholson, Chamberlayne, Sandeman, a thousand others, who spent and gave their lives to build up an idea of the English as brave men and true, to be knocked into a cocked hat by every Englishman who's threatened with a pistol?"

Dinny's cup clattered on its saucer.

"Yes, but if not by every Englishman, Dinny, why by one? Why by this one?"

Quivering all over, Dinny did not answer. Neither Adrian nor Sir Lawrence had made her feel like this — for the first time she had been reached and moved by the other side. Some agelong string had been pulled within her, or she was infected by the emotion of one whom she had always admired and loved, and whom she had hardly ever seen stirred to eloquence. She could not speak.

"I don't know if I'm a religious man," the General went on; "the faith of my fathers is enough for me"— and he made a gesture, as if adding, 'I leave myself aside'—"but, Dinny, I could not take dictation of that sort; I could not, and I cannot understand how he could have."

Dinny said, quietly: "I won't try to make you, Dad; let's take it that you can't. Most people have done something in their lives that other people could not understand if it were known. The difference here is that this thing of Wilfrid's IS known."

"You mean the threat is known — the reason for the —?"

Dinny nodded.

"How?"

"A Mr. Yule brought the story back from Egypt; Uncle Lawrence thinks it can't be scotched. I want you to know the worst." She gathered her wet stockings and shoes in her hand. "Would you mind telling Mother and Hubert for me, Dad?" And she stood up.

The General drew deeply at his pipe, which emitted a gurgling sound.

"Your pipe wants cleaning, dear. I'll do it tomorrow."

"He'll be a pariah," burst from the General, "he'll be a pariah! Dinny, Dinny!"

No two words could have moved and disarmed her more. At one stroke they shifted his opposition from the personal to the altruistic.

She bit her lip and said:

"Dad, I shall pipe my eye if I stay down here with you. And my feet are very cold. Good-night, darling!"

She turned and went quickly to the door, whence she saw him standing like a horse that has just been harnessed.

She went up to her room and sat on her bed, rubbing her cold feet one against the other. It was done! Now she had only to confront the feeling that would henceforth surround her like a wall over which she must climb to the fulfilment of her love. And what surprised her most, while she rubbed and rubbed, was knowing that her father's words had drawn from her a secret endorsement which had not made the slightest inroad on her feeling for Wilfrid. Was love, then, quite detached from judgment? Was the old image of a blind God true? Was it even true that defects in the loved one made him the dearer? That seemed borne out, at all events, by the dislike one had for the too good people in books; one's revolt against the heroic figure; one's impatience at the sight of virtue rewarded.

'Is it that my family's standard,' she thought, 'is higher than mine, or simply that I want him close to me and don't care what he is or does so long as he comes?’ And she had a strange and sudden feeling of knowing Wilfrid to the very core, with all his faults and shortcomings, and with a something that redeemed and made up for them and would keep her love alive, for in that, in that only, was an element mysterious to her. And she thought with a rueful smile: ‘All evil I know by instinct; it’s goodness, truth, beauty that keep me guessing!’ And, almost too tired to undress, she got into bed.

❦

CHAPTER 13

'The Briery,' Jack Muskham's residence at Royston, was old-fashioned and low, unpretentious without, comfortable within. It was lined with the effigies of race-horses and sporting prints. Only in one room, seldom used, was any sign of a previous existence. 'Here,' as an American newspaper man put it, when he came to interview the 'last of the dandies' on the subject of bloodstock, 'here were evidences of this aristocrat's early life in our glorious South West. Here were specimens of Navaho rugs and silver work; the plaited horsehair from El Paso; the great cowboy hats; and a set of Mexican harness dripping with silver. I questioned my host about this phase in his career. "Oh! that," he said, in his Britisher's drawl, "I had five years cow-punchin' when I was a youngster. You see, I had only one thought — horses, and my father thought that might be better for me than ridin' steeplechases here."

'"Can I put a date to that?" I asked this long, lean patrician with the watchful eyes and the languid manner.

'"Why, yes, I came back in 1901, and except for the war I've been breedin' bloodstock ever since."

'"And in the war?" I queried.

'"Oh!" he answered; and I seemed to sense that I was intruding on him: "The usual thing. Yeomanry, cavalry, trenches, and that."

'"Tell me, Mr. Muskham," I said: "Did you enjoy your life over with us out there?"

'"Enjoy?" he said: "Rather, don't you know."'

The interview, produced in a Western paper, was baptised with the heading:

"ENJOYED LIFE IN SOUTHLAND,
SAYS BRITISH DANDY."

The stud farm was fully a mile from Royston village, and at precisely a quarter to ten every day, when not away at races, bloodstock sales, or what not, Jack Muskham mounted his potter pony and ambled off to what the journalist had termed his "equine nursery." He was accustomed to point to this potter pony as an example of what horses become if never spoken to in any but a gentle voice. She was an intelligent little three-year-old, three-quarter-bred, with a fine mouse-coloured coat over which someone seemed to have thrown a bottle of ink and then imperfectly removed the splashes. Beyond a slightly ragged crescent on her forehead, she had no white at all; her mane was hogged, and her long tail banged just below her hocks. Her eyes were quiet and bright, and — for a horse — her teeth were pearly. She moved with a daisy-clipping action, quickly recovering from any stumble. Ridden with a single rein applied to her neck, her mouth was never touched. She was but fourteen-two, and Jack Muskham's legs, he using long stirrup leathers, came down very far. Riding her, as he said, was like sitting in a very easy chair. Besides himself, only one boy, chosen for the quietness of his voice, hands, nerves, and temper, was allowed to handle her.

Dismounting from this animal at the gate of the quadrangular yard which formed the stables, Jack Muskham would enter, smoking one of his special cigarettes in a short amber holder, and be joined on the central grass by his stud groom. He would then put out his cigarette, and they would go round the boxes — where the foals would be with their mothers, and the yearlings — and have this and that one out to be led round the tan track which adjoined the boxes round the yard. After this inspection, they would pass under the archway opposite the entrance and go to the paddocks to see the mares, foals, and yearlings at grass. Discipline in his 'equine nursery' was perfect; to all seeming his employees were as quiet, as clean, as well-behaved as the horses they had charge of. From the moment of his entrance to the moment when he emerged and remounted his potter pony, his talk would be of horses — sparing and to the point. And, daily, there were so many little things to see and say that he was rarely back at the house till one o'clock. He never discussed breeding on its scientific side with his stud groom, in spite of that functionary's considerable knowledge, because, to Jack Muskham, the subject was as much a matter of high politics as the foreign relations of his country are to a Secretary for Foreign Affairs. His mating decisions were made in privacy, following the conclusions of close study welded to what he would have termed his 'flair' and others might have called his prejudices. Stars might come loose, Prime Ministers be knighted, Archdukes restored, towns swallowed up by earthquakes, together with all other forms of catastrophe, so long as Jack Muskham could blend St. Simon on Speculum with the right dashes of Hampton and Bend Or; or, in accordance with a more original theory of his own, could get old Herod through Le Sancy at the extreme top and extreme bottom of a pedigree which had Carbine and

Barcaldine blood in between. He was, in fact, an idealist. To breed the perfect horse was his ideal, as little realisable, perhaps, as the ideals of other men, and far more absorbing — in his view. Not that he ever mentioned it — one did not use such a word! Nor did he bet, so that he was never deflected in his judgments by earthly desires. Tall, in his cigar-brown overcoat, specially lined with camel's hair, and his fawn-coloured buckskin shoes and fawn-coloured face, he was probably the most familiar figure at Newmarket; nor was there any member of the Jockey Club, with the exception of three, whose dicta were more respected. He was in fact an outstanding example of the eminence in his walk of life that can be attained by a man who serves a single end with complete and silent fidelity. In truth, behind this ideal of the 'perfect horse' lay the shape of his own soul. Jack Muskham was a formalist, one of the few survivors in a form-shattering age; and that his formalism had pitched on the horse for its conspicuous expression was due in part to the completeness with which the race-horse was tied to the stud book, in part to the essential symmetry of that animal, and in part to the refuge the cult of it afforded from the whirr, untidiness, glare, blare, unending scepticism, and intrusive blatancy of what he termed "this mongrel age."

At 'The Briery' two men did all the work except scrubbing, for which a woman came in daily. But for that, there was no sign in all the house that women existed in this world. It was monastic as a club which has not succumbed to female service, and as much more comfortable as it was smaller. The rooms were low, and two wide staircases reached the only upper floor, where the rooms were lower still. The books, apart from endless volumes relating to the race-horse, were either works of travel or of history, or detective novels; other fiction, with its scepticism, slangy diction, descriptions, sentiment, and sensation, was absent, if an exception be made of complete sets of Surtees, Whyte-Melville, and Thackeray.

As, in the pursuit by men of their ideals, there is almost always some saving element of irony, so in the case of Jack Muskham. He, whose aim in life was the production of the perfect thoroughbred, was actually engaged in an attempt to cast the thoroughbred, as hitherto conceived, from muzzle to crupper, on to the scrap-heap, and substitute for it an animal with a cross of blood not as yet in the Stud Book!

Unconscious of this discrepancy, he was seated at lunch with Telfourd Yule, still discussing the transportation of Arab mares, when Sir Lawrence Mont was announced.

"Lunch, Lawrence?"

"I have lunched, Jack. But coffee would be the very thing; also some brandy."

"Then let's go into the other room."

"You have here," said Sir Lawrence, "what I never thought to see again, the bachelor's box of my youth. Jack is very remarkable, Mr. Yule. A man who can afford to date in these days is a genius. Do I see Surtees and Whyte-Melville entire? Mr. Yule, what did Mr. Waffles say in Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour when they were holding Caingey up by the heels to let the water run out of his pockets and boots?"

Yule's humorous mug expanded, but he was silent.

"Exactly!" said Sir Lawrence: "No one knows nowadays. He said: 'Why, Caingey, old boy, you look like a boiled porpoise with parsley sauce.' Yes, and what did Mr. Sawyer answer in Market Harboro, when the Honourable Crasher drove at the turnpike gate, saying: 'It's open, I think'?"

Yule's face, as of indiarubber, expanded further, and he was still more silent.

"Dear, dear! Jack?"

"He said: 'I think not'."

"Good!" Sir Lawrence sank into a chair. "And was it? No. Well! Have you arranged to steal that mare? Fine! And when you get her over?"

"I shall put her to the most suitable sire standing. I shall mate the result with the most suitable sire or mare I can find. Then I shall match the result of that mating privately against the best of our present thoroughbreds of the same age. If I'm proved right I ought to be able to get my Arab mares entered in the Stud Book. I'm trying to get three mares, by the way."

"How old are you, Jack?"

"Rising fifty-three."

"I'm sorry. This is good coffee."

After that the three sat silent, awaiting the real purpose of this visit.

"I've come, Mr. Yule," said Sir Lawrence, suddenly, "about that affair of young Desert's."

"Not true, I hope?"

"Unfortunately, yes. He makes no bones about it." And, turning his monocle on Jack Muskham's face, he saw there exactly what he had expected.

"A man," said Muskham slowly, "ought to keep his form better than that, even if he IS a poet."

"We won't go into the rights and wrongs, Jack. Let it go at what you say. All the same"— and Sir Lawrence's manner acquired strange gravity —"I want you two to keep mum. If it comes out, it can't be helped, but I beg that you'll neither of you say anything."

"I don't like the look of the fellow," said Muskham shortly.

"That applies to at least nine-tenths of the people we see about; the reason is not adequate."

"He's one of those bitter, sceptical young moderns, with no real knowledge of the world and no reverence for anything."

"I know you hold a brief for the past, Jack, but don't bring it into this."

"Why not?"

"Well, I didn't want to mention it, but he's engaged to my favourite niece, Dinny Cherrell."

"That nice girl!"

"Yes. We none of us like it, except my boy Michael, who still swears by Desert. But Dinny has got her teeth into it, and I don't think anything will budge her."

"She can't be allowed to marry a man who's bound for Coventry the moment this comes out."

"The more he's taboo, the closer she'll stick to him."

"I like THAT," said Muskham. "What do you say, Yule?"

"It's no affair of mine. If Sir Lawrence wants me to say nothing, I shall say nothing."

"Of course it's no affair of ours; all the same, if making it known would stop your niece, I'd do it. I call it a damned shame!"

"It would have just the opposite effect, Jack. Mr. Yule, you know a lot about the Press. Suppose this story leaks into the Press, as it well may; what then?"

Yule's eyes snapped.

"First they'll tell it vaguely of a certain English traveller; then they'll find out whether it's denied by Desert; then they'll tell it of him, with a good many details wrong, but not so wrong as all that. If he admits it, he can't object. The Press is pretty fair, and damned inaccurate."

Sir Lawrence nodded. "If I knew anyone going in for journalism, I should say: 'Be strictly accurate, and you will be unique.' I have not read any absolutely accurate personal paragraphs in the papers since the war."

"That's their dodge," said Yule; "they get a double shot — first the inaccurate report and then the correction."

"I loathe the Press," said Muskham. "I had an American press-man here. There he sat, and short of kicking him out — I don't know what on earth he made of me."

"Yes, you date, Jack. To you Marconi and Edison are the world's two greatest malefactors. Is it agreed, then, about young Desert?"

"Yes," said Yule; and Muskham nodded.

Sir Lawrence passed swiftly from the subject.

"Nice country about here. Are you staying long, Mr. Yule?"

"I go back to Town this afternoon."

"Let me take you."

"Willingly."

Half an hour later they had started.

"My cousin Jack," said Sir Lawrence, "ought to be left to the nation. In Washington there's a museum with groups of the early Americans under glass smoking the communal pipe, holding tomahawks over each other, and that sort of thing. One might have Jack —” Sir Lawrence paused: “That’s the trouble! How could one have Jack preserved? It’s so difficult to perpetuate the unemphatic. You can catch anything that jumps around; but when there’s no attitude except a watchful languor — and yet a man with a God of his own.”

“Form, and Muskham is its prophet.”

“He might, of course,” murmured Sir Lawrence, “be preserved in the act of fighting a duel. That’s perhaps the only human activity formal enough.”

“Form’s doomed,” said Yule.

“H’m! Nothing so hard to kill as the sense of shape. For what IS life but the sense of shape, Mr. Yule? Reduce everything to dead similarity, and still shape will ‘out’.’

“Yes,” said Yule, “but ‘form’ is shape brought to perfection-point and standardised; and perfection bores our bright young things.”

“That nice expression. But do they exist outside books, Mr. Yule?”

“Don’t they! And yawn-making — as they’d call it! I’d sooner attend City dinners for the rest of my life than spend a week-end in the company of those bright young things.”

“I doubt,” said Sir Lawrence, “whether I’ve come across them.”

“You should thank God. They never stop talking day or night, not even in their couplings.”

“You don’t seem to like them.”

“Well,” said Yule, looking like a gargoyle, “they can’t stand me any more than I can stand them. A boring little crowd, but, luckily, of no importance.”

“I hope,” said Sir Lawrence, “that Jack is not making the mistake of thinking young Desert is one.”

“Muskham’s never met a bright young thing. No; what gets his goat about Desert is the look of his face. It’s a deuced strange face.”

“Lost angel,” said Sir Lawrence. “‘Spiritual pride, my buck!’ Something fine about it.”

Yule nodded. “I don’t mind it myself; and his verse is good. But all revolt’s anathema to Muskham. He likes mentality clipped, with its mane plaited, stepping delicately to the snaffle.”

“I don’t know,” murmured Sir Lawrence, “I think those two might like each other, if they could shoot each other first. Queer people, we English!”

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Chapter 14

When, about the same time that afternoon, Adrian entered his brother's parish and traversed the mean street leading to the Vicarage of St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads, English people were being almost too well illustrated six doors round the corner.

An ambulance stood in front of a house without a future, and all who had something better to do were watching it. Adrian made one of the party. From the miserable edifice two men and a nurse were bearing the stretched-out body of a child, followed by a wailing, middle-aged, red-faced woman and a growling, white-faced man with a drooping moustache.

"What's up?" said Adrian to a policeman.

"The child's got to have an operation. You'd think she was goin' to be murdered, instead of havin' the best that care can give her. There's the Vicar. If he can't quiet 'em, no one can."

Adrian saw his brother come out of the house and join the white-faced man. The growling ceased, but the woman's wails increased. The child was ensconced by now in the ambulance, and the mother made an unwieldly rush at its door.

"Where's their sense?" said the policeman, stepping forward.

Adrian saw Hilary put his hand on the woman's shoulder. She turned as if to deliver a wide-mouthed imprecation, but a mere whimper issued. Hilary put his arm through hers and drew her quietly back into the house. The ambulance drove away. Adrian moved up to the white-faced man and offered him a cigarette. He took it with a "Thanks, mister," and followed his wife.

All was over. The little crowd had gone. The policeman stood there alone.

"The Vicar's a wonder," he said.

"My brother," said Adrian.

The policeman looked at him more respectfully.

"A rare card, sir, the Vicar."

"I quite agree. Was that child very bad?"

"Won't live the day out, unless they operate. Seems as if they'd saved it up to make a close run. Just an accident the Vicar happening on it. Some people'd rather die than go into 'ospitals, let alone their children."

"Independence," said Adrian. "I understand the feeling."

"Well, if you put it that way, sir, so do I. Still, they've got a wretched home in there, and everything of the best in the 'ospital."

"'Be it never so humble —'" quoted Adrian.

"That's right. And in my opinion it's responsible for these slums. Very slummy round these parts, but try and move the people, and don't they let you know! The Vicar does good work, reconditionin' the 'ouses, as they call it. If you want him, I'll go and tell him."

"Oh! I'll wait."

"You'd be surprised," said the policeman, "the things people'll put up with sooner than be messed about. And you can call it what you like: Socialism, Communism, Government by the people for the people, all comes to that in the end, messin' you about. Here! You move on! No hawkin' in this street!"

A man with a barrow who had looked as if he had been going to cry 'Winkles!' altered the shape of his mouth.

Adrian, stirred by the confusion of the policeman's philosophy, waited in hopes of more, but at this moment Hilary emerged and came towards them.

"It won't be their fault if she lives," he said, and, answering the policeman's salute, added: "Are those petunias coming up, Bell?"

"They are, sir; my wife thinks no end of 'em."

"Splendid! Look here! You'll pass the hospital on your way home, you might ask about that child for me; and ring me if the news is bad."

"I will, Vicar; pleased to do it."

"Thanks, Bell. Now, old man, let's go in and have some tea."

Mrs. Hilary being at a meeting, the brothers had tea by themselves.

"I've come about Dinny," said Adrian, and unfolded her story.

Hilary lighted a pipe. "That saying," he said at last: "'Judge not that ye be not judged,' is extraordinarily comforting, until you've got to do something about it. After that it appears to amount to less than nothing; all action is based on judgments, tacit or not. Is Dinny very much in love?"

Adrian nodded. Hilary drew deeply at his pipe.

"I don't like it a little bit, then. I've always wanted a clear sky for Dinny; and this looks to me like a sirocco. I suppose no amount of putting it to her from other people's points of view is any good?"

"I should say none."

"Is there anything you want me to do?"

Adrian shook his head. "I only wanted your reaction."

"Just sorrow that Dinny's going to have a bad time. As to that recantation, my cloth rises on me, but whether it rises because I'm a parson, or a public-school Englishman, I don't know. I suspect the older Adam."

"If Dinny means to stick to this," said Adrian, "one must stick to her. I always feel that if a thing one hates has to happen to a person one loves, one can only help by swallowing the idea of it whole. I shall try to like him and see his point of view."

"He probably hasn't one," said Hilary. "Au fond, you know, like 'Lord Jim,' he just jumped; and he almost certainly knows it at heart."

"The more tragic for them both; and the more necessary to stand by."

Hilary nodded.

"Poor old Con will be badly hit. It gives such a chance to people to play the Pharisee. I can see the skirts being drawn aside."

"Perhaps," said Adrian, "modern scepticism will just shrug its shoulders and say: 'Another little superstition gone west!'"

Hilary shook his head.

"Human nature, in the large, will take the view that he kowtowed to save his life. However sceptical people are nowadays about religion, patriotism, the Empire, the word gentleman, and all that, they still don't like cowardice — to put it crudely. I don't mean to say that a lot of them aren't cowards, but they still don't like it in other people; and if they can safely show their dislike, they will."

"Perhaps the thing won't come out."

"Bound to, one way or another; and, for young Desert, the sooner the better. Give him a chance to captain his soul again. Poor little Dinny! This'll test her sense of humour. Oh! dear me! I feel older. What does Michael say?"

"Haven't seen him since."

"Do Lawrence and Em know?"

"Probably."

"Otherwise it's to be kept dark, eh?"

"Yes. Well, I must be getting on."

"I," said Hilary, "shall carve my feelings into my Roman galley; I shall get half an hour at it, unless that child has collapsed."

Adrian strode on to Bloomsbury. And while he went he tried to put himself in the place of one threatened with sudden extinction. No future life, no chance of seeing again those he loved; no promise, assured or even vague, of future conscious experience analogous to that of this life!

'It's the sudden personal emergency coming out of the blue,' he thought, 'with no eyes on you, that's the acid test. Who among us knows how he'll come through it?'

His brothers, the soldier and the priest, would accept extinction as a matter of simple duty; even his brother the judge, though he would want to argue the point and might convert his executioner. ‘But I?’ he thought. ‘How rotten to die like that for a belief I haven’t got, in a remote corner of the earth, without even the satisfaction of knowing that my death was going to benefit anybody, or would ever even be known!’ Without professional or official prestige to preserve, faced by such an issue, requiring immediate decision, one would have no time to weigh and balance; would be thrown back on instinct. One’s temperament would decide. And if it were like young Desert’s, judging from his verse; if he were accustomed to being in opposition to his fellows, or at least out of touch with them; scornful of convention and matter-of-fact English bull-doggedness; secretly, perhaps, more in sympathy with Arabs than with his own countrymen, would he not almost infallibly decide as Desert had? ‘God knows how I should have acted,’ thought Adrian, ‘but I understand, and in a way I sympathise. Anyway, I’m with Dinny in this, and I’ll see her through; as she saw me through that Ferse business.’ And, having reached a conclusion, he felt better . . . .

But Hilary carved away at his Roman galley. Those classical studies he had so neglected had led up to his becoming a parson, and he could no longer understand why. What sort of young man could he have been to think he was fit for it? Why had he not taken to forestry, become a cowboy, or done almost anything that kept him out of doors instead of in the slummy heart of a dim city? Was he or was he not based on revelation? And, if not, on what was he based? Planing away at an after-deck such as that whence those early plumbers, the Romans, had caused so many foreigners to perspire freely, he thought: ‘I serve an idea, with a superstructure which doesn’t bear examination.’ Still, the good of mankind was worth working for! A doctor did it in the midst of humbug and ceremony. A statesman, though he knew that democracy, which made him a statesman, was ignorance personified. One used forms in which one didn’t believe, and even exhorted others to believe in them. Life was a practical matter of compromise. ‘We’re all Jesuits,’ he thought, ‘using doubtful means to good ends. I should have had to die for my cloth, as a soldier dies for his. But that’s neither here nor there!’

The telephone bell rang, and a voice said:

“The Vicar! . . . Yes, sir! . . . That girl. Too far gone to operate. So if you’d come, sir.”

Hilary put down the receiver, snatched his hat, and ran out of the house. Of all his many duties the deathbed was least to his taste, and, when he alighted from the taxi before the hospital, the lined mask of his face concealed real dread. Such a child! And nothing to be done except patter a few prayers and hold her hand. Criminal the way her parents had let it run on till it was too late. But to imprison them for it would be to imprison the whole British race, which never took steps to interfere with its independence till the last minute, and that too late!

“This way sir,” said a nurse.

In the whiteness and order of a small preliminary room Hilary saw the little figure, white-covered, collapsed, and with a deathly face. He sat down beside it, groping for words with which to warm the child’s last minutes.

‘Shan’t pray,’ he thought, ‘she’s too young.’

The child’s eyes, struggling out of their morphined immobility, flitted with terror round the room and fixed themselves, horror-stricken, first on the white figure of the nurse, then on the doctor in his overalls. Hilary raised his hand.

“D’you mind,” he said, “leaving her with me a moment?”

They passed into an adjoining room.

“Loo!” said Hilary softly.

Recalled by his voice from their terrified wandering, the child’s eyes rested on his smile.

“Isn’t this a nice clean place? Loo! What d’you like best in all the world?”

The answer came almost inaudibly from the white puckered lips: “Pictures.”

“That exactly what you’re going to have, every day — twice a day. Think of that. Shut your eyes and have a nice sleep, and when you wake the pictures will begin. Shut your eyes! And I’ll tell you a story. Nothing’s going to happen to you. See! I’m here.”

He thought she had closed her eyes, but pain gripped her suddenly again; she began whimpering and then screamed.

“God!” murmured Hilary. “Another touch, doctor, quick!”

The doctor injected morphia.

“Leave us alone again.”

The doctor slipped away, and the child’s eyes came slowly back to Hilary’s smile. He laid his fingers on her small emaciated hand.

“Now, Loo, listen!

“‘The Walrus and the Carpenter were walking hand in hand, They wept like anything to see such quantities of sand. “If seven maids with seven brooms could sweep for half a year, Do you suppose,” the Walrus said, “that they could get it clear?” “I doubt it,” said the Carpenter, and shed a bitter tear!’”

On and on went Hilary, reciting ‘The Mad Hatter’s Tea-party.’ And, while he murmured, the child’s eyes closed, the small hand lost warmth.

He felt its cold penetrating his own hand and thought: ‘Now, God, if you are — give her pictures!’

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CHAPTER 15

When Dinny opened her eyes on the morning after she had told her father, she could not remember what her trouble was. Realisation caused her to sit up with a feeling of terror. Suppose Wilfrid ran away from it all, back to the East or further! He well might, and think he was doing it for her sake.

'I can't wait till Thursday,' she thought; 'I must go up. If only I had money, in case —!' She rummaged out her trinkets and took hasty stock of them. The two gentlemen of South Molton Street! In the matter of Jean's emerald pendant they had behaved beautifully. She made a little parcel of her pledgeable ornaments, reserving the two or three she normally wore. There were none of much value, and to get a hundred pounds on them, she felt, would strain benevolence.

At breakfast they all behaved as if nothing had happened. So then, they all knew the worst!

'Playing the angel!' she thought.

When her father announced that he was going up to Town, she said she would come with him.

He looked at her, rather like a monkey questioning man's right not to be a monkey too. Why had she never before noticed that his brown eyes could have that flickering mournfulness?

"Very well," he said.

"Shall I drive you?" asked Jean.

"Thankfully accepted," murmured Dinny.

Nobody said a word on the subject occupying all their thoughts.

In the opened car she sat beside her father. The may-blossom, rather late, was at its brightest, and its scent qualified the frequent drifts of petrol fume. The sky had the high brooding grey of rain withheld. Their road passed over the Chilterns, through Hampden, Great Missenden, Chalfont, and Chorley Wood; land so English that no one, suddenly awakened, could at any moment of the drive have believed he was in any other country. It was a drive Dinny never tired of; but today the spring green and brightness of the may and apple blossom, the windings and divings through old villages, could not deflect her attention from the impassive figure by whom she sat. She knew instinctively that he was going to try and see Wilfrid, and, if so — she was, too. But when he talked it was of India. And when she talked it was of birds. And Jean drove furiously and never looked behind her. Not till they were in the Finchley Road did the General say:

"Where d'you want to be set down, Dinny?"

"Mount Street."

"You're staying up, then?"

"Yes, till Friday."

"We'll drop you, and I'll go on to my Club. You'll drive me back this evening, Jean?"

Jean nodded without turning and slid between two vermilion-coloured buses, so that two drivers simultaneously used the same qualitative word.

Dinny was in a ferment of thought. Dared she telephone Stack to ring her up when her father came? If so, she could time her visit to the minute. Dinny was of those who at once establish liaison with 'staff.' She could not help herself to a potato without unconsciously conveying to the profferer that she was interested in his personality. She always said 'Thank you,' and rarely passed from the presence without having made some remark which betrayed common humanity. She had only seen Stack three times, but she knew he felt that she was a human being, even if she did not come from Barnstaple. She mentally reviewed his no longer youthful figure, his monastic face, black-haired and large-nosed, with eyes full of expression, his curly mouth, at once judgmatic and benevolent. He moved upright and almost at a trot. She had seen him look at her as if saying to himself: 'If this is to be our fate, could I do with it? I could.' He was, she felt, permanently devoted to Wilfrid. She determined to risk it. When they drove away from her at Mount Street, she thought: 'I hope I shall never be a father!'

"Can I telephone, Blore?"

"Certainly, miss."

She gave Wilfrid's number.

"Is that Stack? Miss Cherrell speaking. . . . Would you do me a little favour? My father is going to see Mr. Desert today, General Sir Conway Cherrell; I don't know at what time, but I want to come myself while he's there. . . . Could you ring me up here as soon as he arrives? I'll wait in. . . . Thank you so very much. . . . Is Mr. Desert well? . . . Don't tell him or my father, please, that I'm coming. Thank you ever so!"

'Now,' she thought, 'unless I've misread Dad! There's a picture gallery opposite, I shall be able to see him leave from the window of it.'

No call came before lunch, which she had with her aunt.

"Your uncle has seen Jack Muskham," said Lady Mont, in the middle of lunch; "Royston, you know; and he brought back the other one, just like a monkey — they won't say anything. But Michael says he mustn't, Dinny."

"Mustn't what, Aunt Em?"

"Publish that poem."

"Oh! but he will."

"Why? Is it good?"

"The best he has ever written."

"So unnecessary."

"Wilfrid isn't ashamed, Aunt Em."

"Such a bore for you, I do think. I suppose one of those companionable marriages wouldn't do, would it?"

"I've offered it, dear."

"I'm surprised at you, Dinny."

"He didn't accept it."

"Thank God! I should hate you to get into the papers.

"Not more than I should myself, Auntie."

"Fleur got into the papers, libellin'."

"I remember."

"What's that thing that comes back and hits you by mistake?"

"A boomerang?"

"I knew it was Australian. Why do they have an accent like that?"

"Really I don't know, darling."

"And marsupials? Blore, Miss Dinny's glass."

"No more, thank you, Aunt Em. And may I get down?"

"Let's both get down"; and, getting up, Lady Mont regarded her niece with her head on one side. "Deep breathin' and carrots to cool the blood. Why Gulf Stream, Dinny? What gulf is that?"

"Mexico, dear."

"The eels come from there, I was readin'. Are you goin' out?"

"I'm waiting for a 'phone call."

"When they say tr-r-roubled, it hurts my teeth. Nice girls, I'm sure. Coffee?"

"Yes, PLEASE!"

"It does. One comes together like a puddin' after it."

Dinny thought: 'Aunt Em always sees more than one thinks.'

"Bein' in love," continued Lady Mont, "is worse in the country — there's the cuckoo. They don't have it in America, somebody said. Perhaps they don't fall in love there. Your Uncle'll know. He came back with a story about a poppa at Nooport. But that was years and years ago. I feel other people's insides," continued her aunt, uncannily. "Where's your father gone?"

"To his Club."

"Did you tell him, Dinny?"

"Yes."

"You're his favourite."

"Oh, no! Clare is."

"Fiddle!"

"Did the course of your love run smooth, Aunt Em?"

"I had a good figure," replied her aunt; "too much, perhaps; we had then. Lawrence was my first."

"Really?"

"Except for choir-boys and our groom, and a soldier or two. There was a little captain with a black moustache. Inconsiderate, when one's fourteen."

"I suppose your 'wooing' was very decorous?"

"No; your uncle was passionate. 'Ninety-one. There'd been no rain for thirty years."

"No such rain?"

"No! No rain at all — I forget where. There's the telephone!"

Dinny reached the 'phone just in front of the butler.

"It'll be for me, Blore, thank you."

She took up the receiver with a shaking hand.

"Yes? . . . I see . . . thank you, Stack . . . thank you very much. . . . Will you get me a taxi, Blore?"

She directed the taxi to the gallery opposite Wilfrid's rooms, bought a catalogue, and went upstairs to the window. Here, under pretext of minutely examining Number 35, called 'Rhythm,' a misnomer so far as she could see, she kept watch on the door opposite. Her father could not already have left Wilfrid, for it was only seven minutes since the telephone call. Very soon, however, she saw him issuing from the door, and watched him down the street. His head was bent, and he shook it once or twice; she could not see his face, but she could picture its expression.

'Gnawing his moustache,' she thought; 'poor lamb!'

The moment he rounded the corner she ran down, slipped across the street and up the first flight. Outside Wilfrid's door she stood with her hand raised to the bell. Then she rang.

"Am I too late, Stack?"

"The General's just gone, Miss."

"Oh! May I see Mr. Desert? Don't announce me."

"No, miss," said Stack. Had she ever seen eyes more full of understanding?

Taking a deep breath, she opened the door. Wilfrid was standing at the hearth with his head bent down on his folded arms. She stole silently up, waiting for him to realise her presence.

Suddenly he threw his head up, and saw her.

"Darling!" said Dinny, "so sorry for startling you!" And she tilted her head, with lips a little parted and throat exposed, watching the struggle on his face.

He succumbed and kissed her.

"Dinny, your father —"

"I know. I saw him go. 'Mr. Desert, I believe! My daughter has told me of an engagement, and — er — your position. I— er — have come about that. You have — er — considered what will happen when your — er — escapade out there becomes — er — known. My daughter is of age, she can please herself, but we are all extremely fond of her, and I think you will agree that in the face of such a — er — scandal it would be wholly wrong on your part — er — to consider yourself engaged to her at present."

"Almost exact."

"And you answered?"

"That I'd think it over. He's perfectly right."

"He is perfectly wrong. I have told you before, 'Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.' Michael thinks you ought not to publish The Leopard."

"I must. I want it off my chest. When I'm not with you I'm hardly sane."

"I know! But, darling, those two are not going to say anything; need it ever come out? Things that don't come out quickly often don't come out at all. Why go to meet trouble?"

"It isn't that. It's some damned fear in me that I WAS yellow. I want the whole thing out. Then, yellow or not, I can hold my head up. Don't you see, Dinny?"

She did see. The look on his face was enough. 'It's my business,' she thought, 'to feel as he does, whatever I think; only so can I help him; perhaps only so can I keep him.'

"I understand, perfectly. Michael's wrong. We'll face the music, and our heads shall be 'bloody but unbowed.' But we won't be 'captains of our souls,' whatever happens."

And, having got him to smile, she drew him down beside her. After that long close silence, she opened her eyes with the slow look all women know how to give.

"To-morrow is Thursday, Wilfrid. Will you mind if we drop in on Uncle Adrian on the way home? He's on our side. And about our engagement, we can say we aren't engaged, and BE all the same. Good-bye, my love!"

Down in the vestibule by the front door as she was opening it, Stack's voice said:

"Excuse me, miss."

"Yes?"

"I've been with Mr. Desert a long time, and I was thinking. You're engaged to him, if I don't mistake, miss?"

"Yes and no, Stack. I hope to marry him, however."

"Quite, miss. And a good thing, too, if you'll excuse me. Mr. Desert is a sudden gentleman, and I was thinking if we were in leeaison, as you might say, it'd be for his good."

"I quite agree; that's why I rang you up this morning."

"I've seen many young ladies in my time, but never one I'd rather he married, miss, which is why I've taken the liberty."

Dinny held out her hand. "I'm terribly glad you did; it's just what I wanted; because things are difficult, and going to be more so, I'm afraid."

Having polished his hand, Stack took hers, and they exchanged a rather convulsive squeeze.

"I know there's something on his mind," he said. "That's not my business. But I have known him to take very sudden decisions. And if you were to give me your telephone numbers, miss, I might be of service to you both."

Dinny wrote them down. "This is the town one at my uncle, Sir Lawrence Mont's, in Mount Street; and this is my country one at Condaford Grange in Oxfordshire. One or the other is almost sure to find me. And thank you ever so. It takes a load off my mind."

"And off mine, miss. Mr. Desert has every call on me. And I want the best for him. He's not everybody's money, but he's mine."

"And mine, Stack."

"I won't bandy compliments, miss, but he'll be a lucky one, if you'll excuse me."

Dinny smiled. "No, I shall be the lucky one. Good-bye, and thank you again."

She went away, treading, so to speak, on Cork Street. She had an ally in the lion's mouth; a spy in the friend's camp; a faithful traitor! Thus mixing her metaphors, she scurried back to her aunt's house. Her father would almost certainly go there before returning to Condaford.

Seeing his unmistakable old bowler in the hall, she took the precaution of removing her own hat before going to the drawing-room. He was talking to her aunt, and they stopped as she came in. Everyone would always stop now as she came in! Looking at them with quiet directness, she sat down.

The General's eyes met hers.

"I've been to see Mr. Desert, Dinny."

"I know, dear. He is thinking it over. We shall wait till everyone knows, anyway."

The General moved uneasily.

"And if it is any satisfaction to you, we are not formally engaged."

The General gave her a slight bow, and Dinny turned to her aunt, who was fanning a pink face with a piece of lilac-coloured blotting-paper.

There was a silence, then the General said:

"When are you going to Lippinghall, Em?"

"Next week," replied Lady Mont, "or is it the week after? Lawrence knows. I'm showing two gardeners at the Chelsea Flower Show. Boswell and Johnson, Dinny."

"Oh! Are they still with you?"

"More so. Con, you ought to grow pestifera — no, that's not the name — that hairy anemone thing."

"Pulsatilla, Auntie."

"Charmin' flowers. They want lime."

"We're short of lime at Condaford," said the General, "as you ought to know, Em."

"Our azaleas were a dream this year, Aunt Em."

Lady Mont put down the blotting-paper.

"I've been tellin' your father, Dinny, that it's no good fussin' you."

Dinny, watching her father's glum face, said: "Do you know that nice shop in Bond Street, Auntie, where they make animals? I got a lovely little vixen and her cubs there to make Dad like foxes better."

"Huntin'," said Lady Mont, and sighed. "When they get up chimneys, it's rather touchin'."

"Even Dad doesn't like digging out, or stopping earths, do you, Dad?"

"N-no!" said the General, "on the whole, no!"

"Bloodin' children, too," said Lady Mont. "I saw you blooded, Con."

"Messy job, and quite unnecessary! Only the old raw-hide school go in for it now."

"He looked so nasty, Dinny."

"Yes, you haven't got the face for it, Dad. It wants one of those snub-nosed, red-haired, freckled boys, that like killing for the sake of killing."

The General rose.

"I must be going back to the Club. Jean picks me up there. When shall we see you, Dinny? Your mother —" and he stopped.

"Aunt Em's keeping me till Saturday."

The General nodded. He suffered his sister's and daughter's kiss with a face that seemed to say, 'Yes — but —'

From the window Dinny watched his figure moving down the street, and her heart twitched.

"Your father!" said her aunt's voice behind her. "All this is very wearin', Dinny."

"I think it's very dear of Dad not to have mentioned the fact that I'm dependent on him."

"Con IS a dear," said Lady Mont; "he said the young man was respectful. Who was it said: 'Goroo — goroo'?"

"The old Jew in David Copperfield."

"Well, it's what I feel."

Dinny turned from the window.

"Auntie! I don't feel the same being at all as I did two weeks ago. I'm utterly changed. Then I didn't seem to have any desires; now I'm all one desire, and I don't seem to care whether I'm decent or not. Don't say Epsom salts!"

Lady Mont patted her arm.

"'Honour thy father and thy mother,'" she said; "but then there was 'Forsake all and follow me,' so you can't tell."

"I can," said Dinny. "Do you know what I'm hoping now? That everything will come out tomorrow. If it did, we could be married at once."

"Let's have some tea, Dinny. Blore, tea! Indian and rather strong!"

CHAPTER 16

Dinny took her lover to Adrian's door at the museum the next day, and left him there. Looking round at his tall, hatless, girt-in figure, she saw him give a violent shiver. But he smiled, and even at that distance she felt warmed by his eyes.

Adrian, already notified, received the young man with what he stigmatised to himself as 'morbid curiosity,' and placed him at once in mental apposition to Dinny. A curiously diverse couple they would make! Yet, with a perception not perhaps unconnected with the custody of skeletons, he had a feeling that his niece was not physically in error. This was a figure that could well stand or lie beside her. Its stringy grace and bony gallantry accorded with her style and slenderness; and the darkened face, with its drawn and bitter lines, had eyes which even Adrian, who had all the public-school-man's impatience of male film stars, could see would be attractive to the feminine gender. Bones broke the ice to some degree; and over the identity of a supposed Hittite in moderate preservation they became almost cordial. Places and people whom they had both seen in strange conditions were a further incentive to human feeling. But not till he had taken up his hat to go did Wilfrid say suddenly:

"Well, Mr. Cherrell, what would YOU do?"

Adrian, who was looking up, halted and considered his questioner with narrowed eyes.

"I'm a poor hand at advice, but Dinny is a precious baggage —"

"She is."

Adrian bent and shut the door of a cabinet.

"This morning," he said, "I watched a solitary ant in my bathroom trying to make its way and find out about things. I'm sorry to say I dropped some ashes from my pipe on it to see what it would do. Providence all over — always dropping ashes from its pipe on us to observe the result. I've been in several minds, but I've come to the conclusion that if you're really in love with Dinny —" a convulsive movement of Wilfrid's body ended in the tight clenching of his hands on his hat —"as I see you are, and as I know her to be with you, then stand fast and work your way with her through the ashes. She'd rather be in the cart with you than in a Pullman with the rest of us. I believe"— and Adrian's face was illuminated by earnestness —"that she is one of those of whom it is not yet written, 'and they twain shall be one SPIRIT.'" The young man's face quivered.

'Genuine!' thought Adrian.

"So think first of her, but not in the 'I love you so that nothing will induce me to marry you' fashion. Do what she wants — when she wants it — she's not unreasonable. And, honestly, I don't believe you'll either of you regret it."

Desert took a step towards him, and Adrian could see that he was intensely moved. But he mastered all expression, save a little jerky smile, made a movement of one hand, turned, and went out.

Adrian continued to shut the doors of cupboards that contained bones. 'That,' he was thinking, 'is the most difficult, and in some ways the most beautiful face I've seen. The spirit walks upon its waters and is often nearly drowned. I wonder if that advice was criminal, because for some reason or other I believe he's going to take it.' And he returned to the reading of a geographical magazine which Wilfrid's visit had interrupted. It contained a spirited account of an Indian tribe on the Amazon which had succeeded, even without the aid of American engineers at capitalistic salaries, in perfecting the Communistic ideal. None of them, apparently, owned anything. Their whole lives, including the processes of nature, were passed in the public eye. They wore no clothes, they had no laws; their only punishment, something in connection with red ants, was inflicted for the only offence, that of keeping anything to themselves. They lived on the cassava root variegated with monkey, and were the ideal community!

'A wonderful instance,' thought Adrian, 'of how the life of man runs in cycles. For the last twenty thousand years or so we've been trying, as we thought, to improve on the principle which guides the life of these Indians, only to find it reintroduced as the perfect pattern.'

He sat for some time with a smile biting deep into the folds about his mouth. Doctrinaires, extremists! That Arab who put a pistol to young Desert's head was a symbol of the most mischievous trait in human nature! Ideas and creeds — what were they but half-truths, only useful in so far as they helped to keep life balanced? The geographical magazine slipped off his knee.

He stopped on the way home in the garden of his square to feel the sun on his cheek and listen to a blackbird. He had all he wanted in life: the woman he loved, fair health, a fair salary — seven hundred a year and the prospect of a pension — two adorable children, not his own, so that he was free from the misgivings of more normal parents; an absorbing job, a love of nature, and another thirty years, perhaps, before him. 'If at this moment,' he thought, 'someone put a pistol to my head and said: "Adrian Cherrell, renounce Christianity or out go your brains!" should I say with Clive in India: "Shoot and be damned!"?' And he could not answer. The blackbird continued to sing, the young leaves to twitter in the breeze, the sun to warm his cheek, and life to be desirable in the quiet of that one-time fashionable square . . . .

Dinny, when she left those two on the verge of acquaintanceship, had paused, in two minds, and then gone north to St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads. Her instinct was to sap the opposition of the outlying portions of her family, so as to isolate the defences of her immediate people. She moved towards the heart of practical Christianity with a certain rather fearful exhilaration.

Her Aunt May was in the act of dispensing tea to two young ex-Collegians before their departure to a club where they superintended the skittles, chess, draughts, and ping-pong of the neighbourhood.

"If you want Hilary, Dinny, he had two committees, but they might collapse, because he's almost the whole of both."

"You and uncle know about me, I suppose?"

Mrs. Hilary nodded. She was looking very fresh in a sprigged dress.

"Would you mind telling me what uncle feels about it?"

"I'd rather leave that to him, Dinny. We neither of us remember Mr. Desert very well."

"People who don't know him well will always misjudge him. But neither you nor uncle care what other people think." She said this with a guileless expression which by no means deceived Mrs. Hilary, accustomed to Women's Institutes.

"We're neither of us very orthodox, as you know, Dinny, but we do both of us believe very deeply in what Christianity stands for, and it's no good pretending we don't."

Dinny thought a moment.

"Is that more than gentleness and courage and self-sacrifice, and must one be a Christian to have those?"

"I'd rather not talk about it. I should be sorry to say anything that would put me in a position different from Hilary's."

"Auntie, how model of you!"

Mrs. Hilary smiled. And Dinny knew that judgment in this quarter was definitely reserved.

She waited, talking of other things, till Hilary came in. He was looking pale and worried. Her aunt gave him tea, passed a hand over his forehead, and went out.

Hilary drank off his tea and filled his pipe with a knot of tobacco screwed up in a circular paper.

"Why corporations, Dinny? Why not three doctors, three engineers, three architects, an adding machine, and a man of imagination to work it and keep them straight?"

"Are you in trouble, Uncle?"

"Yes, gutting houses on an overdraft is ageing enough, without corporational red tape."

Looking at his worn but smiling face, Dinny thought: 'I can't bother him with my little affairs.' "You and Aunt May couldn't spare time, I suppose, to come to the Chelsea Flower Show on Tuesday?"

"My goodness!" said Hilary, sticking one end of a match into the centre of the knob and lighting the knob with the other end, "how I would love to stand in a tent and smell azaleas!"

"We thought of going at one o'clock, so as to avoid the worst of the crush. Aunt Em would send for you."

"Can't promise, so don't send. If we're not at the main entrance at one, you'll know that Providence has intervened. And now, what about you? Adrian has told me."

"I don't want to bother you, Uncle."

Hilary's shrewd blue eyes almost disappeared. He expelled a cloud of smoke.

"Nothing that concerns you will bother me, my dear, except in so far as it's going to hurt you. I suppose you MUST, Dinny?"

"Yes, I must."

Hilary sighed.

"In that case it remains to make the best of it. But the world loves the martyrdom of others. I'm afraid he'll have a bad Press, as they say."

"I'm sure he will."

"I can only just remember him, as a rather tall, scornful young man in a buff waistcoat. Has he lost the scorn?"

Dinny smiled.

"It's not the side I see much of at present."

"I sincerely trust," said Hilary, "that he has not what they call devouring passions."

"Not so far as I have observed."

"I mean, Dinny, that once that type has eaten its cake, it shows all the old Adam with a special virulence. Do you get me?"

"Yes. But I believe it's a 'marriage of true minds' with us."

"Then, my dear, good luck! Only, when people begin to throw bricks, don't resent it. You're doing this with your eyes open, and you'll have no right to. Harder to bear than having your own toe trodden on is seeing one you love batted over the head. So catch hold of yourself hard at the start, and go on catching hold, or you'll make it worse for him. If I'm not wrong, Dinny, you can get very hot about things."

"I'll try not to. When Wilfrid's book of poems comes out, I want you to read one called 'The Leopard'; it gives his state of mind about the whole thing."

"Oh!" said Hilary blankly. "Justification? That's a mistake."

"That's what Michael says. I don't know whether it is or not; I think in the end — not. Anyway, it's coming out."

"There beginneth a real dog-fight. 'Turn the other cheek' and 'too proud to fight' would have been better left unsaid. All the same, it's asking for trouble, and that's all about it."

"I can't help it, Uncle."

"I realise that, Dinny; it's when I think of the number of things you won't be able to help that I feel so blue. And what about Condaford? Is it going to cut you off from that?"

"People do come round, except in novels; and even there they have to in the end, or else die, so that the heroine may be happy. Will you say a word for us to Father if you see him, Uncle?"

"No, Dinny. An elder brother never forgets how superior he was to you when he was big and you were not."

Dinny rose.

"Well, Uncle; thank you ever so for not believing in damnation, and even more for not saying so. I shall remember all you've said. Tuesday, one o'clock at the main entrance; and don't forget to eat something first; it's a very tiring business."

When she had gone Hilary refilled his pipe.

'"And even more for not saying so!"' he repeated in thought. 'That young woman can be caustic. I wonder how often I say things I don't mean in the course of my professional duties.' And, seeing his wife in the doorway, he added:

"May, would you say I was a humbug — professionally?"

"Yes, dear. How could it be otherwise?"

"You mean, the forms a parson uses aren't broad enough to cover the variations of human nature? But I don't see how they could be. Would you like to go to the Chelsea Flower Show on Tuesday?"

Mrs. Hilary, thinking: 'Dinny might have asked ME,' replied cheerfully: "Very much."

"Let's try and arrange so that we can get there at one o'clock."

"Did you talk to her about her affair?"

"Yes."

"Is she immovable?"

"Quite."

Mrs. Hilary sighed. “It’s an awful pity. Do you think a man could ever live that down?”

“Twenty years ago I should have said ‘No.’ Now I’m not sure. It seems a queer thing to say, but it’s not the really religious people who’ll matter.”

“Why?”

“Because they won’t come across them. It’s the army, and Empire people, and Englishmen overseas, whom they will come across continually. The hub of unforgiveness is in her own family to start with. It’s the yellow label. The gum they use putting that on is worse than the patent brand of any hotel that wants to advertise itself.”

“I wonder,” said Mrs. Hilary, “what the children would say about it?”

“Queer that we don’t know.”

“We know less about our children than any of their friends do. Were we like that to our own elders, I wonder?”

“Our elders looked on us as biological specimens; they had us at an angle, and knew quite a lot about us. WE’VE tried to put ourselves on a level with our youngsters, elder brother and sister business, and we don’t know a thing. We’ve missed the one knowledge, and haven’t got the other. A bit humiliating, but they’re a decent crowd. It’s not the young people I’m afraid of in Dinny’s business, it’s those who’ve had experience of the value of English prestige, and they’ll be justified; and those who like to think he’s done a thing they wouldn’t have done themselves — and they won’t be justified a bit.”

“I think Dinny’s over-estimating her strength, Hilary.”

“No woman really in love could do otherwise. To find out whether she is or not will be her job. Well, she won’t rust.”

“You speak as if you rather liked it.”

“The milk is spilled, and it’s no good worrying. Let’s get down to the wording of that new appeal. There’s going to be a bad trade slump. Just our luck! All the people who’ve got money will be sticking to it.”

“I wish people wouldn’t be less extravagant when times are bad. It only means less work still. The shopkeepers are moaning about that already.”

Hilary reached for a notebook and began writing. His wife looked over his shoulder presently and read:

“To all whom it may concern:

“And whom does it not concern that there should be in our midst thousands of people so destitute from birth to death of the bare necessities of life that they don’t know what real cleanliness, real health, real fresh air, real good food are?”

“One ‘real’ will cover the lot, dear.”

❦

Chapter 17

Arriving at the Chelsea Flower Show, Lady Mont said thoughtfully: "I'm meetin' Boswell and Johnson at the calceolarias, Dinny. What a crowd!"

"Yes, and all plain. Do they come, Auntie, because they're yearning for beauty they haven't got?"

"I can't get Boswell and Johnson to yearn. There's Hilary! He's had that suit ten years. Take this and run for tickets, or he'll try and pay."

With a five-pound note Dinny slid towards the wicket, avoiding her uncle's eyes. She secured four tickets, and turned smiling.

"I saw you being a serpent," he said. "Where are we going first? Azaleas? I like to be thoroughly sensual at a flower show."

Lady Mont's deliberate presence caused a little swirl in the traffic, while her eyes from under slightly drooped lids took in the appearance of people selected, as it were, to show off flowers.

The tent they entered was warm with humanity and perfume, though the day was damp and cool. The ingenious beauty of each group of blossoms was being digested by variegated types of human being linked only through that mysterious air of kinship which comes from attachment to the same pursuit. This was the great army of flower-raisers — growers of primulas in pots, of nasturtiums, gladioli and flags in London back gardens, of stocks, hollyhocks and sweet-williams in little provincial plots; the gardeners of larger grounds; the owners of hothouses and places where experiments are made — but not many of these, for they had already passed through or would come later. All moved with a prying air, as if marking down their own next ventures; and alongside the nurserymen would stop and engage as if making bets. And the subdued murmur of voices, cockneyfied, countrified, cultivated, all commenting on flowers, formed a hum like that of bees, if not so pleasing. This subdued expression of a national passion, walled-in by canvas, together with the scent of the flowers, exercised on Dinny an hypnotic effect, so that she moved from one brilliant planted posy to another, silent and with her slightly upturned nose twitching delicately.

Her aunt's voice roused her.

"There they are!" she said, pointing with her chin.

Dinny saw two men standing so still that she wondered if they had forgotten why they had come. One had a reddish moustache and sad cow-like eyes; the other looked like a bird with a game wing; their clothes were stiff with Sundays. They were not talking, nor looking at the flowers, but as if placed there by Providence without instructions.

"Which is Boswell, Auntie?"

"No moustache," said Lady Mont; "Johnson has the green hat. He's deaf. So like them."

She moved towards them, and Dinny heard her say:

"Ah!"

The two gardeners rubbed their hands on the sides of their trousered legs, but did not speak.

"Enjoyin' it?" she heard her aunt say. Their lips moved, but no sound came forth that she could catch. The one she had called Boswell lifted his cap and scratched his head. Her aunt was pointing now at the calceolarias, and suddenly the one in the green hat began to speak. He spoke so that, as Dinny could see, not even her aunt could hear a word, but his speech went on and on and seemed to afford him considerable satisfaction. Every now and then she heard her aunt say: "Ah!" But Johnson went on. He stopped suddenly; her aunt said "Ah!" again and came back to her.

"What was he saying?" asked Dinny.

"No," said Lady Mont, "not a word. You can't. But it's good for him." She waved her hand to the two gardeners, who were again standing without sign of life, and led the way.

They passed into the rose tent now, and Dinny looked at her watch. She had appointed to meet Wilfrid at the entrance of it.

She cast a hurried look back. There he was! She noted that Hilary was following his nose, Aunt May following Hilary, Aunt Em talking to a nurseryman. Screened by a prodigious group of 'K. of Ks.' she skimmed over to the entrance, and, with her hands in Wilfrid's, forgot entirely where she was.

"Are you feeling strong, darling? Aunt Em is here, and my Uncle Hilary and his wife. I should so like them to know you, because they all count in our equation."

He seemed to her at that moment like a highly-strung horse asked to face something it has not faced before.

"If you wish, Dinny."

They found Lady Mont involved with the representatives of 'Plantem's Nurseries.'

"That one — south aspect and chalk. The nemesias don't. It's cross-country — they do dry so. The phloxes came dead. At least they said so: you can't tell. Oh! Here's my niece! Dinny, this is Mr. Plantem. He often sends — Oh! . . . ah! Mr. Desert! How d'you do? I remember you holdin' Michael's arms up at his weddin'." She had placed her hand in Wilfrid's and seemingly forgotten it, the while her eyes from under their raised brows searched his face with a sort of mild surprise.

"Uncle Hilary," said Dinny.

"Yes," said Lady Mont, coming to herself. "Hilary, May — Mr. Desert."

Hilary, of course, was entirely his usual self, but Aunt May looked as if she were greeting a dean. And almost at once Dinny was tacitly abandoned to her lover.

"What do you think of Uncle Hilary?"

"He looks like a man to go to in trouble."

"He is. He knows by instinct how not to run his head against brick walls, and yet he's always in action. I suppose that comes of living in a slum. He agrees with Michael that to publish 'The Leopard' is a mistake."

"Running my head against a brick wall — um?"

"Yes."

"The die, as they say, is cast. Sorry if you're sorry, Dinny."

Dinny's hand sought his. "No. Let's sail under our proper colours — only, for my sake, Wilfrid, try to take what's coming quietly, and so will I. Shall we hide behind this firework of fuchsias and slip off? They'll expect it."

Once outside the tent they moved towards the Embankment exit, past the rock gardens, each with its builder standing in the damp before it, as though saying: 'Look on this, and employ me!'

"Making nice things and having to cadge round to get people to notice them!" said Dinny.

"Where shall we go, Dinny?"

"Battersea Park?"

"Across this bridge, then."

"You were a darling to let me introduce them, but you did so look like a horse trying to back through its collar. I wanted to stroke your neck."

"I've got out of the habit of people."

"It's nice not to be dependent on them."

"The worst mixer in the world. But you, I should have thought —"

"I only want you; I think I must have a nature like a dog's. Without you, now, I should just be lost."

The twitch of his mouth was better than an answer.

"Ever seen the Lost Dogs' Home? It's over there."

"No. Lost dogs are dreadful to think about. Perhaps one ought to, though. Yes, let's!"

The establishment had its usual hospitalised appearance of all being for the best considering that it was the worst. There was a certain amount of barking and of enquiry on the faces of a certain number of dogs. Tails wagged as they approached. Such dogs as were of any breed looked quieter and sadder than the dogs that were of no breed, and those in the majority. A black spaniel was sitting in a corner of the wired enclosure, with head drooped between long ears. They went round to him.

"How on earth," said Dinny, "can a dog as nice as that stay unclaimed? He IS sad!"

Wilfrid put his fingers through the wire. The dog looked up. They saw a little red under his eyes, and a wisp of hair loose and silky on his forehead. He raised himself slowly from off his haunches, and they could see him pant very slightly as though some calculation or struggle were going on in him.

“Come on, old boy!”

The dog came slowly, all black, foursquare on his feathered legs. He had every sign of breeding, making his forlorn position more mysterious than ever. He stood almost within reach; his shortened tail fluttered feebly, then came to a droop again, precisely as if he had said: ‘I neglect no chance, but you are not.’

“Well, old fellow?” said Wilfrid.

Dinny bent down. “Give me a kiss.”

The dog looked up at them. His tail moved once, and again drooped.

“Not a good mixer, either,” said Wilfrid.

“He’s too sad for words.” She bent lower and this time got her hand through the wire. “Come, darling!” The dog sniffed her glove. Again his tail fluttered feebly; a pink tongue showed for a moment as though to make certain of his lips. With a supreme effort Dinny’s fingers reached his muzzle smooth as silk.

“He’s awfully well bred, Wilfrid.”

“Stolen, I expect, and then got away. Probably from some country kennel.”

“I believe I could hang dog-thieves.”

The dog’s dark-brown eyes had the remains of moisture in their corners. They looked back at Dinny, with suspended animation, as if saying: ‘You are not my past, and I don’t know if there is a future.’

She looked up. “Oh, Wilfrid!”

He nodded and left her with the dog. She stayed stooped on her heels, slowly scratching behind the dog’s ears, till Wilfrid, followed by a man with a chain and collar, came back.

“I’ve got him,” he said; “he reached his time-limit yesterday, but they were keeping him another week because of his looks.”

Dinny turned her back, moisture was oozing from her eyes. She mopped them hastily, and heard the man say:

“I’ll put this on, sir, before he comes out, or he might leg it; he’s never taken to the place.”

Dinny turned round.

“If his owner turns up we’ll give him back at once.”

“Not much chance of that, miss. In my opinion that’s the dog of someone who’s died. He slipped his collar, probably, and went out to find him, got lost, and no one’s cared enough to send here and see. Nice dog, too. You’ve got a bargain. I’m glad. I didn’t like to think of that dog being put away; young dog, too.”

He put the collar on, led the dog out to them, and transferred the chain to Wilfrid, who handed him a card.

“In case the owner turns up. Come on, Dinny; let’s walk him a bit. Walk, boy!”

The nameless dog, hearing the sweetest word in his vocabulary, moved forward to the limit of the chain.

“That theory’s probably right,” said Wilfrid, “and I hope it is. We shall like this fellow.”

Once on grass they tried to get through to the dog’s inner consciousness. He received their attentions patiently, without response, tail and eyes lowered, suspending judgment.

“We’d better get him home,” said Wilfrid. “Stay here, and I’ll bring up a cab.”

He wiped a chair with his handkerchief, transferred the chain to her, and swung away.

Dinny sat watching the dog. He had followed Wilfrid to the limit of the chain and then seated himself in the attitude in which they had first seen him.

What did dogs feel? They certainly put one and one together; loved, disliked, suffered, yearned, sulked, and enjoyed, like human beings; but they had a very small vocabulary and so — no ideas! Still, anything must be better than living in a wire enclosure with a lot of dogs less sensitive than yourself!

The dog came back to her side, but kept his head turned in the direction Wilfrid had taken, and began to whine.

A taxi cab drew up. The dog stopped whining, and began to pant.

"Master's coming!" The dog gave a tug at the chain.

Wilfrid had reached him. Through the slackened chain she could feel the disillusionment; then it tightened, and the wagging of the tail came fluttering down the links as the dog sniffed at the turn-ups of Wilfrid's trousers.

In the cab the dog sat on the floor with his chin hanging over Wilfrid's shoe. In Piccadilly he grew restless and ended with his chin on Dinny's knee. Between Wilfrid and the dog the drive was an emotional medley for her, and she took a deep breath when she got out.

"Wonder what Stack will say," said Wilfrid. "A spaniel in Cork Street is no catch."

The dog took the stairs with composure.

"House-trained," said Dinny thankfully.

In the sitting-room the dog applied his nose to the carpet. Having decided that the legs of all the furniture were uninteresting and the place bereft of his own kind, he leaned his nose on the divan and looked out of the corners of his eyes.

"Up!" said Dinny. The dog jumped on to the divan.

"Jove! He does smell!" said Wilfrid.

"Let's give him a bath. While you're filling it, I'll look him over."

She held the dog, who would have followed Wilfrid, and began parting his hair. She found several yellow fleas, but no other breed.

"Yes, you do smell, darling."

The dog turned his head and licked her nose.

"The bath's ready, Dinny!"

"Only dog fleas."

"If you're going to help, put on that bath gown, or you'll spoil your dress."

Behind his back, Dinny slipped off her frock and put on the blue bath gown, half hoping he would turn, and respecting him because he didn't. She rolled up the sleeves and stood beside him. Poised over the bath, the dog protruded a long tongue.

"He's not going to be sick, is he?"

"No; they always do that. Gently, Wilfrid, don't let him splash — that frightens them. Now!"

Lowered into the bath, the dog, after a scramble, stood still with his head drooped, concentrated on keeping foothold of the slippery surface.

"This is hair shampoo, better than nothing. I'll hold him. You do the rubbing in."

Pouring some of the shampoo on the centre of that polished black back, Dinny heaped water up the dog's sides and began to rub. This first domestic incident with Wilfrid was pure joy, involving no mean personal contact with him as well as with the dog. She straightened up at last.

"Phew! My back! Sluice him and let the water out. I'll hold him."

Wilfrid sluiced, the dog behaving as if not too sorry for his fleas. He shook himself vigorously, and they both jumped back.

"Don't let him out," cried Dinny; "we must dry him in the bath."

"All right. Put your hands round his neck and hold him still."

Wrapped in a huge bath towel, the dog lifted his face to her; its expression was drooping and forlorn.

"Poor boy, soon over now, and you'll smell lovely."

The dog shook himself.

Wilfrid withdrew the towel. "Hold him a minute, I'll get an old blanket; we'll make him curl up till he's dry."

Alone with the dog, who was now trying to get out of the bath, Dinny held him with his forepaws over the edge, and worked away at the accumulations of sorrow about his eyes.

"There! That's better!"

They carried the almost inanimate dog to the divan, wrapped in an old Guards’ blanket.

“What shall we call him, Dinny?”

“Let’s try him with a few names, we may hit on his real one.”

He answered to none. “Well,” said Dinny, “let’s call him ‘Foch.’ But for Foch we should never have met.”

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https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/g/galsworthy/john/flower/chapter17.html
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CHAPTER 18

Feelings at Condaford, after the General's return, were vexed and uneasy. Dinny had said she would be back on Saturday, but it was now Wednesday and she was still in London. Her saying, "We are not formally engaged," had given little comfort, since the General had added, "That was soft sawder." Pressed by Lady Cherrell as to what exactly had taken place between him and Wilfrid, he was laconic.

"He hardly said a word, Liz. Polite and all that, and I must say he doesn't look like a fellow who'd quit. His record's very good, too. The thing's inexplicable."

"Have you read any of his verse, Con?"

"No. Where is it?"

"Dinny has them somewhere. Very bitter. So many writers seem to be like that. But I could put up with anything if I thought Dinny would be happy."

"Dinny says he's actually going to publish a poem about that business. He must be a vain chap."

"Poets almost always are."

"I don't know who can move Dinny. Hubert says he's lost touch with her. To begin married life under a cloud like that!"

"I sometimes think," murmured Lady Cherrell, "that living here, as we do, we don't know what will cause clouds and what won't."

"There can't be a question," said the General, with finality, "among people who count."

"Who does count, nowadays?"

The General was silent. Then he said shrewdly:

"England's still aristocratic underneath. All that keeps us going comes from the top. Service and tradition still rule the roost. The socialists can talk as they like."

Lady Cherrell looked up, astonished at this flow.

"Well," she said, "what are we to do about Dinny?"

The General shrugged.

"Wait till things come to a crisis of some sort. Cut-you-off-with-a-shilling is out of date and out of question — we're too fond of her. You'll speak to her, Liz, when you get a chance, of course . . ."

Between Hubert and Jean discussion of the matter took a rather different line.

"I wish to God, Jean, Dinny had taken to your brother."

"Alan's got over it. I had a letter from him yesterday. He's at Singapore now. There's probably somebody out there. I only hope it isn't a married woman. There are so few girls in the East."

"I don't think he'd go for a married woman. Possibly a native; they say Malay girls are often pretty."

Jean grimaced.

"A Malay girl instead of Dinny!"

Presently she murmured: "I'd like to see this Mr. Desert. I think I could give him an idea, Hubert, of what'll be thought of him if he carries Dinny into this mess."

"You must be careful with Dinny."

"If I can have the car I'll go up tomorrow and talk it over with Fleur. She must know him quite well; he was their best man."

"I'd choose Michael of the two; but for God's sake take care, old girl."

Jean, who was accustomed to carry out her ideas, slid away next day before the world was up and was at South Square, Westminster, by ten o'clock. Michael, it appeared, was down in his constituency.

"The safer his seat," said Fleur, "the more he thinks he has to see of them. It's the gratitude complex. What can I do for you?"

Jean slid her long-lashed eyes round from the Fragonard, which she had been contemplating as though it were too French, and Fleur almost jumped. Really, she WAS like a 'leopardess'!

"It's about Dinny and her young man, Fleur. I suppose you know what happened to him out there?"

Fleur nodded.

"Then can't something be done?"

Fleur's face became watchful. She was twenty-nine, Jean twenty-three; but it was no use coming the elder matron!

"I haven't seen anything of Wilfrid for a long time."

"Somebody's got to tell him pretty sharply what'll be thought of him if he lugs Dinny into this mess."

"I'm by no means sure there'll be a mess; even if his poem comes out. People like the Ajax touch."

"You've not been in the East."

"Yes, I have; I've been round the world."

"That's not the same thing at all."

"My dear," said Fleur, "excuse my saying so, but the Cherrells are about thirty years behind the times."

"I'm not a Cherrell."

"No, you're a Tasburgh, and, if anything, that's a little worse. Country rectories, cavalry, navy, Indian civil — how much d'you suppose all that counts nowadays?"

"It counts with those who belong to it; and he belongs to it, and Dinny belongs to it."

"No one who's really in love belongs anywhere," said Fleur. "Did you care two straws when you married Hubert with a murder charge hanging over his head?"

"That's different. He'd done nothing to be ashamed of."

Fleur smiled.

"True to type. Would it surprise you, as they say in the courts, if I told you that there isn't one in twenty people about town who'd do otherwise than yawn if you asked them to condemn Wilfrid for what he did? And there isn't one in forty who won't forget all about it in a fortnight."

"I don't believe you," said Jean flatly.

"You don't know modern Society, my dear."

"It's modern Society," said Jean, even more flatly, "that doesn't count."

"Well, I don't know that it does much; but then what does?"

"Where does he live?"

Fleur laughed.

"In Cork Street, opposite the Gallery. You're not thinking of bearding him, are you?"

"I don't know."

"Wilfrid can bite."

"Well," said Jean, "thanks. I must be going."

Fleur looked at her with admiration. The girl had flushed, and that pink in her brown cheeks made her look more vivid than ever.

"Well, good-bye, my dear; and do come and tell me about it. I know you've the pluck of the devil."

"I don't know that I'm going at all," said Jean. "Good-bye!"

She drove, rather angry, past the House of Commons. Her temperament believed so much in action that Fleur's worldly wisdom had merely irritated her. Still, it was not so easy as she had thought to go to Wilfrid Desert and say: 'Stand and deliver me back my sister-inlaw.' She drove, however, to Pall Mall, parked her car near the Parthenæum, and walked up to Piccadilly. People who saw her, especially men, looked back, because of the admirable grace of her limbs and the colour and light in her face. She had no idea where Cork Street was, except that it was near Bond Street. And, when she reached it, she walked up and down before locating the Gallery. 'That must be the door, opposite,' she thought. She was standing uncertainly in front of a door without a name, when a man with a dog on a lead came up the stairs and stood beside her.

"Yes, miss?"

"I am Mrs. Hubert Cherrell. Does Mr. Desert live here?"

"Yes, ma'am; but whether you can see him I don't know. Here, Foch, good dog! If you'll wait a minute I'll find out."

A minute later Jean, swallowing resolutely, was in the presence. 'After all,' she was thinking, 'he can't be worse than a parish meeting when you want money from it.'

Wilfrid was standing at the window, with his eyebrows raised.

"I'm Dinny's sister-inlaw," said Jean. "I beg your pardon for coming, but I wanted to see you."

Wilfrid bowed.

"Come here, Foch."

The spaniel, who was sniffing round Jean's skirt, did not respond until he was called again. He licked Wilfrid's hand and sat down behind him. Jean had flushed.

"It's frightful cheek on my part, but I thought you wouldn't mind. We've just come back from the Soudan."

Wilfrid's face remained ironic, and irony always upset her. Not quite stammering, she continued:

"Dinny has never been in the East."

Again Wilfrid bowed. The affair was not going like a parish meeting.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

"Oh, thank you, no; I shan't be a minute. You see, what I wanted to say was that Dinny can't possibly realise what certain things mean out there."

"D'you know, that's what occurred to me."

"Oh!"

A minute of silence followed, while the flush on her face and the smile on Wilfrid's deepened. Then he said:

"Thank you so much for coming. Anything else?"

"Er — no! Good-bye!"

All the way downstairs she felt shorter than she had ever felt in her life. And the first man she passed in the street jumped, her eyes had passed through him like a magnetic shock. He had once been touched by an electric eel in Brazil, and preferred the sensation. Yet, curiously, while she retraced her steps towards her car, though worsted, she bore no grudge. Even more singularly, she had lost most of her feeling that Dinny was in danger.

Regaining her car, she had a slight altercation with a policeman and took the road for Condaford. Driving to the danger of the public all the way, she was home to lunch. All she said of her adventure was that she had been for a long drive. Only in the four-poster of the chief spare room did she say to Hubert:

"I've been up and seen him. D'you know, Hubert, I really believe Dinny will be all right. He's got charm."

"What on earth," said Hubert, turning on his elbow, "has that to do with it?"

"A lot," said Jean. "Give me a kiss, and don't argue . . ."

When his strange young visitor had gone, Wilfrid flung himself on the divan and stared at the ceiling. He felt like a general who has won a 'victory'— the more embarrassed. Having lived for thirty-five years, owing to a variety of circumstances, in a condition of marked egoism, he was unaccustomed to the feelings which Dinny from the first had roused within him. The old-fashioned word 'worship' was hardly admissible, but no other adequately replaced it. When with her his sensations were so restful and refreshed that when not with her he felt like one who had taken off his soul and hung it up. Alongside this new beatitude was a growing sense that his own happiness would not be complete unless hers was too. She was always telling him that she was only happy in his presence. But that was absurd, he could never replace all the interests and affections of her life before the statue of Foch had made them acquainted. And, if not, for what was he letting her in? The young woman with the eyes, who had just gone, had stood there before him like an incarnation of this question. Though he had routed her, she had left the query printed on the air.

The spaniel, seeing the incorporeal more clearly than his master, was resting a long nose on his knee. Even this dog he owed to Dinny. He had got out of the habit of people. With this business hanging over him, he was quite cut off. If he married Dinny, he took her with him into isolation. Was it fair?

But, having appointed to meet her in half an hour, he rang the bell.

“I’m going out now, Stack.”

“Very good, sir.”

Leading the dog, he made his way to the Park. Opposite the Cavalry Memorial he sat down to wait for her, debating whether he should tell her of his visitor. And just then he saw her coming.

She was walking quickly from Park Lane, and had not yet seen him. She seemed to skim, straight, and — as those blasted novelists called it —‘willowy’! She had a look of spring, and was smiling as if something pleasant had just happened to her. This glimpse of her, all unaware of him, soothed Wilfrid. If she could look so pleased and care-free, surely he need not worry. She halted by the bronze horse which she had dubbed ‘the jibbing barrel,’ evidently looking for him. Though she turned her head so prettily this way and that, her face had become a little anxious. He stood up. She waved her hand and came quickly across the drive.

“Been sitting to Botticelli, Dinny?”

“No — to a pawnbroker. If you ever want one I recommend Frewens of South Molton Street.”

“YOU, at a pawnbroker’s?”

“Yes, darling. I’ve got more money of my own on me than I ever had in my life.”

“What do you want it for?”

Dinny bent and stroked the dog.

“Since I knew you I’ve grasped the real importance of money.”

“And what’s that?”

“Not to be divided from you by the absence of it. The great open spaces are what we want now. Take Foch off the lead, Wilfrid; he’ll follow, I’m sure.”

❦

Chapter 19

In a centre of literature such as London, where books come out by the half-dozen almost every day, the advent of a slender volume of poems is commonly of little moment. But circumstances combined to make the appearance of The Leopard, and other Poems a 'literary event.' It was Wilfrid's first production for four years. He was a lonely figure, marked out by the rarity of literary talent among the old aristocracy, by the bitter, lively quality of his earlier poems, by his Eastern sojourn and isolation from literary circles, and finally by the report that he had embraced Islam. Someone, on the appearance of his third volume four years ago, had dubbed him 'a sucking Byron'; the phrase had caught the ear. Finally, he had a young publisher who understood the art of what he called 'putting it over.' During the few weeks since he received Wilfrid's manuscript, he had been engaged in lunching, dining, and telling people to look out for 'The Leopard,' the most sensation-making poem since 'The Hound of Heaven.' To the query "Why?" he replied in nods and becks and wreathed smiles. Was it true that young Desert had become a Mussulman? Oh! Yes. Was he in London? Oh! yes, but, of course, the shyest and rarest bird in the literary flock.

He who was Compson Grice Ltd. had from the first perceived that in 'The Leopard' he had 'a winner'— people would not enjoy it, but they would talk about it. He had only to start the snowball rolling down the slope, and when moved by real conviction no one could do this better than he. Three days before the book came out he met Telfourd Yule by a sort of accidental prescience.

"Hallo, Yule, back from Araby?"

"As you see."

"I say, I've got a most amazing book of poems coming out on Monday. The Leopard, by Wilfrid Desert. Like a copy? The first poem's a corker."

"Oh!"

"Takes the wind clean out of that poem in Alfred Lyall's Verses written in India, about the man who died sooner than change his faith. Remember?"

"I do."

"What's the truth about Desert taking to Islam?"

"Ask him."

"That poem's so personal in feeling — it might be about himself."

"Indeed?"

And Compson Grice thought, suddenly: 'If it were! What a stunt!'

"Do you know him, Yule?"

"No."

"You must read the thing; I couldn't put it down."

"Ah!"

"But would a man publish such a thing about his own experience?"

"Can't say."

And, still more suddenly, Compson Grice thought: 'If it were, I could sell a hundred thousand!'

He returned to his office, thinking: 'Yule was deuced close. I believe I was right, and he knows it. He's only just back; everything's known in the bazaars, they say. Now, let's see, where am I?'

Published at five shillings, on a large sale there would, after royalty paid, be a clear profit of sixpence a copy. A hundred thousand copies would be two thousand five hundred pounds, and about the same in royalties to Desert! By George! But, of course, loyalty to client first! And there came to him one of those inspirations which so often come to loyal people who see money ahead of them.

'I must draw his attention to the risk of people saying that it's his own case. I'd better do it the day after publication. In the meantime I'll put a second big edition in hand.'

On the day before publication, a prominent critic, Mark Hanna, who ran a weekly bell in the Carillon, informed him that he had gone all out for the poem. A younger man, well known for a certain buccaneering spirit, said no word, but wrote a criticism. Both critiques appeared on the day of publication. Compson Grice cut them out and took them with him to the 'Jessamine' restaurant, where he had bidden Wilfrid to lunch.

They met at the entrance and passed to a little table at the far end. The room was crowded with people who knew everybody in the literary, dramatic and artistic world. And Compson Grice waited, with the experience of one who had entertained many authors, until a bottle of Mouton Rothschild 1870 had been drunk to its dregs. Then, producing from his pocket the two reviews, he placed that of Mark Hanna before his guest, with the words: "Have you seen this? It's rather good."

Wilfrid read it.

The reviewer had indeed gone 'all out.' It was almost all confined to The Leopard, which it praised as the most intimate revelation of the human soul in verse since Shelley.

"Bunk! Shelley doesn't reveal except in his lyrics."

"Ah! well," said Compson Grice, "they have to work in Shelley."

The review acclaimed the poem as "tearing away the last shreds of the hypocritical veil which throughout our literature has shrouded the muse in relation to religion." It concluded with these words: "This poem, indeed, in its unflinching record of a soul tortured by cruel dilemma, is the most amazing piece of imaginative psychology which has come our way in the twentieth century."

Watching his guest lay down the cutting, Compson Grice said softly:

"Pretty good! It's the personal fervour of the thing that gets them."

Wilfrid gave his queer shiver.

"Got a cigar-cutter?"

Compson Grice pushed one forward with the other review.

"I think you ought to read this in the Daily Phase."

The review was headed: 'Defiance: Bolshevism and the Empire.'

Wilfrid took it up.

"Geoffrey Coltham?" he said. "Who's he?"

The review began with some fairly accurate personal details of the poet's antecedents, early work and life, ending with the mention of his conversion to Islam. Then, after some favourable remarks about the other poems, it fastened on The Leopard, sprang, as it were, at the creature's throat, and shook it as a bulldog might. Then, quoting these lines:

> 'Into foul ditch each dogma leads.
> Cursed be superstitious creeds,
> In every driven mind the weeds!
> There's but one liquor for the sane —
> Drink deep! Let scepticism reign
> And its astringence clear the brain!'

it went on with calculated brutality:

'The thin disguise assumed by the narrative covers a personal disruptive bitterness which one is tempted to connect with the wounded and overweening pride of one who has failed himself and the British world. Whether Mr. Desert intended in this poem to reveal his own experience and feelings in connection with his conversion to Islam — a faith, by the way, of which, judging from the poor and bitter lines quoted above, he is totally unworthy — we cannot of course say, but we advise him to come into the open and let us know. Since we have in our midst a poet who, with all his undoubted thrust, drives at our entrails, and cuts deep into our religion and our prestige, we have the right to know whether or not he — like his hero — is a renegade.'

"That, I think," said Compson Grice, quietly, "is libellous."

Wilfrid looked up at him, so that he said afterwards: "I never knew Desert had such eyes."

"I AM a renegade. I took conversion at the pistol's point, and you can let everybody know it."

Smothering the words: 'Thank God!' Compson Grice reached out his hand. But Wilfrid had leaned back and veiled his face in the smoke of his cigar. His publisher moved forward on to the edge of his chair.

"You mean that you want me to send a letter to the Daily Phase to say that The Leopard is practically your own experience?"

"Yes."

"My dear fellow, I think it's wonderful of you. That is courage, if you like."

The smile on Wilfrid's face caused Compson Grice to sit back, swallow the words: "The effect on the sales will be enormous," and substitute:

"It will strengthen your position enormously. But I wish we could get back on that fellow."

"Let him stew!"

"Quite!" said Compson Grice. He was by no means anxious to be embroiled, and have all his authors slated in the important Daily Phase.

Wilfrid rose. "Thanks very much. I must be going."

Compson Grice watched him leave, his head high and his step slow. 'Poor devil!' he thought. 'It IS a scoop!'

Back in his office, he spent some time finding a line in Colthan's review which he could isolate from its context and use as advertisement. He finally extracted this: "Daily Phase: 'No poem in recent years has had such power'" (the remaining words of the sentence he omitted because they were 'to cut the ground from under the feet of all we stand for'). He then composed a letter to the editor. He was writing — he said — at the request of Mr. Desert, who, far from needing any challenge to come into the open, was only too anxious that everyone should know that The Leopard was indeed founded on his personal experience. For his own part — he went on — he considered that this frank avowal was a more striking instance of courage than could be met with in a long day's march. He was proud to have been privileged to publish a poem which, in psychological content, quality of workmanship, and direct human interest, was by far the most striking of this generation.

He signed himself "Your obedient servant, Compson Grice." He then increased the size of the order for the second edition, directed that the words "First edition exhausted; second large impression," should be ready for use immediately, and went to his club to play bridge.

His club was the Polyglot, and in the hall he ran on Michael. The hair of his erstwhile colleague in the publishing world was ruffled, the ears stood out from his head, and he spoke at once:

"Grice, what are you doing about that young brute Coltham?"

Compson Grice smiled blandly and replied:

"Don't worry! I showed the review to Desert, and he told me to draw its sting by complete avowal."

"Good God!"

"Why? Didn't you know?"

"Yes, I knew, but —"

These words were balm to the ears of Compson Grice, who had been visited by misgiving as to the truth of Wilfrid's admission. Would a man really publish that poem if it were his own case; could he really want it known? But this was conclusive: Mont had been Desert's discoverer and closest friend.

"So I've written to the Phase and dealt with it."

"Did Wilfrid tell you to do that?"

"He did."

"To publish that poem was crazy. 'Quem deus —'" He suddenly caught sight of the expression on Compson Grice's face. "Yes," he added, bitterly, "you think you've got a scoop!"

Compson Grice said coldly:

"Whether it will do us harm or good remains to be seen."

"Bosh!" said Michael. "Everybody will read the thing now, blast them! Have you seen Wilfrid today?"

"He lunched with me."

"How's he looking?"

Tempted to say ‘Like Asrael!’ Compson Grice substituted: “Oh! all right — quite calm.”

“Calm as hell! Look here, Grice! If you don’t stand by him and help him all you can through this, I’ll never speak to you again.”

“My dear fellow,” said Compson Grice, with some dignity, “what do you suppose?” And, straightening his waistcoat, he passed into the card room.

Michael, muttering, “Cold-blooded fish!” hurried in the direction of Cork Street. ‘I wonder if the old chap would like to see me,’ he thought.

But at the very mouth of the street he recoiled and made for Mount Street instead. He was informed that both his father and mother were out, but that Miss Dinny had come up that morning from Condaford.

“All right, Blore. If she’s in I’ll find her.”

He went up and opened the drawing-room door quietly. In the alcove, under the cage of her aunt’s parakeet, Dinny was sitting perfectly still and upright, like a little girl at a lesson, with her hands crossed on her lap and her eyes fixed on space. She did not see him till his hand was on her shoulder.

“Penny!”

“How does one learn not to commit murder, Michael?”

“Ah! Poisonous young brute! Have your people seen The Phase?”

Dinny nodded.

“What was the reaction?”

“Silence, pinched lips.”

Michael nodded.

“Poor dear! So you came up?”

“Yes, I’m going to the theatre with Wilfrid.”

“Give him my love, and tell him that if he wants to see me I’ll come at any moment. Oh! and, Dinny, try to make him feel that we admire him for spilling the milk.”

Dinny looked up, and he was moved by the expression on her face.

“It wasn’t all pride that made him, Michael. There’s something egging him on, and I’m afraid of it. Deep down he isn’t sure that it wasn’t just cowardice that made him renounce. I know he can’t get that thought out of his mind. He feels he’s got to prove, not to others so much as to himself, that he isn’t a coward. Oh! I know he isn’t. But so long as he hasn’t proved it to himself and everybody, I don’t know what he might do.”

Michael nodded. From his one interview with Wilfrid he had formed something of the same impression.

“Did you know that he’s told his publisher to make a public admission?”

“Oh!” said Dinny blankly. “What then?”

Michael shrugged.

“Michael, will anyone grasp the situation Wilfrid was in?”

“The imaginative type is rare. I don’t pretend *I* can grasp it. Can you?”

“Only because it happened to Wilfrid.”

Michael gripped her arm.

“I’m glad you’ve got the old-fashioned complaint, Dinny, not just this modern ‘physiological urge.’”

❦

Chapter 20

While Dinny was dressing her aunt came to her room.

“Your uncle read me that article, Dinny. I wonder!”

“What do you wonder, Aunt Em?”

“I knew a Coltham — but he died.”

“This one will probably die, too.”

“Where do you get your boned bodies, Dinny? So restful.”

“Harridge’s.”

“Your uncle says he ought to resign from his club.”

“Wilfrid doesn’t care two straws about his club; he probably hasn’t been in a dozen times. But I don’t think he’ll resign.”

“Better make him.”

“I should never dream of ‘making’ him do anything.”

“So awkward when they use black balls.”

“Auntie, dear, could I come to the glass?”

Lady Mont crossed the room and took up the slim volume from the bedside table.

“The Leopard! But he did change them, Dinny.”

“He did not, Auntie; he had no spots to change.”

“Baptism and that.”

“If baptism really meant anything, it would be an outrage on children till they knew what it was about.”

“Dinny!”

“I mean it. One doesn’t commit people to things entirely without their consent; it isn’t decent. By the time Wilfrid could think at all he had no religion.”

“It wasn’t the givin’ up, then, it was the takin’ on.”

“He knows that.”

“Well,” said Lady Mont, turning towards the door, “I think it served that Arab right; so intrudin’! If you want a latch-key, ask Blore.”

Dinny finished dressing quickly and ran downstairs. Blore was in the dining-room.

“Aunt Em says I may have a key, Blore, and I want a taxi, please.”

Having telephoned to the cab-stand and produced a key, the butler said: “What with her ladyship speaking her thoughts out loud, miss, I’m obliged to know, and I was saying to Sir Lawrence this morning: ‘If Miss Dinny could take him off just now, on a tour of the Scotch Highlands where they don’t see the papers, it would save a lot of vexation.’ In these days, miss, as you’ll have noticed, one thing comes on the top of another, and people haven’t the memories they had. You’ll excuse my mentioning it.”

“Thank you ever so, Blore. Nothing I’d like better; only I’m afraid he wouldn’t think it proper.”

“In these days a young LADY can do anything, miss.”

“But men still have to be careful, Blore.”

“Well, miss, of course, relatives are difficult; but it could be arranged.”

“I think we shall have to face the music.”

The butler shook his head.

“In my belief, whoever said that first is responsible for a lot of unnecessary unpleasantness. Here’s your taxi, miss.”

In the taxi she sat a little forward, getting the air from both windows on her cheeks, which needed cooling. Even the anger and vexation left by that review were lost in this sweeter effervescence. At the corner of Piccadilly she read a newspaper poster: "Derby horses arrive." The Derby tomorrow! How utterly she had lost count of events! The restaurant chosen for their dinner was Blafard's in Soho, and her progress was impeded by the traffic of a town on the verge of national holiday. At the door, with the spaniel held on a leash, stood Stack. He handed her a note: "Mr. Desert sent me with this, miss. I brought the dog for a walk."

Dinny opened the note with a sensation of physical sickness.

"DINNY DARLING —

"Forgive my failing you to-night. I've been in a torture of doubt all day. The fact is, until I know where I stand with the world over this business, I have an overwhelming feeling that I must not commit you to anything; and a public jaunt like this is just what I ought to avoid for you. I suppose you saw The Daily Phase — that is the beginning of the racket. I must go through this next week on my own, and measure up where I am. I won't run off, and we can write. You'll understand. The dog is a boon, and I owe him to you. Good-bye for a little, my dear love.

"Your devoted

"W.D."

It was all she could do not to put her hand on her heart under the driver's eyes. Thus to be shut away in the heat of the battle was what, she knew now, she had been dreading all along. With an effort she controlled her lips, said "Wait a minute!" and turned to Stack.

"I'll take you and Foch back."

"Thank you, miss."

She bent down to the dog. Panic was at work within her breast! The dog! He was a link between them!

"Put him into the cab, Stack."

On the way she said quietly:

"Is Mr. Desert in?"

"No, miss, he went out when he gave me the note."

"Is he all right?"

"A little worried, I think, miss. I must say I'd like to teach manners to that gentleman in The Daily Phase."

"Oh! you saw that?"

"I did; it oughtn't to be allowed is what I say."

"Free speech," said Dinny. And the dog pressed his chin against her knee. "Is Foch good?"

"No trouble at all, miss. A gentleman, that dog; aren't you, boy?"

The dog continued to press his chin on Dinny's knee; and the feel of it was comforting.

When the cab stopped in Cork Street, she took a pencil from her bag, tore off the empty sheet of Wilfrid's note, and wrote:

"DARLING —

"As you will. But by these presents know: I am yours for ever and ever. Nothing can or shall divide me from you, unless you stop loving

"Your devoted

"DINNY.

"You won't do that, will you? Oh! don't!"

Licking what was left of the gum on the envelope, she put her half sheet in and held it till it stuck. Giving it to Stack, she kissed the dog's head and said to the driver: "The Park end of Mount Street, please. Good-night, Stack!"

"Good night, miss!"

The eyes and mouth of the motionless henchman seemed to her so full of understanding that she turned her face away. And that was the end of the jaunt she had been so looking forward to.

From the top of Mount Street she crossed into the Park and sat on the seat where she had sat with him before, oblivious of the fact that she was unattached, without a hat, in evening dress, and that it was past eight o'clock. She sat with the collar of her cloak turned up to her chestnut-coloured hair, trying to see his point of view. She saw it very well. Pride!

She had enough herself to understand. Not to involve others in one's troubles was elementary. The fonder one was, the less would one wish to involve them. Curiously ironical how love divided people just when they most needed each other! And no way out, so far as she could see. The strains of the Guards' band began to reach her faintly. They were playing — Faust? — no — Carmen! Wilfrid's favourite opera! She got up and walked over the grass towards the sound. What crowds of people! She took a chair some way off and sat down again, close to some rhododendrons. The Habanera! What a shiver its first notes always gave one! How wild, sudden, strange and inescapable was love! 'L'amour est enfant de Bohème' . . .! The rhododendrons were late this year. That deep rosy one! They had it at Condaford . . . Where was he — oh! where was he at this moment? Why could not love pierce veils, so that in spirit she might walk beside him, slip a hand into his! A spirit hand was better than nothing! And Dinny suddenly realised loneliness as only true lovers do when they think of life without the loved one. As flowers wilt on their stalks, so would she wilt — if she were cut away from him. "See things through alone!" How long would he want to? For ever? At the thought she started up; and a stroller, who thought the movement meant for him, stood still and looked at her. Her face corrected his impression, and he moved on. She had two hours to kill before she could go in; she could not let them know that her evening had come to grief. The band was finishing off Carmen with the Toreador's song. A blot on the opera, its most popular tune! No, not a blot, for it was meant, of course, to blare above the desolation of that tragic end, as the world blared around the passion of lovers. The world was a heedless and a heartless stage for lives to strut across, or in dark corners join and cling together . . . How odd that clapping sounded in the open! She looked at her wrist-watch. Half-past nine! An hour yet before it would be really dark. But there was a coolness now, a scent of grass and leaves; the rhododendrons were slowly losing colour, the birds had finished with song. People passed and passed her; she saw nothing funny about them, and they seemed to see nothing funny about her. And Dinny thought: 'Nothing seems funny any more, and I haven't had any dinner.' A coffee stall? Too early, perhaps, but there must be places where she could still get something! No dinner, almost no lunch, no tea — a condition appropriate to the love-sick! She began to move towards Knightsbridge, walking fast, by instinct rather than experience, for this was the first time she had ever wandered alone about London at such an hour. Reaching the gate without adventure, she crossed and went down Sloane Street. She felt much better moving, and chalked up in her mind the thought: 'For love-sickness, walking!' In this straight street there was practically nobody to notice her. The carefully closed and blinded houses seemed to confirm, each with its tall formal narrow face, the indifference of the regimented world to the longings of street-walkers such as she. At the corner of the King's Road a woman was standing.

"Could you tell me," said Dinny, "of any place close by where I could get something to eat?"

The woman addressed, she now saw, had a short face with high cheek-bones on which, and round the eyes, was a good deal of make-up. Her lips were good-natured, a little thick; her nose, too, rather thick; her eyes had the look which comes of having to be now stony and now luring, as if they had lost touch with her soul. Her dress was dark and fitted her curves, and she wore a large string of artificial pearls. Dinny could not help thinking she had seen people in Society not unlike her.

"There's a nice little place on the left."

"Would you care to come and have something with me?" said Dinny, moved by impulse, or by something hungry in the woman's face.

"Why! I would," said the woman. "Fact is, I came out without anything. It's nice to have company, too." She turned up the King's Road and Dinny turned alongside. It passed through her mind that if she met someone it would be quaint; but for all that she felt better.

'For God's sake,' she thought, 'be natural!'

The woman led her into a little restaurant, or rather public-house, for it had a bar. There was no one in the eating-room, which had a separate entrance, and they sat down at a small table with a cruet-stand, a handbell, a bottle of Worcester sauce, and in a vase some failing pyrethrums which had never been fresh. There was a slight smell of vinegar.

"I COULD do with a cigarette," said the woman.

Dinny had none. She tinkled the bell.

"Any particular sort?"

"Oh! Gaspers."

A waitress appeared, looked at the woman, looked at Dinny, and said: "Yes?"

"A packet of Players, please. A large coffee for me, strong and fresh, and some cake or buns, or anything. What will you have?”

The woman looked at Dinny, as though measuring her capacity, looked at the waitress, and said, hesitating: “Well, to tell the truth, I’m hungry. Cold beef and a bottle of stout?”

“Vegetables?” said Dinny: “A salad?”

“Well, a salad, thank you.”

“Good! And pickled walnuts? Will you get it all as quickly as you can, please?”

The waitress passed her tongue over her lips, nodded, and went away.

“I say,” said the woman, suddenly, “it’s awful nice of you, you know.”

“It was so friendly of you to come. I should have felt a bit lost without you.”

“SHE can’t make it out,” said the woman, nodding her head towards the vanished waitress. “To tell you the truth, nor can I.”

“Why? We’re both hungry.”

“No doubt about that,” said the woman; “you’re going to see me eat. I’m glad you ordered pickled walnuts, I never can resist a pickled onion, and it don’t do.”

“I might have thought of cocktails,” murmured Dinny, “but perhaps they don’t make them here.”

“A sherry wouldn’t be amiss. I’ll get ’em.” The woman rose and disappeared into the bar.

Dinny took the chance to powder her nose. She also dived her hand down to the pocket in her ‘boned body’ where the spoils of South Molton Street were stored, and extracted a five-pound note. She was feeling a sort of sad excitement.

The woman came back with two glasses. “I told ’em to charge it to our bill. The liquor’s good here.”

Dinny raised her glass and sipped. The woman tossed hers off at a draught.

“I wanted that. Fancy a country where you couldn’t get a drink!”

“But they can, of course, and do.”

“You bet. But they say some of the liquor’s awful.”

Dinny saw that her gaze was travelling up and down her cloak and dress and face with insatiable curiosity.

“Pardon me,” said the woman, suddenly: “You got a date?”

“No, I’m going home after this.”

The woman sighed. “Wish she’d bring those bl-inkin’ cigarettes.”

The waitress reappeared with a bottle of stout and the cigarettes. Staring at Dinny’s hair, she opened the bottle.

“Coo!” said the woman, taking a long draw at her ‘Gasper,’ “I wanted that.”

“I’ll bring you the other things in a minute,” said the waitress.

“I haven’t seen you on the stage, have I?” said the woman.

“No, I’m not on the stage.”

The advent of food broke the ensuing hush. The coffee was better than Dinny had hoped and very hot. She had drunk most of it and eaten a large piece of plum cake before the woman, putting a pickled walnut in her mouth, spoke again.

“D’you live in London?”

“No. In Oxfordshire.”

“Well, I like the country, too; but I never see it now. I was brought up near Maidstone — pretty round there.” She heaved a sigh with a flavouring of stout. “They say the Communists in Russia have done away with vice — isn’t that a scream? An American journalist told me. Well! I never knew a budget make such a difference before,” she continued, expelling smoke as if liberating her soul: “Dreadful lot of unemployment.”

“It does seem to affect everybody.”

“Affects me, I know,” and she stared stonily. “I suppose you’re shocked at that.”

“It takes a lot to shock people nowadays, don’t you find?”

“Well, I don’t mix as a rule with bishops.”

Dinny laughed.

"All the same," said the woman, defiantly, "I came across a parson who talked the best sense to me I ever heard; of course, I couldn't follow it."

"I'll make you a bet," said Dinny, "that I know his name. Cherrell?"

"In once," said the woman, and her eyes grew round.

"He's my uncle."

"Coo! Well, well! It's a funny world! And not so large. Nice man he was," she added.

"Still is."

"One of the best."

Dinny, who had been waiting for those inevitable words, thought: 'This is where they used to do the "My erring sister" stunt.'

The woman uttered a sigh of repletion.

"I've enjoyed that," she said, and rose. "Thank you ever so. I must be getting on now, or I'll be late for business."

Dinny tinkled the bell. The waitress appeared with suspicious promptitude.

"The bill, please, and can you get me THAT changed?"

The waitress took the note with a certain caution.

"I'll just go and fix myself," said the woman; "see you in a minute." She passed through a door.

Dinny drank up the remains of her coffee. She was trying to realise what it must be like to live like that. The waitress came back with the change, received her tip, said "Thank you, miss," and went. Dinny resumed the process of realisation.

"Well," said the woman's voice behind her, "I don't suppose I'll ever see you again. But I'd like to say I think you're a jolly good sort."

Dinny looked up at her.

"When you said you'd come out without anything, did you mean you hadn't anything to come out with?"

"Sure thing," said the woman.

"Then would you mind taking this change? It's horrid to have no money in London."

The woman bit her lips, and Dinny could see that they were trembling.

"I wouldn't like to take your money," she said, "after you've been so kind."

"Oh! bosh! Please!" And, catching her hand, she pressed the money into it. To her horror, the woman uttered a loud sniff. She was preparing to make a run for the door, when the woman said:

"D'you know what I'm going to do? I'm going home to have a sleep. My God, I am! I'm going home to have a sleep."

Dinny hurried back to Sloane Street. Walking past the tall blinded houses, she recognised with gratitude that her love-sickness was much better. If she did not walk too fast, she would not be too soon at Mount Street. It was dark now, and in spite of the haze of city light the sky was alive with stars. She did not enter the Park again, but walked along its outside railings. It seemed an immense time since she had parted from Stack and the dog in Cork Street. Traffic was thickening as she rounded into Park Lane. To-morrow all these vehicles would be draining out to Epsom Downs; the Town would be seeming almost empty. And, with a sickening sensation, it flashed on her how empty it would always feel without Wilfrid to see or look forward to.

She came to the gate by the 'jibbing barrel,' and suddenly, as though all that evening had been a dream, she saw Wilfrid standing beside it. She choked and ran forward. He put out his arms and caught her to him.

The moment could hardly be prolonged, for cars and pedestrians were passing in and out; so arm-inarm they moved towards Mount Street. Dinny just clung to him, and he seemed equally wordless; but the thought that he had come there to be near her was infinitely comforting.

They escorted each other back and forth past the house, like some footman and housemaid for a quarter of an hour off duty. Class and country, custom and creed, all were forgotten. And, perhaps, no two people in all its seven millions were in those few minutes more moved and at one in the whole of London.

At last the comic instinct woke.

"We can't see each other home all night, darling. So one kiss — and yet — one kiss — and yet — one kiss!"

She ran up the steps, and turned the key.

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https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/g/galsworthy/john/flower/chapter20.html
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Chapter 21

Wilfred's mood when he left his publisher at 'The Jessamine' was angry and confused. Without penetrating to the depths of Compson Grice's mental anatomy, he felt that he had been manipulated; and the whole of that restless afternoon he wandered, swung between relief at having burnt his boats and resentment at the irrevocable. Thus preoccupied, he did not really feel the shock his note would be to Dinny, and only when, returning to his rooms, he received her answer did his heart go out to her, and with it himself to where she had fortuitously found him. In the few minutes while they paraded Mount Street, silent and half-embraced, she had managed to pass into him her feeling that it was not one but two against the world. Why keep away and make her more unhappy than he need? And he sent her a note by Stack next morning asking her to go 'joy-riding.' He had forgotten the Derby, and their car was involved almost at once in a stream of vehicles.

"I've never seen the Derby," said Dinny. "Could we go?"

There was the more reason why they should go because there seemed to be no reasonable chance of not going.

Dinny was astonished at the general sobriety. No drinking and no streamers, no donkey-carts, false noses, badinage. Not a four-inhand visible, not a coster nor a Kate; nothing but a wedged and moving stream of motor 'buses and cars mostly shut.

When, at last, they had 'parked' on the Downs, eaten their sandwiches and moved into the crowd, they turned instinctively toward the chance of seeing a horse.

Frith's "Derby Day" seemed no longer true, if it ever was. In that picture people seemed to have lives and to be living them; in this crowd everybody seemed trying to get somewhere else.

In the paddock, which at first sight still seemed all people and no horses, Wilfrid said suddenly:

"This is foolish, Dinny; we're certain to be seen."

"And if we are? Look, there's a horse!"

Quite a number of horses, indeed, were being led round in a ring. Dinny moved quickly towards them.

"They all look beautiful to me," she said in a hushed voice, "and just as good one as the other — except this one; I don't like his back."

Wilfrid consulted his card. "That's the favourite."

"I still don't. D'you see what I mean? It comes to a point too near the tail, and then droops."

"I agree, but horses run in all shapes."

"I'll back the horse you fancy, Wilfrid."

"Give me time, then."

The people to her left and right kept on saying the horses' names as they passed. She had a place on the rail with Wilfrid standing close behind her.

"He's a pig of a horse," said a man on her left, "I'll never back the brute again."

She took a glance at the speaker. He was broad and about five feet six, with a roll of fat on his neck, a bowler hat, and a cigar in his mouth. The horse's fate seemed to her the less dreadful.

A lady sitting on a shooting-stick to her right said:

"They ought to clear the course for the horses going out. That lost me my money two years ago."

Wilfrid's hand rested on her shoulder.

"I like that one," he said, "Blenheim. Let's go and put our money on."

They went to where people were standing in little queues before a row of what looked like pigeon-holes.

"Stand here," he said. "I'll lay my egg and come back to you."

Dinny stood watching.

"How d'you do, Miss Cherrell?" A tall man in a grey top-hat, with a very long case of field-glasses slung round him, had halted before her. "We met at the Foch statue and your sister's wedding — remember?"

“Oh! yes. Mr. Muskham.” Her heart was hurrying, and she restrained herself from looking towards Wilfrid.

“Any news of your sister?”

“Yes, we heard from Egypt. They must have had it terribly hot in the Red Sea.”

“Have you backed anything?”

“Not yet.”

“I shouldn’t touch the favourite — he won’t stay.”

“We thought of Blenheim.”

“Well, nice horse, and handy for the turns. But there’s one more fancied in his stable. I take it you’re a neophyte. I’ll give you two tips, Miss Cherrell. Look for one or both of two things in a horse: leverage behind, and personality — not looks, just personality.”

“Leverage behind? Do you mean higher behind than in front?”

Jack Muskham smiled. “That’s about it. If you see that in a horse, especially where it has to come up a hill, back it.”

“But personality? Do you mean putting his head up and looking over the tops of people into the distance? I saw one horse do that.”

“By Jove, I should like you as a pupil! That’s just about what I do mean.”

“But I don’t know which horse it was,” said Dinny.

“That’s awkward.” And then she saw the interested benevolence on his face stiffen. He lifted his hat and turned away. Wilfrid’s voice behind her said:

“Well, you’ve got a tenner on.”

“Let’s go to the Stand and see the race.” He did not seem to have seen Muskham; and, with his hand within her arm, she tried to forget the sudden stiffening of Jack Muskham’s face. The crowd’s multiple entreaty that she should have her ‘fortune told’ did its best to distract her, and she arrived at the Stand in a mood of indifference to all but Wilfrid and the horses. They found standing room close to the bookmakers near the rails.

“Green and chocolate — I can remember that. Pistache is my favourite-chocolate filling. What shall I win if I do win, darling?”

“Listen!”

They isolated the words “Eighteen to one Blenheim!”

“A hundred and eighty!” said Dinny. “Splendid!”

“Well, it means that he’s not fancied by the stable; they’ve got another running. Here they come! Two with chocolate and green. The second of them is ours.”

The parade, enchanting to all except the horses, gave her the chance to see the brown horse they had backed adorning its perched rider.

“How d’you like him, Dinny?”

“I love them nearly all. How can people tell which is the best by looking at them?”

“They can’t.”

The horses were turning now and cantering past the Stand.

“Would you say Blenheim is higher behind than in front?” murmured Dinny.

“No. Very nice action. Why?”

But she only pressed his arm and gave a little shiver.

Neither of them having glasses, all was obscure to them when the race began. A man just behind kept saying: “The favourite’s leadin’! The favourite’s leadin’!”

As the horses came round Tattenham Corner, the same man burbled: “The Pasha — the Pasha’ll win — no, the favourite — the favourite wins! — no, he don’t — Iliad — Iliad wins.”

Dinny felt Wilfrid’s hand grip her arm.

“Ours,” he said, “on this side — look!”

Dinny saw a horse on the far side in pink and brown, and nearer her the chocolate and green. It was ahead, it was ahead! They had won!

Amidst the silence and discomfiture those two stood smiling at each other. It seemed an omen!

"I'll draw your money, and we'll go to the car and be off."

He insisted on her taking all the money, and she ensconced it with her other wealth — so much more insurance against any sudden decision to deprive her of himself.

They drove again into Richmond Park on the way home, and sat a long time among the young bracken, listening to the cuckoos, very happy in the sunny, peaceful, whispering afternoon.

They dined together in a Kensington restaurant, and he left her finally at the top of Mount Street.

That night she slept unvisited by doubts or dreams, and went down to breakfast with clear eyes and a flush of sunburn on her cheeks. Her uncle was reading The Daily Phase. He put it down and said:

"When you've had your coffee, Dinny, you might glance at this. There is something about publishers," he added, "which makes one doubt sometimes whether they are men and brothers. And there is something about editors which makes it certain sometimes that they are not."

Dinny read Compson Grice's letter, printed under the headlines:

> "MR. DESERT'S APOSTASY.
>
> OUR CHALLENGE TAKEN UP.
>
> A CONFESSION."

Two stanzas from Sir Alfred Lyall's poem Theology in Extremis followed:

> "Why? Am I bidding for glory's roll?
> I shall be murdered and clean forgot;
> Is it a bargain to save my soul?
> God, whom I trust in, bargains not.
> Yet for the honour of English race
> May I not live or endure disgrace . . .
>
> "I must be gone to the crowd untold
> Of men by the Cause which they served unknown,
> Who moulder in myriad graves of old;
> Never a story and never a stone
> Tells of the martyrs who die like me,
> Just for the pride of the old countree."

And the pink of sunburn gave way to a flood of crimson.

"Yes," murmured Sir Lawrence, watching her, "'the fat is in the fire,' as old Forsyte would have said. Still, I was talking to a man last night who thought that nowadays nothing makes an indelible mark. Cheating at cards, boning necklaces — you go abroad for two years and it's all forgotten. As for sex abnormality, according to him it's no longer abnormal. So we must cheer up!"

Dinny said passionately: "What I resent is that any worm will have the power to say what he pleases."

Sir Lawrence nodded: "The greater the worm, the greater the power. But it's not the worms we need bother about; it's the people with 'pride of English race,' and there are still a few about."

"Uncle, is there any way in which Wilfrid can show publicly that he's not a coward?"

"He did well in the war."

"Who remembers the war?"

"Perhaps," muttered Sir Lawrence, "we could throw a bomb at his car in Piccadilly, so that he could look at it over the side and light a cigarette. I can't think of anything more helpful."

"I saw Mr. Muskham yesterday."

"Then you were at the Derby?" He took a very little cigar from his pocket. "Jack takes the view that you are being victimised."

"Oh! Why can't people leave one alone?"

"Attractive nymphs are never left alone. Jack's a misogynist."

Dinny gave a little desperate laugh.

“I suppose one’s troubles ARE funny.”

She got up and went to the window. It seemed to her that all the world was barking, like dogs at a cornered cat, and yet there was nothing in Mount Street but a van from the Express Dairy.

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Chapter 22

Jack Muskham occupied a bedroom at Burton's Club when racing kept him overnight in town. Having read an account of the Derby in The Daily Phase, he turned the paper idly. The other features in 'that rag' were commonly of little interest to him. Its editing shocked his formalism, its news jarred his taste, its politics offended him by being so like his own. But his perusal was not perfunctory enough to prevent him from seeing the headline 'Mr. Desert's Apostasy.' Reading the half column that followed it, he pushed the paper away and said: "That fellow must be stopped."

Glorying in his yellow streak, was he, and taking that nice girl with him to Coventry! Hadn't even the decency to avoid being seen with her in public on the very day when he was confessing himself as yellow as that rag!

In an age when tolerations and condonations seemed almost a disease, Jack Muskham knew and registered his own mind. He had disliked young Desert at first sight. The fellow's name suited him! And to think that this nice girl, who, without any training, had made those shrewd remarks about the racehorse, was to have her life ruined by this yellow-livered young braggart! It was too much! If it hadn't been for Lawrence, indeed, he would have done something about it before now. But there his mind stammered. What? . . . Here was the fellow publicly confessing his disgrace! An old dodge, that — taking the sting out of criticism! Making a virtue of necessity! Parading his desertion! That cock shouldn't fight, if he had his way! But once more his mind stammered . . . No outsider could interfere. And yet, unless there were some outward and visible sign condemning the fellow's conduct, it would look as if nobody cared.

'By George!' he thought. 'This Club, at least, can sit up and take notice. We don't want rats in Burton's!'

He brought the matter up in Committee meeting that very afternoon, and was astonished almost to consternation by the apathy with which it was received. Of the seven members present —'the Squire,' Wilfrid Bentworth, being in the Chair — four seemed to think it was a matter between young Desert and his conscience, and, besides, it looked like being a newspaper stunt. Times had changed since Lyall wrote that poem. One member went so far as to say he didn't want to be bothered, he hadn't read The Leopard, he didn't know Desert, and he hated The Daily Phase.

"So do I," said Jack Muskham, "but here's the poem." He had sent out for it and spent an hour after lunch reading it. "Let me read you a bit. It's poisonous."

"For heaven's sake no, Jack!"

The fifth member, who had so far said nothing, supposed that if Muskham pressed it they must all read the thing.

"I do press it."

'The Squire,' hitherto square and silent, remarked: "The secretary will get copies and send them round to the Committee. Better send them, too, a copy of today's Daily Phase. We'll discuss it at the meeting next Friday. Now about this claret?" And they moved to consideration of important matters.

It has been noticed that when a newspaper of a certain type lights on an incident which enables it at once to exhibit virtue and beat the drum of its own policy, it will exploit that incident, within the limits of the law of libel, without regard to the susceptibilities of individuals. Secured by the confession in Compson Grice's letter, The Daily Phase made the most of its opportunity, and in the eight days intervening before the next Committee meeting gave the Committeemen little chance of professing ignorance or indifference. Everybody, indeed, was reading and talking about The Leopard and, on the morning of the adjourned meeting, The Daily Phase had a long allusive column on the extreme importance of British behaviour in the East. It had also a large-type advertisement. "The Leopard and other Poems, by Wilfrid Desert: published by Compson Grice: 40,000 copies sold: Third Large Impression ready."

A debate on the ostracism of a fellow-being will bring almost any man to a Committee meeting; and the attendance included some never before known to come.

A motion had been framed by Jack Muskham.

"That the Honourable Wilfrid Desert be requested, under Rule 23, to resign his membership of Burton's Club, because of conduct unbecoming to a member."

He opened the discussion in these words:

"You've all had copies of Desert's poem The Leopard and The Daily Phase of yesterday week. There's no doubt about the thing. Desert has publicly owned to having ratted from his religion at the pistol's point, and I say he's no longer fit to be a member of this Club. It was founded in memory of a very great traveller who'd have dared Hell itself. We don't want people here who don't act up to English traditions, and make a song about it into the bargain."

There was a short silence, and then the fifth member of the Committee at the previous meeting remarked:

"It's a deuced fine poem, all the same."

A well-known K.C., who had once travelled in Turkey, added:

"Oughtn't he to have been asked to attend?"

"Why?" asked Jack Muskham. "He can't say more than is said in that poem, or in that letter of his publisher's."

The fourth member of the Committee at the previous meeting muttered: "I don't like paying attention to The Daily Phase."

"We can't help his having chosen that particular rag," said Jack Muskham.

"Very distasteful," continued the fourth member, "diving into matters of conscience. Are we all prepared to say we wouldn't have done the same?"

There was a sound as of feet shuffling, and a wrinkled expert on the early civilisations of Ceylon murmured: "To my mind, Desert is on the carpet — not for apostasy, but for the song he's made about it. Decency should have kept him quiet. Advertising his book! It's in a third edition, and everybody reading it. Making money out of it seems to me the limit."

"I don't suppose," said the fourth member, "that he thought of that. It's the accident of the sensation."

"He could have withdrawn the book."

"Depends on his contract. Besides, that would look like running from the storm he's roused. As a matter of fact, I think it's rather fine to have made an open confession."

"Theatrical!" murmured the K.C.

"If this," said Jack Muskham, "were one of the Service Clubs, they wouldn't think twice about it."

An author of Mexico Revisited said drily:

"But it is not."

"I don't know if you can judge poets like other people," mused the fifth member.

"In matters of ordinary conduct," said the expert on the civilisation of Ceylon, "why not?"

A little man at the end of the table opposite the Chairman remarked, "The D-d-daily Ph-Phase," as if releasing a small spasm of wind.

"Everybody's talking about the thing," said the K.C.

"My young people," put in a man who had not yet spoken, "scoff. They say: 'What does it matter what he did?' They talk about hypocrisy, laugh at Lyall's poem, and say it's good for the Empire to have some wind let out of it."

"Exactly!" said Jack Muskham: "That's the modern jargon. All standards gone by the board. Are we going to stand for that?"

"Anybody here know young Desert?" asked the fifth member.

"To nod to," replied Jack Muskham.

Nobody else acknowledged acquaintanceship.

A very dark man with deep lively eyes said suddenly:

"All I can say is I trust the story has not got about in Afghanistan; I'm going there next month."

"Why?" said the fourth member.

"Merely because it will add to the contempt with which I shall be regarded, anyway."

Coming from a well-known traveller, this remark made more impression than anything said so far. Two members, who, with the Chairman, had not yet spoken, said simultaneously: "Quite!"

"I don't like condemning a man unheard," said the K.C.

"What about that, 'Squire'?" asked the fourth member.

The Chairman, who was smoking a pipe, took it from his mouth.

"Anybody anything more to say?"

"Yes," said the author of Mexico Revisited, "let's put it on his conduct in publishing that poem."

"You can't," growled Jack Muskham; "the whole thing's of a piece. The point is simply: Is he fit to be a member here or not? I ask the Chairman to put that to the meeting."

But the 'Squire' continued to smoke his pipe. His experience of Committees told him that the time was not yet. Separate or 'knot' discussions would now set in. They led nowhere, of course, but ministered to a general sense that the subject was having justice done to it.

Jack Muskham sat silent, his long face impassive and his long legs stretched out. The discussion continued.

"Well?" said the member who had revisited Mexico, at last.

The 'Squire' tapped out his pipe.

"I think," he said, "that Mr. Desert should be asked to give us his reasons for publishing that poem."

"Hear, hear!" said the K.C.

"Quite!" said the two members who had said it before.

"I agree," said the authority on Ceylon.

"Anybody against that?" said the 'Squire.'

"I don't see the use of it," muttered Jack Muskham. "He ratted, and he's confessed it."

No one else objecting, the 'Squire' continued:

"The Secretary will ask him to see us and explain. There's no other business, gentlemen."

In spite of the general understanding that the matter was sub judice, these proceedings were confided to Sir Lawrence before the day was out by three members of the Committee, including Jack Muskham. He took the knowledge out with him to dinner at South Street.

Since the publication of the poems and Compson Grice's letter, Michael and Fleur had talked of little else, forced to by the comments and questionings of practically every acquaintance. They differed radically. Michael, originally averse to publication of the poem, now that it was out, stoutly defended the honesty and courage of Wilfrid's avowal. Fleur could not forgive what she called the 'stupidity of the whole thing.' If he had only kept quiet and not indulged his conscience or his pride, the matter would have blown over, leaving practically no mark. It was, she said, unfair to Dinny, and unnecessary so far as Wilfrid himself was concerned; but of course he had always been like that. She had not forgotten the uncompromising way in which eight years ago he had asked her to become his mistress, and the still more uncompromising way in which he had fled from her when she had not complied. When Sir Lawrence told them of the meeting at Burton's, she said simply:

"Well, what could he expect?"

Michael muttered:

"Why is Jack Muskham so bitter?"

"Some dogs attack each other at sight. Others come to it more meditatively. This appears to be a case of both. I should say Dinny is the bone."

Fleur laughed.

"Jack Muskham and Dinny!"

"Sub-consciously, my dear. The workings of a misogynist's mind are not for us to pry into, except in Vienna. They can tell you everything there; even to the origin of hiccoughs."

"I doubt if Wilfrid will go before the Committee," said Michael, gloomily. Fleur confirmed him.

"Of course he won't, Michael."

"Then what will happen?"

"Almost certainly he'll be expelled under rule whatever it is."

Michael shrugged. "He won't care. What's a Club more or less?"

"No," said Fleur; "but at present the thing is in flux — people just talk about it; but expulsion from his Club will be definite condemnation. It's just what's wanted to make opinion line up against him."

"And FOR him."

"Oh! for him, yes; but we know what that amounts to — the disgruntled."

"That's all beside the point," said Michael gruffly. "I know what he's feeling: his first instinct was to defy that Arab, and he bitterly regrets that he went back on it."

Sir Lawrence nodded.

"Dinny asked me if there was anything he could do to show publicly that he wasn't a coward. You'd think there might be, but it's not easy. People object to be put into positions of extreme danger in order that their rescuers may get into the papers. Van horses seldom run away in Piccadilly. He might throw someone off Westminster Bridge, and jump in after him; but that would merely be murder and suicide. Curious that, with all the heroism there is about, it should be so difficult to be deliberately heroic."

"He ought to face the Committee," said Michael; "and I hope he will. There's something he told me. It sounds silly; but, knowing Wilfrid, one can see it made all the difference."

Fleur had planted her elbows on the polished table and her chin on her hands. So, leaning forward, she looked like the girl contemplating a china image in her father's picture by Alfred Stevens.

"Well?" she said. "What is it?"

"He said he felt sorry for his executioner."

Neither his wife nor his father moved, except for a slight raising of the eyebrows. He went on defiantly:

"Of course, it sounds absurd, but he said the fellow begged him not to make him shoot — he was under a vow to convert the infidel."

"To mention that to the Committee," Sir Lawrence said slowly, "would certainly be telling it to the marines."

"He's not likely to," said Fleur; "he'd rather die than be laughed at."

"Exactly! I only mentioned it to show that the whole thing's not so simple as it appears to the pukka sahib."

"When," murmured Sir Lawrence, in a detached voice, "have I heard anything so nicely ironical? But all this is not helping Dinny."

"I think I'll go and see him again," said Michael.

"The simplest thing," said Fleur, "is for him to resign at once."

And with that common-sense conclusion the discussion closed.

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Chapter 23

Those who love, when the object of their love is in trouble, must keep sympathy to themselves and yet show it. Dinny did not find this easy. She watched, lynx-eyed, for any chance to assuage her lover's bitterness of soul; but though they continued to meet daily, he gave her none. Except for the expression of his face when he was off guard, he might have been quite untouched by tragedy. Throughout that fortnight after the Derby she came to his rooms, and they went joy-riding, accompanied by the spaniel Foch; and he never mentioned that of which all more or less literary and official London was talking. Through Sir Lawrence, however, she heard that he had been asked to meet the Committee of Burton's Club and had answered by resignation. And, through Michael, who had been to see him again, she heard that he knew of Jack Muskham's part in the affair. Since he so rigidly refused to open out to her, she, at great cost, tried to surpass him in obliviousness of purgatory. His face often made her ache, but she kept that ache out of her own face. And all the time she was in bitter doubt whether she was right to refrain from trying to break through to him. It was a long and terrible lesson in the truth that not even real love can reach and anoint deep spiritual sores. The other half of her trouble, the unending quiet pressure of her family's sorrowful alarm, caused her an irritation of which she was ashamed.

And then occurred an incident which, however unpleasant and alarming at the moment, was almost a relief because it broke up that silence.

They had been to the Tate Gallery and, walking home, had just come up the steps leading to Carlton House Terrace. Dinny was still talking about the pre-Raphaelites, and saw nothing till Wilfrid's changed expression made her look for the cause. There was Jack Muskham, with a blank face, formally lifting a tall hat as if to someone who was not there, and a short dark man removing a grey felt covering, in unison. They passed, and she heard Muskham say:

"That I consider the limit."

Instinctively her hand went out to grasp Wilfrid's arm, but too late. He had spun round in his tracks. She saw him, three yards away, tap Muskham on the shoulder, and the two face each other, with the little man looking up at them like a terrier at two large dogs about to fight. She heard Wilfrid say in a low voice:

"What a coward and cad you are!"

There followed an endless silence, while her eyes flitted from Wilfrid's convulsed face to Muskham's, rigid and menacing, and the terrier man's black eyes snapping up at them. She heard him say: "Come on, Jack!" saw a tremor pass through the length of Muskham's figure, his hands clench, his lips move:

"You heard that, Yule?"

The little man's hand, pushed under his arm, pulled at him; the tall figure turned; the two moved away; and Wilfrid was back at her side.

"Coward and cad!" he muttered: "Coward and cad! Thank God I've told him!" He threw up his head, took a gulp of air, and said: "That's better! Sorry, Dinny!"

In Dinny feeling was too churned up for speech. The moment had been so savagely primitive; and she had the horrid fear that it could not end there; an intuition, too, that she was the cause, the hidden reason of Muskham's virulence. She remembered Sir Lawrence's words: "Jack thinks you are being victimised." What if she were! What business was it of that long, lounging man who hated women! Absurd! She heard Wilfrid muttering:

"'The limit!' He might know what one feels!"

"But, darling, if we all knew what other people felt, we should be seraphim, and he's only a member of the Jockey Club."

"He's done his best to get me outed, and he couldn't even refrain from THAT."

"It's I who ought to be angry, not you. It's I who force you to go about with me. Only, you see, I like it so. But, darling, I don't shrink in the wash. What IS the use of my being your love if you won't let yourself go with me?"

"Why should I worry you with what can't be cured?"

"I exist to be worried by you. PLEASE worry me!"

"Oh! Dinny, you're an angel!"

"I repeat it is not so. I really have blood in my veins."

"It's like ear-ache; you shake your head, and shake your head, and it's no good. I thought publishing The Leopard would free me, but it hasn't. Am I 'yellow,' Dinny — am I?"

"If you were yellow I should not have loved you."

"Oh! I don't know. Women can love anything."

"Proverbially we admire courage before all. I'm going to be brutal. Has doubt of your courage anything to do with your ache? Isn't it just due to feeling that other people doubt?"

He gave a little unhappy laugh. "I don't know; I only know it's there."

Dinny looked up at him.

"Oh! darling, don't ache! I do so hate it for you."

They stood for a moment looking deeply at each other, and a vendor of matches, without the money to indulge in spiritual trouble, said:

"Box o' lights, sir?" . . .

Though she had been closer to Wilfrid that afternoon than perhaps ever before, Dinny returned to Mount Street oppressed by fears. She could not get the look on Muskham's face out of her head, nor the sound of his: "You heard that, Yule?"

It was silly! Out of such explosive encounters nothing but legal remedies came nowadays; and of all people she had ever seen, she could least connect Jack Muskham with the Law. She noticed a hat in the hall, and heard voices, as she was passing her uncle's study. She had barely taken off her own hat when he sent for her. He was talking to the little terrier man, who was perched astride of a chair, as if riding a race.

"Dinny, Mr. Telfourd Yule; my niece Dinny Cherrell."

The little man bowed over her hand.

"Yule has been telling me," said Sir Lawrence, "of that encounter. He's not easy in his mind."

"Neither am I," said Dinny.

"I'm sure Jack didn't mean those words to be heard, Miss Cherrell."

"I don't agree; I think he did."

Yule shrugged. The expression on his face was rueful, and Dinny liked its comical ugliness.

"Well, he certainly didn't mean YOU to hear them."

"He ought to have, then. Mr. Desert would prefer not to be seen with me in public. It's I who make him."

"I came to your Uncle because when Jack won't talk about a thing, it's serious. I've known him a long time."

Dinny stood silent. The flush on her cheeks had dwindled to two red spots. And the two men stared at her, thinking, perhaps, that, with her cornflower-blue eyes, slenderness, and that hair, she looked unsuited to the matter in hand. She said quietly: "What can I do, Uncle Lawrence?"

"I don't see, my dear, what anyone can do at the moment. Mr. Yule says that he left Jack going back to Royston. I thought possibly I might take you down to see him tomorrow. He's a queer fellow; if he didn't date so, I shouldn't worry. Such things blow over, as a rule."

Dinny controlled a sudden disposition to tremble.

"What do you mean by 'date'?"

Sir Lawrence looked at Yule and said: "We don't want to seem absurd. There's been no duel fought between Englishmen, so far as I know, for seventy or eighty years; but Jack is a survival. We don't quite know what to think. Horse-play is not in his line; neither is a law court. And yet we can't see him taking no further notice."

"I suppose," said Dinny, with spirit, "he won't see, on reflection, that he's more to blame than Wilfrid?"

"No," said Yule, "he won't. Believe me, Miss Cherrell, I am deeply sorry about the whole business."

Dinny bowed. "I think it was very nice of you to come; thank you!"

"I suppose," said Sir Lawrence, doubtfully, "you couldn't get Desert to send him an apology?"

‘So THAT,’ she thought, ‘is what they wanted me for.’ “No, Uncle, I couldn’t — I couldn’t even ask him. I’m quite sure he wouldn’t.”

“I see,” said Sir Lawrence glumly.

Bowing to Yule, Dinny turned towards the door. In the hall she seemed to be seeing through the wall behind her the renewed shrugging of their shoulders, the ruefulness on their glum faces, and she went up to her room. Apology! Thinking of Wilfrid’s badgered, tortured face, the very idea of it offended her. Stricken to the quick already on the score of personal courage, it was the last thing he would dream of. She wandered unhappily about her room, then took out his photograph. The face she loved looked back at her with the sceptical indifference of an effigy. Wilful, sudden, proud, self-centred, deeply dual; but cruel, no, and cowardly — NO!

‘Oh! my darling!’ she thought, and put it away.

She went to her window and leaned out. A beautiful evening — the Friday of Ascot week, the first of those two weeks when in England fine weather is almost certain! On Wednesday there had been a deluge, but today had the feel of real high summer. Down below a taxi drew up — her Uncle and Aunt were going out to dinner. There they came, with Blore putting them in and standing to look after them. Now the staff would turn on the wireless. Yes! Here it was! She opened her door. Grand opera! Rigoletto! The twittering of those tarnished melodies came up to her in all the bravura of an age which knew better than this, it seemed, how to express the emotions of wayward hearts.

The gong! She did not want to go down and eat, but she must, or Blore and Augustine would be upset. She washed hastily, compromised with her dress, and went down.

But while she ate she grew more restless, as if sitting still and attending to a single function were sharpening the edge of her anxiety. A duel! Fantastic, in these days! And yet — Uncle Lawrence was uncanny, and Wilfrid in just the mood to do anything to show himself unafraid. Were duels illegal in France? Thank heaven she had all that money. No! It was absurd! People had called each other names with impunity for nearly a century. No good to fuss; tomorrow she would go with Uncle Lawrence and see that man. It was all, in some strange way, on her account. What would one of her own people do if called a coward and a cad — her father, her brother, Uncle Adrian? What COULD they do? Horsewhips, fists, law courts — all such hopeless, coarse, ugly remedies! And she felt for the first time that Wilfrid had been wrong to use such words. Ah! But was he not entitled to hit back? Yes, indeed! She could see again his head jerked up and hear his: ‘Ah! That’s better!’

Swallowing down her coffee, she got up and sought the drawing-room. On the sofa was her Aunt’s embroidery thrown down, and she gazed at it with a feeble interest. An intricate old French design needing many coloured wools — grey rabbits looking archly over their shoulders at long, curious, yellow dogs seated on yellower haunches, with red eyes and tongues hanging out; leaves and flowers, too, and here and there a bird, all set in a background of brown wool. Tens of thousands of stitches, which, when finished, would lie under glass on a little table, and last till they were all dead and no one knew who had wrought them. “Tout lasse, tout passe! The strains of Rigoletto still came floating from the basement. Really Augustine must have drama in her soul, to be listening to a whole opera.

“La Donna è mobile!”

Dinny took up her book, the Memoirs of Harriette Wilson; a tome in which no one kept any faith to speak of except the authoress, and she only in her own estimation; a loose, bright, engaging, conceited minx, with a good heart and one real romance among a peck of love affairs.

“La Donna è mobile!” It came mocking up the stairs, fine and free, as if the tenor had reached his Mecca. Mobile! No! That was more true of men than of women! Women did not change. One loved — one lost, perhaps! She sat with closed eyes till the last notes of that last act had died away, then went up to bed. She passed a night broken by dreams, and was awakened by a voice saying:

“Someone on the telephone for you, Miss Dinny.”

“For me? Why! What time is it?”

“Half-past seven, miss.”

She sat up startled.

“Who is it?”

“No name, miss; but he wants to speak to you special.”

With the thought ‘Wilfrid!’ she jumped up, put on a dressing-gown and slippers, and ran down.

“Yes. Who is it?”

“Stack, miss. I’m sorry to disturb you so early, but I thought it best. Mr. Desert, miss, went to bed as usual last night, but this morning the dog was whining in his room, and I went in, and I see he’s not been in bed at all. He must have gone out very early, because I’ve been about since half-past six. I shouldn’t have disturbed you, miss, only I didn’t like the look of him last night . . . Can you hear me, miss?”

“Yes. Has he taken any clothes or anything?”

“No, miss.”

“Did anybody come to see him last night?”

“No, miss. But a letter came by hand about half-past nine. I noticed him distraight, miss, when I took the whisky in. Perhaps it’s nothing, but being so sudden, I . . . Can you hear me, miss?”

“Yes. I’ll dress at once and come round. Stack, can you get me a taxi, or, better, a car, by the time I’m there?”

“I’ll get a car, miss.”

“Is there any service to the Continent he could have caught?”

“Nothing before nine o’clock.”

“I’ll be round as quick as I can.”

“Yes, miss. Don’t you worry, miss; he might be wanting exercise or something.”

Dinny replaced the receiver and flew upstairs.

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Chapter 24

Wilfred's taxi-cab, whose tank he had caused to be filled to the brim, ground slowly up Haverstock Hill towards the Spaniard's Road. He looked at his watch. Forty miles to Royston — even in this growler he would be there by nine! He took out a letter and read it through once more.

"Liverpool Street Station.

"Friday.

"SIR,

"You will agree that the matter of this afternoon cannot rest there. Since the Law denies one decent satisfaction, I give you due notice that I shall horsewhip you publicly whenever and wherever I first find you unprotected by the presence of a lady.

"Yours faithfully,

"J. MUSKHAM.

"The Briery, Royston."

'Whenever and wherever I first find you unprotected by the presence of a lady!' That would be sooner than the swine thought! A pity the fellow was so much older than himself.

The cab had reached the top now, and was speeding along the lonely Spaniard's Road. In the early glistening morning the view was worth a poet's notice, but Wilfrid lay back in the cab, unseeing, consumed by his thoughts. Something to hit at. This chap, at any rate, should no longer sneer at him! He had no plan except to be publicly on hand at the first possible moment after reading those words: "Unprotected by the presence of a lady!" Taken as sheltering behind a petticoat? Pity it was not a real duel! The duels of literature jig-sawed in his brain — Bel Ami, Bazarov, Dr. Slammer, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, D'Artagnan, Sir Toby, Winkle — all those creatures of fancy who had endeared the duel to readers. Duels and runs on banks, those two jewels in the crown of drama — gone! Well, he had shaved — with cold water! — and dressed with as much care as if he were not going to a vulgar brawl. The dandified Jack Muskham and a scene of low violence! Very amusing! The cab ground and whirred its way on through the thin early traffic of market and milk carts; and Wilfrid sat drowsing after his almost sleepless night. Barnet he passed, and Hatfield, and the confines of Welwyn Garden City, then Knebworth, and the long villages of Stevenage, Graveley and Baldock. Houses and trees seemed touched by unreality in the fine haze. Postmen, and maids on doorsteps, boys riding farm horses, and now and then an early cyclist, alone inhabited the outdoor world. And, with that wry smile on his lips and his eyes half closed, he lay back, his feet pressed against the seat opposite. He had not to stage the scene, nor open the brawl. He had but to deliver himself, as it were registered, so that he could not be missed.

The cab slowed up.

"We're gettin' near Royston, governor; where d'you want to go?"

"Pull up at the inn."

The cab resumed its progress. The morning light hardened. All, now, was positive, away to the round, high-lying clumps of beeches. On the grassy slope to his right he saw a string of sheeted race-horses moving slowly back from exercise. The cab entered a long village street, and near its end stopped at an hotel. Wilfrid got out.

"Garage your cab. I'll want you to take me back."

"Right, governor."

He went in and asked for breakfast. Just nine o'clock! While eating he enquired of the waiter where the Briery was.

"It's the long low 'ouse lying back on the right, sir; but if you want Mr. Muskham, you've only to stand in the street outside 'ere. 'E'll be passing on his pony at five past ten; you can set your watch by him going to his stud farm when there's no racing."

"Thank you, that will save me trouble."

At five minutes before ten, smoking a cigarette, he took his position at the hotel gate. Girt-in, and with that smile, he stood motionless, and through his mind passed and repassed the scene between Tom Sawyer and the boy in the too-good clothes, walking round each other with an elaborate ritual of insults before the whirlwind of their encounter. There would be no ritual today! 'If I can lay him out,' he thought, 'I will!' His hands, concealed in the pockets of his jacket, kept turning into fists; otherwise he stood, still as the gatepost against which he leaned, his face veiled in the thin fume rising from his cigarette. He noticed with satisfaction his cabman talking to another chauffeur outside the yard, a man up the street opposite cleaning windows, and a butcher's cart. Muskham could not pretend this was not a public occasion. If they had neither of them boxed since schooldays, the thing would be a crude mix-up; all the more chance of hurting or being hurt! The sun topped some trees on the far side and shone on his face. He moved a pace or two to get the full of it. The sun — all good in life came from the sun! And suddenly he thought of Dinny. The sun to her was not what it was to him. Was he in a dream — was she real? Or, rather, were she and all this English business some rude interval of waking? God knew! He stirred and looked at his watch. Three minutes past ten, and there, sure enough, as the waiter had said, coming up the street was a rider, unconcerned, sedate, with a long easy seat on a small well-bred animal. Closer and closer, unaware! Then the rider's eyes came round, there was a movement of his chin. He raised a hand to his hat, checked the pony, wheeled it and cantered back.

'H'm!' thought Wilfrid. 'Gone for his whip!' And from the stump of his cigarette he lighted another. A voice behind him said:

"What'd I tell you, sir? That's Mr. Muskham."

"He seems to have forgotten something."

"Ah!" said the waiter, "he's regular as a rule. They say at the stud he's a Turk for order. Here he comes again; not lost much time, 'as 'e?"

He was coming at a canter. About thirty yards away he reined up and got off. Wilfrid heard him say to the pony, "Stand, Betty!" His heart began to beat, his hands in his pockets were clenched fast; he still leaned against the gate. The waiter had withdrawn, but with the tail of his eye Wilfrid could see him at the hotel door, waiting as if to watch over the interview he had fostered. His cabman was still engaged in the endless conversation of those who drive cars; the shopman still cleaning his windows; the butcher's man rejoining his cart. Muskham came deliberately, a cut-and-thrust whip in his hand.

'Now!' thought Wilfrid.

Within three yards Muskham stopped. "Are you ready?"

Wilfrid took out his hands, let the cigarette drop from his lips, and nodded. Raising the whip, the long figure sprang. One blow fell, then Wilfrid closed. He closed so utterly that the whip was useless and Muskham dropped it. They swayed back clinched together against the gate; then, both, as if struck by the same idea, unclinched and raised their fists. In a moment it was clear that neither was any longer expert. They drove at each other without science, but with a sort of fury, length and weight on one side, youth and agility on the other. Amidst the scrambling concussions of this wild encounter, Wilfrid was conscious of a little crowd collecting — they had become a street show! Their combat was so breathless, furious and silent, that its nature seemed to infect that gathering, and from it came nothing but a muttering. Both were soon cut on the mouth and bleeding, both were soon winded and half dazed. In sheer breathlessness they clinched again and stood swaying, striving to get a grip of each other's throats.

"Go it, Mr. Muskham!" cried a voice.

As if encouraged, Wilfrid wrenched himself free and sprang; Muskham's fist thumped into his chest as he came on, but his outstretched hands closed round his enemy's neck. There was a long stagger, and then both went crashing to the ground. There, again as if moved by the same thought, they unclinched and scrambled up. For a moment they stood panting, glaring at each other for an opening. For a second each looked round him. Wilfrid saw Muskham's blood-stained face change and become rigid, his hands drop and hide in his pockets; saw him turn away. And suddenly he realised why. Standing up in an open car, across the street, was Dinny, with one hand covering her lips and the other shading her eyes.

Wilfrid turned as abruptly and went into the hotel.

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CHAPTER 25

While Dinny dressed and skimmed along the nearly empty streets, she had been thinking hard. That letter brought last night by hand surely meant that Muskham was the cause of Wilfrid's early sortie. Since he had slipped like a needle into a bundle of hay, her only chance was to work from the other end. No need to wait for her uncle to see Jack Muskham. She could see him alone just as well as, perhaps better. It was eight o'clock when she reached Cork Street, and she at once said: "Has Mr. Desert a revolver, Stack?"

"Yes, miss."

"Has he taken it?"

"No."

"I ask because he had a quarrel yesterday."

Stack passed his hand over his unshaven chin. "Don't know where you're going, miss, but would you like me to come with you?"

"I think it would be better if you'd go and make sure he isn't taking a boat train."

"Certainly, miss. I'll take the dog, and do that."

"Is that car outside for me?"

"Yes, miss. Would you like it opened?"

"I would; the more air, the better."

The henchman nodded, his eyes and nose seeming to Dinny unusually large and intelligent.

"If I run across Mr. Desert first, where shall I get in touch with you, miss?"

"I'll call at Royston post-office for any telegram. I'm going to see a Mr. Muskham there. The quarrel was with him."

"Have you had anything to eat, miss? Let me get you a cup of tea."

"I've had one, thank you." It saved time to say what was not true.

That drive, on an unknown road, seemed interminable to her, haunted by her uncle's words: "If Jack didn't date so, I shouldn't worry . . . He's a survival." Suppose that, even now, in some enclosure — Richmond Park, Ken Wood, where not — they were playing the old-fashioned pranks, of honour! She conjured up the scene — Jack Muskham, tall, deliberate; Wilfrid, girt-in, defiant, trees around them, wood-pigeons calling, their hands slowly rising to the level —! Yes, but who would give the word? And pistols! People did not go about with duelling pistols nowadays. If that had been suggested, Wilfrid would surely have taken his revolver! What should she say if, indeed, she found Muskham at home? "Please don't mind being called a cad and coward! They are really almost terms of endearment." Wilfrid must never know that she had tried to mediate. It would but wound his pride still further. Wounded pride! Was there any older, deeper, more obstinate cause of human trouble, or any more natural and excusable! The consciousness of having failed oneself! Overmastered by the attraction that knows neither reason nor law, she loved Wilfrid none the less for having failed himself; but she was not blind to that failure. Ever since her father's words "by any Englishman who's threatened with a pistol" had touched some nerve in the background of her being, she had realised that she was divided by her love from her instinctive sense of what was due from Englishmen.

The driver stopped to examine a back tyre. From the hedge a drift of elder-flower scent made her close her eyes. Those flat white scented blossoms! The driver remounted and started the car with a jerk. Was life always going to jerk her away from love? Was she never to rest drugged and happy in its arms?

'Morbid!' she thought. 'I ought to be keying my pitch to the Jockey Club.'

Royston began, and she said: "Stop at the post-office, please."

"Right, lady!"

There was no telegram for her, and she asked for Muskham's house. The post-mistress looked at the clock.

"Nearly opposite, miss; but if you want Mr. Muskham, I saw him pass riding just now. He'll be going to his stud farm — that'll be through the town and off to the right."

Dinny resumed her seat, and they drove slowly on.

Afterwards she did not know whether her instinct or the driver's stopped the car. For when he turned round and said: "Appears like a bit of a mix-up, miss," she was already standing, to see over the heads of that ring of people in the road. She saw only too well the stained, blood-streaked faces, the rain of blows, the breathless, swaying struggle. She had opened the door, but with the sudden thought: 'He'd never forgive me!' banged it to again, and stood, with one hand shading her eyes, the other covering her lips, conscious that the driver, too, was standing.

"Something like a scrap!" she heard him say admiringly.

How strange and wild Wilfrid looked! But with only fists they could not kill each other! And mixed with her alarm was a sort of exultation. He had come down to seek battle! Yet every blow seemed falling on her flesh, each clutch and struggling movement seemed her own.

"Not a blasted bobby!" said her driver, carried away. "Go it! I back the young 'un."

Dinny saw them fall apart, then Wilfrid rushing with outstretched hands; she heard the thump of Muskham's fist on his chest, saw them clinch, stagger, and fall; then rise and stand gasping, glaring. She saw Muskham catch sight of her, then Wilfrid; saw them turn away; and all was over. The driver said: "Now, that's a pity!" Dinny sank down on the car seat, and said quietly:

"Drive on, please."

Away! Just away! Enough that they had seen her — more than enough, perhaps!

"Drive on a little, then turn and go back to Town." They wouldn't begin again!

"Neither of 'em much good with is 'ands, miss, but a proper spirit."

Dinny nodded. Her hand was still over her mouth, for her lips were trembling. The driver looked at her.

"You're a bit pale, miss — too much blood! Why not stop somewhere and 'ave a drop o' brandy?"

"Not here," said Dinny, "the next village."

"Baldock. Right-o!" And he put the car to speed.

The crowd had disappeared as they repassed the hotel. Two dogs, a man cleaning windows, and a policeman were the only signs of life.

At Baldock she had some breakfast. Conscious that she ought to feel relieved, now that the explosion had occurred, she was surprised by the foreboding which oppressed her. Would he not resent her having come as if to shield him? Her accidental presence had stopped the fight, and she had seen them disfigured, blood-stained, devoid of their dignities. She decided to tell no one where she had been, or what she had seen — not even Stack or her uncle.

Such precautions are of small avail in a country so civilised. An able, if not too accurate, description of the "Encounter at Royston between that well-known breeder of bloodstock, Mr. John Muskham — cousin to Sir Charles Muskham, Bart — and the Hon. Wilfrid Desert, second son of Lord Mullyon, author of The Leopard, which has recently caused such a sensation," appeared in that day's last edition of the Evening Sun, under the heading, "Fisticuffs in High Quarters." It was written with spirit and imagination, and ended thus: "It is believed that the origin of the quarrel may be sought in the action which it is whispered was taken by Mr. Muskham over Mr. Desert's membership of a certain Club. It seems that Mr. Muskham took exception to Mr. Desert continuing a member after his public acknowledgment that The Leopard was founded on his own experience. The affair, no doubt, was very high-spirited, if not likely to improve the plain man's conception of a dignified aristocracy."

This was laid before Dinny at dinner-time by her uncle without comment. It caused her to sit rigid, till his voice said: "Were you there, Dinny?"

'Uncanny, as usual,' she thought; but, though by now habituated to the manipulation of truth, she was not yet capable of the lie direct, and she nodded.

"What's that?" said Lady Mont.

Dinny pushed the paper over to her aunt, who read, screwing up her eyes, for she had long sight.

"Which won, Dinny?"

"Neither. They just stopped."

"Where is Royston?"

"In Cambridgeshire."

"Why?"

Neither Dinny nor Sir Lawrence knew.

"He didn't take you on a pillion, Dinny?"

"No, dear. I just happened to drive up."

"Religion is very inflamin'," murmured Lady Mont.

"It is," said Dinny bitterly.

"Did the sight of you stop them?" said Sir Lawrence.

"Yes."

"I don't like that. It would have been better if a bobby or a knock-out blow —"

"I didn't want them to see me."

"Have you seen him since?"

Dinny shook her head.

"Men are vain," said her aunt.

That closed the conversation.

Stack telephoned after dinner that Wilfrid had returned; but instinct told her to make no attempt to see him.

After a restless night she took the morning train to Condaford. It was Sunday, and they were all at church. She seemed strangely divided from her family. Condaford smelled the same, looked the same, and the same people did the same things; yet all was different! Even the Scottish terrier and the spaniels sniffed her with doubting nostrils, as if uncertain whether she belonged to them any more.

'And do I?' she thought. 'The scent is not there when the heart is away!'

Jean was the first to appear, Lady Cherrell having stayed to Communion, the General to count the offertory and Hubert to inspect the village cricket pitch. She found Dinny sitting by an old sundial in front of a bed of delphiniums. Having kissed her sister-inlaw, she stood and looked at her for quite a minute, before saying: "Take a pull, my dear, or you'll be going into a decline, whatever that is."

"I only want my lunch," said Dinny.

"Same here. I thought my dad's sermons were a trial even after I'd censored them; but your man here!"

"Yes, one CAN 'put him down.'"

Again Jean paused, and her eyes searched Dinny's face.

"Dinny, I'm all for you. Get married at once, and go off with him."

Dinny smiled.

"There are two parties to every marriage."

"Is that paragraph in this morning's paper correct, about a fight at Royston?"

"Probably not."

"I mean was there one?"

"Yes."

"Who began it?"

"I did. There's no other woman in the case."

"Dinny, you're very changed."

"No longer sweet and disinterested."

"Very well!" said Jean. "If you want to play the love-lorn female, play it!"

Dinny caught her skirt. Jean knelt down and put her arms round her.

"You were a brick to me when I was up against it."

Dinny laughed.

"What are my father and Hubert saying now?"

“Your father says nothing and looks glum. Hubert either says: ‘Something must be done,’ or ‘It’s the limit.’”

“Not that it matters,” said Dinny suddenly; “I’m past all that.”

“You mean you’re not sure what HE’LL do? But, of course, he must do what you want.”

Again Dinny laughed.

“You’re afraid,” said Jean, with startling comprehension, “that he might run off and leave you?” And she subsided on to her hams the better to look up into Dinny’s face. “Of course he might. You know I went to see him?”

“Oh?”

“Yes; he got over me. I couldn’t say a word. Great charm Dinny.”

“Did Hubert send you?”

“No. On my own. I was going to let him know what would be thought of him if he married you, but I couldn’t. I should have imagined he’d have told you about it. But I suppose he knew it would worry you.”

“I don’t know,” said Dinny; and did not. It seemed to her at that moment that she knew very little.

Jean sat silently pulling an early dandelion to pieces.

“If I were you,” she said at last, “I’d vamp him. If you’d once belonged to him, he couldn’t leave you.”

Dinny got up. “Let’s go round the gardens and see what’s out.”

❦

Chapter 26

Since Dinny said no further word on the subject occupying every mind, no word was said by anyone; and for this she was truly thankful. She spent the next three days trying to hide the fact that she was very unhappy. No letter had come from Wilfrid, no message from Stack; surely, if anything had happened, HE would have let her know. On the fourth day, feeling that she could bear the suspense no longer, she telephoned to Fleur and asked if she might come up to them.

The expressions on her father's and her mother's faces when she said she was going affected her as do the eyes and tails of dogs whom one must leave. How much more potent was the pressure put by silent disturbance than by nagging!

Panic assailed her in the train. Had her instinct to wait for Wilfrid to make the first move been wrong? Ought she not to have gone straight to him? And on reaching London she told her driver: "Cork Street."

But he was out, and Stack did not know when he would be in. The henchman's demeanour seemed to her strangely different, as if he had retreated to a fence and were sitting on it. Was Mr. Desert well? Yes. And the dog? Yes, the dog was well. Dinny drove away disconsolate. At South Square again no one was in; it seemed as if the world were in conspiracy to make her feel deserted. She had forgotten Wimbledon, the Horse Show, and other activities of the time of year. All such demonstrations of interest in life were, indeed, so far from her present mood that she could not conceive people taking part in them.

She sat down in her bedroom to write to Wilfrid. There was no longer any reason for silence, for Stack would tell him she had called.

She wrote:

"South Square, Westminster.

"Ever since Saturday I've been tortured by the doubt whether to write, or wait for you to write to me. Darling, I never meant to interfere in any way. I had come down to see Mr. Muskham and tell him that it's I only who was responsible for what he so absurdly called the limit. I never expected you to be there. I didn't really much hope even to find him. Please let me see you.

"Your unhappy

"DINNY."

She went out herself to post it. On the way back she came on Kit, with his governess, the dog, and the two youngest of her Aunt Alison's children. They seemed entirely happy; she was ashamed not to seem so too, so they all went together to Kit's schoolroom to have tea. Before it was over Michael came in. Dinny, who had seldom seen him with his little son, was fascinated by the easy excellence of their relationship. It was, perhaps, a little difficult to tell which was the elder, though a certain difference in size and the refusal of a second helping of strawberry jam seemed to favour Michael. That hour, in fact, brought her the nearest approach to happiness she had known since she left Wilfrid five days ago. After it was over she went with Michael to his study.

"Anything wrong, Dinny?"

Wilfrid's best friend, and the easiest person in the world to confide in, and she did not know what to say! And then suddenly she began to talk, sitting in his armchair, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, staring not at him, but at her future. And Michael sat on the window-sill, his face now rueful, now whimsical, making little soothing sounds. Nothing would matter, she said, neither public opinion, the Press, nor even her family, if only there were not in Wilfrid himself this deep bitter unease, this basic doubt of his own conduct, this permanent itch to prove to others, and, above all, to himself, that he was not 'yellow.' Now that she had given way, it poured out of her, all that bottled-up feeling that she was walking on a marsh, where at any moment she might sink in some deep, unlooked-for hole thinly covered by specious surface. She ceased and lay back in the chair exhausted.

"But, Dinny," said Michael, gently, "isn't he really fond of you?"

"I don't know, Michael; I thought so — I don't know. Why should he be? I'm an ordinary person, he's not."

"We all seem ordinary to ourselves. I don't want to flatter you, but you seem to me less ordinary than Wilfrid."

“Oh, no!”

“Poets,” said Michael gloomily, “give a lot of trouble. What are we going to do about it?”

That evening after dinner he went forth, ostensibly to the House, in fact to Cork Street.

Wilfrid was not in, so he asked Stack’s permission to wait. Sitting on the divan in that unconventional, dimly-lighted room, he twitted himself for having come. To imply that he came from Dinny would be worse than useless. Besides, he hadn’t. No! He had come to discover, if he could, whether Wilfrid really was in love with her. If not, then — well, then the sooner she was out of her misery the better. It might half break her heart, but that was better than pursuing a substance which wasn’t there. He knew, or thought he knew, that Wilfrid was the last person to endure a one-sided relationship. The worst of all disasters for Dinny would be to join herself to him under a misconception of his feelings for her. On a little table close to the divan, with the whisky, were the night’s letters — only two, one of them, he could see, from Dinny herself. The door was opened slightly and a dog came in. After sniffing at Michael’s trousers, it lay down with its head on its paws and its eyes fixed on the door. He spoke to it, but it took no notice — the right sort of dog. ‘I’ll give him till eleven,’ thought Michael. And almost immediately Wilfrid came. He had a bruise on one cheek and some plaster on his chin. The dog fluttered round his legs.

“Well, old man,” said Michael, “that must have been a hearty scrap.”

“It was. Whisky?”

“No, thanks.”

He watched Wilfrid take up the letters and turn his back to open them.

‘I ought to have known he’d do that,’ thought Michael; ‘there goes my chance! He’s bound to pretend to be in love with her!’

Before turning round again Wilfrid made himself a drink and finished it. Then, facing Michael, he said: “Well?”

Disconcerted by the abruptness of that word, and by the knowledge that he had come to pump his friend, Michael did not answer.

“What d’you want to know?”

Michael said abruptly: “Whether you’re in love with Dinny.”

Wilfrid laughed. “Really, Michael!”

“I know. But things can’t go on like this. Damn it! Wilfrid, you ought to think of her.”

“I do.” He said it with a face so withdrawn and unhappy that Michael thought: ‘He means that.’

“Then for God’s sake,” he said, “show it! Don’t let her eat her heart out like this!”

Wilfrid had turned to the window. Without looking round he said:

“You’ve never had occasion to try and prove yourself the opposite of yellow. Well, don’t! You won’t find the chance. It comes when you don’t want it, not when you do.”

“Naturally! But, my dear fellow, that’s not Dinny’s fault.”

“Her misfortune.”

“Well, then?”

Wilfrid wheeled round.

“Oh! damn you, Michael! Go away! No one can interfere in this. It’s much too intimate.”

Michael rose and clutched his hat. Wilfrid had said exactly what he himself had really been thinking ever since he came.

“You’re quite right,” he said humbly. “Good-night, old man! That’s a nice dog.”

“I’m sorry,” said Wilfrid; “you meant well, but you can’t help. No one can. Good-night!”

Michael got out, and all the way downstairs he looked for the tail between his legs.

When he reached home Dinny had gone up, but Fleur was waiting down for him. He had not meant to speak of his visit, but, after looking at him keenly, she said:

“You haven’t been to the House, Michael. You’ve been to see Wilfrid.”

Michael nodded.

“Well?”

“No go!”

“I could have told you that. If you come across a man and woman quarrelling in the street, what do you do?”

“Pass by on the other side, if you can get there in time.”

“Well?”

“They’re NOT quarrelling.”

“No, but they’ve got a special world no one else can enter.”

“That’s what Wilfrid said.”

“Naturally.”

Michael stared. Yes, of course. She had once had her special world, and not with — him!

“It was stupid of me. But I AM stupid.”

“No, not stupid; well-intentioned. Are you going up?”

“Yes.”

As he went upstairs he had the peculiar feeling that it was she who wanted to go to bed with him rather than he with her. And yet, once in bed, that would all change, for of such was the nature of man!

Dinny, in her room above theirs, through her open window could hear the faint murmur of their voices, and, bowing her face on her hands, gave way to a feeling of despair. The stars in their courses fought against her! External opposition one could cut through or get round; but this deep spiritual unease in the loved one’s soul, that — ah! that — one could not reach; and the unreachable could not be pushed away, cut through, or circumvented. She looked up at the stars that fought against her. Did the ancients really believe that, or was it, with them, as with her, just a manner of speaking? Did those bright wheeling jewels on the indigo velvet of all space really concern themselves with little men, the lives and loves of human insects, who, born from an embrace, met and clung and died and became dust? Those candescent worlds, circled by little offsplit planets — were their names taken in vain, or were they really in their motions and their relative positions the writing on the wall for men to read?

No! That was only human self-importance! To his small wheel man bound the Universe. Swing low, sweet chariots! But they didn’t! Man swung with them — in space . . . .

❦

CHAPTER 27

Two days later the Cherrell family met in conclave because of a sudden summons received by Hubert to rejoin his regiment in the Soudan. He wished to have something decided about Dinny before he left. The four Cherrell brothers, Sir Lawrence, Michael, and himself, gathered, therefore, in Adrian's room at the Museum after Mr. Justice Charwell's Court had risen. They all knew that the meeting might be futile, because, as even Governments find, to decide is useless if decision cannot be carried out.

Michael, Adrian, and the General, who had been in personal touch with Wilfrid, were the least vocal, Sir Lawrence and the Judge the most vocal; Hubert and Hilary were now vocal and now dumb.

Starting from the premise, which nobody denied, that the thing was a bad business, two schools of thought declared themselves — Adrian, Michael, and to some extent Hilary believed there was nothing to be done but wait and see; the rest thought there was much to be done, but what — they could not say.

Michael, who had never seen his four uncles so close together before, was struck by the resemblance in the shape and colouring of their faces, except that the eyes of Hilary and Lionel were blue and grey, and of the General and Adrian brown and hazel. They all, notably, lacked gesture, and had a lean activity of figure. In Hubert these characteristics were accentuated by youth, and his hazel eyes at times looked almost grey.

"If only," Michael heard his father say, "you could injunct her, Lionel?" and Adrian's impatient:

"We must let Dinny alone; trying to control her is absurd. She's got a warm heart, an unselfish nature, and plenty of sense." Then Hubert's retort:

"We know all that, Uncle, but the thing will be such a disaster for her, we must do what we can."

"Well, what CAN you do?"

'Exactly!' thought Michael, and said: "Just now she doesn't know how she stands."

"You couldn't get her to go out with you to the Soudan, Hubert?" said the Judge.

"I've lost all touch with her."

"If someone wanted her badly —" began the General, and did not finish.

"Even then," murmured Adrian, "only if she were quite sure Desert didn't want her more."

Hilary took out his pipe. "Has anyone tried Desert?"

"I have," said the General.

"And I, twice," muttered Michael.

"Suppose," said Hubert gloomily, "I had a shot."

"Not, my dear fellow," put in Sir Lawrence, "unless you can be quite certain of keeping your temper."

"I never can be certain of that."

"Then don't!"

"Would YOU go, Dad?" asked Michael.

"I?"

"He used to respect you."

"Not even a blood relation!"

"You might take a chance, Lawrence," said Hilary.

"But why?"

"None of the rest of us can, for one reason or another."

"Why shouldn't YOU?"

"In a way I agree with Adrian; it's best to leave it all alone."

"What exactly is the objection to Dinny's marrying him?" asked Adrian. The General turned to him abruptly.

"She'd be marked out for life."

“So was that fellow who stuck to his wife when she was convicted. Everybody respected him the more.”

“There’s no such sharp hell,” said the Judge, “as seeing fingers pointed at your life’s partner.”

“Dinny would learn not to notice them.”

“Forgive me, but you’re missing the point,” muttered Michael. “The point is Wilfrid’s own feeling. If he remains bitter about himself and marries her — that’ll be hell for her, if you like. And the fonder she is of him, the worse it’ll be.”

“You’re right, Michael,” said Sir Lawrence unexpectedly. “I’d think it well worth while to go if I could make him see that.”

Michael sighed.

“Whichever way it goes, it’s hell for poor Dinny.”

“‘Joy cometh in the morning,’” murmured Hilary through a cloud of smoke.

“Do you believe that, Uncle Hilary?”

“Not too much.”

“Dinny’s twenty-six. This is her first love. If it goes wrong — what then?”

“Marriage.”

“With somebody else?”

Hilary nodded.

“Lively!”

“Life is lively.”

“Well, Lawrence?” asked the General, sharply: “You’ll go?”

Sir Lawrence studied him for a moment, and then replied: “Yes.”

“Thank you!”

It was not clear to any of them what purpose would be served, but it was a decision of sorts, and at least could be carried out . . . .

Wilfrid had lost most of his bruise and discarded the plaster on his chin when Sir Lawrence, encountering him on the stairs at Cork Street that same late afternoon, said:

“D’you mind if I walk a little way with you?”

“Not at all, sir.”

“Any particular direction?”

Wilfrid shrugged, and they walked side by side, till at last Sir Lawrence said:

“Nothing’s worse than not knowing where you’re going!”

“You’re right.”

“Then why go, especially if in doing it you take someone with you? Forgive my putting things crudely, but, except for Dinny, would you be caring a hang about all this business? What other ties have you got here?”

“None. I don’t want to discuss things. If you’ll forgive me, I’ll branch off.”

Sir Lawrence stopped. “Just one moment, and then I’ll do the branching. Have you realised that a man who has a quarrel with himself is not fit to live with until he’s got over it? That’s all I wanted to say; but it’s a good deal. Think it over!” And, raising his hat, Sir Lawrence turned on his heel. By George! He was well out of that! What an uncomfortable young man! And, after all, one had said all one had come to say! He walked towards Mount Street, reflecting on the limitations imposed by tradition. But for tradition, would Wilfrid mind being thought ‘yellow’? Would Dinny’s family care? Would Lyall have written his confounded poem? Would not the Corporal in the Buffs have kowtowed? Was a single one of the Cherrells, met in conclave, a real believing Christian? Not even Hilary — he would bet his boots! Yet not one of them could stomach this recantation. Not religion, but the refusal to take the ‘dare’! That was the rub to them. The imputation of cowardice, or at least of not caring for the good name of one’s country. Well! About a million British had died for that good name in the war; had they all died for a futility? Desert himself had nearly died for it, and got the M.C., or D.S.O., or something! All very contradictory! People cared for their country in a crowd, it seemed, but not in a desert; in France, but not in Darfur.

He heard hurrying footsteps, and, turning round, saw Desert behind him. Sir Lawrence had almost a shock looking at his face, dry, dark, with quivering lips and deep suffering eyes.

"You were quite right," he said; "I thought I'd let you know. You can tell her family I'm going away."

At this complete success of his mission Sir Lawrence experienced dismay.

"Be careful!" he said: "You might do her a great injury."

"I shall do her that, anyway. Thank you for speaking to me. You've made me see. Good-bye!" He turned and was gone.

Sir Lawrence stood looking after him, impressed by his look of suffering. He turned in at his front door doubtful whether he had not made bad worse. While he was putting down his hat and stick, Lady Mont came down the stairs.

"I'm so bored, Lawrence. What have you been doin'?"

"Seeing young Desert; and, it seems, I've made him feel that until he can live on good terms with himself he won't be fit to live with at all."

"That's wicked."

"How?"

"He'll go away. I always knew he'd go away. You must tell Dinny at once what you've done." And she went to the telephone.

"Is that you, Fleur? . . . Oh! Dinny . . . This is Aunt Em! . . . Yes . . . Can you come round here? . . . Why not? . . . That's not a reason . . . But you must! Lawrence wants to speak to you . . . At once? Yes. He's done a very stupid thing . . . What? . . . No! . . . He wants to explain. In ten minutes . . . very well."

'My God!' thought Sir Lawrence. He had suddenly realised that to deaden feeling on any subject one only needed to sit in conclave. Whenever the Government got into trouble, they appointed a Commission. Whenever a man did something wrong, he went into consultation with solicitor and counsel. If he himself hadn't been sitting in conclave, would he ever have gone to see Desert and put the fat into the fire like this? The conclave had dulled his feelings. He had gone to Wilfrid as some juryman comes in to return his verdict after sitting in conclave on a case for days. And now he had to put himself right with Dinny, and how the deuce would he do that? He went into his study, conscious that his wife was following.

"Lawrence, you must tell her exactly what you've done, and how he took it. Otherwise it may be too late. And I shall stay until you've done it."

"Considering, Em, that you don't know what I said, or what he said, that seems superfluous."

"No," said Lady Mont, "nothing is, when a man's done wrong."

"I was charged to go and see him by your family."

"You ought to have had more sense. If you treat poets like innkeepers, they blow up."

"On the contrary, he thanked me."

"That's worse. I shall have Dinny's taxi kept at the door."

"Em," said Sir Lawrence, "when you want to make your will, let me know."

"Why?"

"Because of getting you consecutive before you start."

"Anything I have," said Lady Mont, "is to go to Michael, to be kept for Catherine. And if I'm dead when Kit goes to Harrow, he's to have my grandfather's 'stirrup-cup' that's in the armoire in my sitting-room at Lippin'hall. But he's not to take it to school with him, or they'll melt it, or drink boiled peppermints out of it, or something. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Then," said Lady Mont, "get ready and begin at once when Dinny comes."

"Quite!" said Sir Lawrence meekly. "But how the deuce am I to put it to Dinny?"

"Just put it, and don't invent as you go along."

Sir Lawrence played a tune with his fingers on the window-pane. His wife stared at the ceiling. They were like that when Dinny came.

"Keep Miss Dinny's taxi, Blore."

At the sight of his niece Sir Lawrence perceived that he had indeed lost touch with feeling. Her face, under its chestnut-coloured hair, was sharpened and blanched, and there was a look in her eyes that he did not like.

“Begin,” said Lady Mont.

Sir Lawrence raised one high thin shoulder as if in protection.

“My dear, your brother has been recalled, and I was asked whether I would go and see young Desert. I went. I told him that if he had a quarrel with himself he would not be fit to live with till he’d made it up. He said nothing and turned off. Afterwards he came up behind me in this street, and said that I was right. Would I tell your family that he was going away. He looked very queer and troubled. I said: ‘Be careful! You might do her a great injury.’ ‘I shall do her that, anyway,’ he said. And he went off. That was about twenty minutes ago.”

Dinny looked from one to the other, covered her lips with her hand, and went out.

A moment later they heard her cab move off.

❦

Chapter 28

Except for receiving a little note in answer to her letter, which relieved her not at all, Dinny had spent these last two days in distress of mind. When Sir Lawrence made his communication, she felt as if all depended on whether she could get to Cork Street before he was back there, and in her taxi she sat with hands screwed tight together in her lap and her eyes fixed on the driver's back, a back, indeed, so broad that it was not easy to fix them elsewhere. Useless to think of what she was going to say — she must say whatever came into her head when she saw him. His face would give her a lead. She realised that if he once got away from England it would be as if she had never seen him. She stopped the cab in Burlington Street and walked swiftly to his door. If he had come straight home, he must be in! In these last two days she had realised that Stack had perceived some change in Wilfrid and was conforming to it, and when he opened the door she said:

"You mustn't put me off, Stack, I MUST see Mr. Desert." And, slipping past, she opened the door of the sitting-room. Wilfrid was pacing up and down.

"Dinny!"

She felt that if she said the wrong thing it might be, then and there, the end; and she only smiled. He put his hands over his eyes; and, while he stood thus blinded, she stole up and put her arms round his neck.

Was Jean right? Ought she to —?

Then, through the opened door Foch came in. He slid the velvet of his muzzle under her hand, and she sank on her knees to kiss him. When she looked up, Wilfrid had turned away. Instantly she scrambled up, and stood, as it were, lost. She did not know of what, if of anything, she thought, not even whether she were feeling. All seemed to go blank within her. He had thrown the window open and was leaning there holding his hands to his head. Was he going to throw himself out? She made a violent effort to control her nerves, and said very gently: "Wilfrid!" He turned and looked at her, and she thought: 'My God! He hates me!' Then his expression changed, and became the one she knew; and she was aware once more of how at sea one is with wounded pride — so multiple and violent and changing in its moods!

"Well?" she said. "What do you wish me to do?"

"I don't know. The whole thing is mad. I ought to have buried myself in Siam by now."

"Would you like me to stay here to-night?"

"Yes! No! I don't know."

"Wilfrid, why take it so hard? It's as if love were nothing to you. Is it nothing?"

For answer he took out Jack Muskham's letter.

"Read this!"

She read it. "I see. It was doubly unfortunate that I came down."

He threw himself down again on the divan, and sat there looking up at her.

'If I do go,' thought Dinny, 'I shall only begin tearing to get back again.' And she said: "What are you doing for dinner?"

"Stack's got something, I believe."

"Would there be enough for me?"

"Too much, if you feel as I do."

She rang the bell.

"I'm staying to dinner, Stack. I only want about a pin's head of food."

And, craving for a moment in which to recover her balance, she said: "May I have a wash, Wilfrid?"

While she was drying her face and hands, she took hold of herself with all her might, and then as suddenly relaxed. Whatever she decided would be wrong, painful, perhaps impossible. Let it go!

When she came back to the sitting-room he was not there. The door into his bedroom was open, but it was empty. Dinny rushed to the window. He was not in the street. Stack's voice said.

"Excuse me, miss: Mr. Desert was called out. He told me to say he would write. Dinner will be ready in a minute."

Dinny went straight up to him.

“Your first impression of me was the right one, Stack; not your second. I am going now. Mr. Desert need have no fear of me. Tell him that, please.”

“Miss,” said Stack, “I told you he was very sudden; but this is the most sudden thing I’ve ever known him do. I’m sorry, miss. But I’m afraid it’s a case of cutting your losses. If I can be of service to you, I will.”

“If he leaves England,” said Dinny, “I should like to have Foch.”

“If I know Mr. Desert, miss, he means to go. I’ve seen it coming on him ever since he had that letter the night before you came round in the early morning.”

“Well,” said Dinny, “shake hands, and remember what I said.”

They exchanged a hand-grip, and, still unnaturally steady, she went out and down the stairs. She walked fast, giddy and strange in her head, and nothing but the word: So! recurring in her mind. All that she had felt, all that she had meant to feel, compressed into that word of two letters. In her life she had never felt so withdrawn and tearless, so indifferent as to where she went, what she did, or whom she saw. The world might well be without end, for its end had come. She did not believe that he had designed this way of breaking from her. He had not enough insight into her for that. But, in fact, no way could have been more perfect, more complete. Drag after a man! Impossible! She did not even have to form that thought, it was instinctive.

She walked and walked for three hours about the London streets, and turned at last towards Westminster with the feeling that if she didn’t she would drop. When she went in at South Square, she summoned all that was left in her to a spurt of gaiety; but, when she had gone up to her room, Fleur said:

“Something very wrong, Michael.”

“Poor Dinny! What the hell has he done now?”

Going to the window, Fleur drew aside the curtain. It was not yet quite dark. Except for two cats, a taxi to the right, and a man on the pavement examining a small bunch of keys, there was nothing to be seen.

“Shall I go up and see if she’ll talk?”

“No. If Dinny wants us, she’ll let us know. If it’s as you think, she’ll want no one. She’s proud as the devil when her back’s to the wall.”

“I hate pride,” said Fleur; and, closing the curtain, she went towards the door. “It comes when you don’t want it, and does you down. If you want a career, don’t have pride.” She went out.

‘I don’t know,’ thought Michael, ‘if I have pride, but I haven’t got a career.’ He followed slowly upstairs, and for some little time stood in the doorway of his dressing-room. But no sound came from upstairs . . .

Dinny, indeed, was lying on her bed, face down. So this was the end! Why had the force called love exalted and tortured her, then thrown her, used and exhausted, quivering, longing, wounded, startled, to eat her heart out in silence and grief? Love and pride, and the greater of these is pride! So the saying seemed to go within her, and to be squeezed into her pillow. Her love against his pride! Her love against her own pride! And the victory with pride! Wasteful and bitter! Of all that evening only one moment now seemed to her real: when he had turned from the window, and she had thought: ‘He hates me!’ Of course he hated her, standing like the figure of his wounded self-esteem; the one thing that prevented him from crying out: ‘God damn you all! Good-bye!’

Well, now he could cry it and go! And she — suffer, suffer — and slowly get over it. No! Lie on it, keep it down, keep it silent, press it into her pillows. Make little of it, make nothing of it, while inside her it swelled and ravaged her. The expression of instinct is not so clear as that; but behind all formless throbbing there is meaning; and that was the meaning within Dinny’s silent and half-smothered struggle on her bed. How could she have acted differently? Not her fault that Muskham had sent the letter with that phrase about the protection of a woman! Not her fault that she had rushed down to Royston! What had she done wrong? The whole thing arbitrary, gratuitous! Perhaps love in its courses was always so! It seemed to her that the night ticked while she lay there; the rusty ticking of an old clock. Was it the night, or her own life, abandoned and lying on its face?

❦

CHAPTER 29

Wilfrid had obeyed impulse when he ran down into Cork Street. Ever since the sudden breaking off of that fierce undignified scuffle at Royston, and the sight of Dinny standing in the car covering her eyes with a hand, his feelings towards her had been terribly confused. Now at the sudden sight, sound, scent of her, warmth had rushed up in him and spent itself in kisses; but the moment she left him his insane feeling had returned and hurled him down into a London where at least one could walk and meet no one. He went south and became involved with a queue of people trying to get into 'His Majesty's.' He stood among them thinking: 'As well in here as anywhere.' But, just as his turn came, he broke away and branched off eastward; passed through Covent Garden, desolate and smelling of garbage; and came out into Ludgate Hill. Hereabouts he was reminded by scent of fish that he had eaten nothing since breakfast. And, going into a restaurant, he drank a cocktail and ate some hors-d'oeuvre. Asking for a sheet of paper and envelope, he wrote:

"I had to go. If I had stayed, you and I would have been one. I don't know what I'm going to do — I may finish in the river to-night, or go abroad, or come back to you. Whatever I do, forgive, and believe that I have loved you. Wilfrid."

He addressed the envelope and thrust it into his pocket. But he did not post it. He felt he could never express what he was feeling. Again he walked east. Through the City zone, deserted as if it had been mustard-gassed, he was soon in the cheerier Whitechapel Road. He walked, trying to tire himself out and stop the whirling of his thoughts. He moved northwards now, and towards eleven was nearing Chingford. All was moonlit and still when he passed the hotel and went on towards the Forest. One car, a belated cyclist, a couple or two, and three tramps were all he met before he struck off the road in among the trees. Daylight was gone, and the moon was silvering the leaves and branches. Thoroughly exhausted, he lay down on the beech mast. The night was an unwritten poem — the gleam and drip of light like the play of an incoherent mind, fluttering, slipping in and out of reality; never at rest; never the firm silver of true metal; burnished and gone like a dream. Up there were the stars he had travelled by times without number, the Wain, and all the others that seemed meaningless, if not nameless, in this town world.

He turned over and lay on his face, pressing his forehead to the ground. And suddenly he heard the drone of a flying machine. But through the heavily-leafed boughs he could see no gliding, sky-scurrying shape. Some night-flier to Holland; some English airman pricking out the lighted shape of London, or practising flight between Hendon and an East Coast base. After flying in the war he had never wished to fly again. The very sound of it brought back still that sick, fed-up feeling from which the Armistice had delivered him. The drone passed on and away. A faint rumbling murmur came from London, but here the night was still and warm, with only a frog croaking, a bird cheeping feebly once, two owls hooting against each other. He turned again on to his face, and fell into an uneasy sleep.

When he woke light was just rifting the clear darkness. A heavy dew had fallen; he felt stiff and chilled, but his mind was clear. He got up and swung his arms, lit a cigarette, and drew the smoke deep in. He sat with his arms clasped round his knees, smoking his cigarette to its end without ever moving it from his lips, and spitting out the stub with its long ash just before it burned his mouth. Suddenly he began to shiver. He got up to walk back to the road. Stiff and sore, he made poor going. It was full dawn by the time he reached the road, and then, knowing that he ought to go towards London, he went in the opposite direction. He plodded on, and every now and then shivered violently. At last he sat down and, bowed over his knees, fell into a sort of coma. A voice saying: "Hi!" roused him. A fresh-faced young man in a small car had halted alongside. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing," muttered Wilfrid.

"You appear to be in poor shape, all the same. D'you know what time it is?"

"No."

"Get in here, and I'll run you to the hotel at Chingford. Got any money?"

Wilfrid looked at him grimly and laughed.

"Yes."

"Don't be touchy! What you want is a sleep and some strong coffee! Come on!"

Wilfrid got up. He could hardly stand. He lay back in the little car, huddled beside the young man, who said: "Now we shan't be long."

In ten minutes, which to a blurred and shivering consciousness might have been five hours, they were in front of the hotel.

"I know the 'boots' here," said the young man; "I'll put you in charge of him. What's your name?"

"Hell!" muttered Wilfrid.

"Hi! George! I found this gentleman on the road. He seems to have gone a bit wonky. Put him into some decent bedroom. Heat him up a good hot bottle, and get him into bed with it. Brew him some strong coffee, and see that he drinks it."

The boots grinned. "That all?"

"No; take his temperature, and send for a doctor. Look here, sir," the young man turned to Wilfrid, "I recommend this chap. He can polish boots with the best. Just let him do for you, and don't worry. I must get on. It's six o'clock." He waited a moment, watching Wilfrid stagger into the hotel on the arm of the 'boots,' then sped away.

The 'boots' assisted Wilfrid to a room. "Can you undress, governor?"

"Yes," muttered Wilfrid.

"Then I'll go and get you that bottle and the coffee. Don't be afraid, we don't 'ave damp beds 'ere. Were you out all night?"

Wilfrid sat on the bed and did not answer.

"'Ere!" said the 'boots': "give us your sleeves!" He pulled Wilfrid's coat off, then his waistcoat and trousers. "You've got a proper chill, it seems to me. Your underthings are all damp. Can you stand?"

Wilfrid shook his head.

The 'boots' stripped the sheets off the bed, pulled Wilfrid's shirt over his head; then with a struggle wrenched off vest and drawers, and wrapped him in a blanket.

"Now, governor, a good pull and a pull altogether." He forced Wilfrid's head on to the pillow, heaved his legs on to the bed, and covered him with two more blankets.

"You lie there; I won't be gone ten minutes."

Wilfrid lay, shivering so that his thoughts would not join up, nor his lips make consecutive sounds owing to the violent chattering of his teeth. He became conscious of a chambermaid, then of voices.

"His teeth'll break it. Isn't there another place?"

"I'll try under his arm."

A thermometer was pressed under his arm and held there.

"You haven't got yellow fever, have you, sir?"

Wilfrid shook his head.

"Can you raise yourself, governor, and drink this?"

Robust arms raised him, and he drank.

"One 'undred and four."

"Gawd! 'Ere, pop this bottle to his feet, I'll 'phone the Doc."

Wilfrid could see the maid watching him, as if wondering what sort of fever she was going to catch.

"Malaria," he said, suddenly, "not infectious. Give me a cigarette! In my waistcoat."

The maid put a cigarette between his lips and lit it. Wilfrid took a long pull.

"A-again!" he said.

Again she put it between his lips, and again he took a pull.

"They say there's mosquitoes in the forest. Did you find any last night, sir?"

"In the sys-system."

Shivering a little less now, he watched her moving about the room, collecting his clothes, drawing the curtains so that they shaded the bed. Then she approached him, and he smiled up at her.

"Another nice drop of hot coffee?"

He shook his head, closed his eyes again, and shivered deep into the bed, conscious that she was still watching him, and then again of voices.

"Can't find a name, but he's some sort of nob. There's money and this letter in his coat. The doctor'll be here in five minutes."

"Well, I'll wait till then, but I've got my work to do."

"Same 'ere. Tell the missus when you call her."

He saw the maid stand looking at him with a sort of awe. A stranger and a nob, with a curious disease, interesting to a simple mind. Of his face, pressed into the pillow, she couldn't see much — one dark cheek, one ear, some hair, the screwed-up eye under the brow. He felt her touch his forehead timidly with a finger. Burning hot, of course!

"Would you like your friends written to, sir?"

He shook his head.

"The doctor'll be here in a minute."

"I'll be like this two days — nothing to be done — quinine — orange juice —" Seized by a violent fit of shivering, he was silent. He saw the doctor come in; and the maid still leaning against the chest of drawers, biting her little finger. She took it from her mouth, and he heard her say: "Shall I stay, sir?"

"Yes, you can stay."

The doctor's fingers closed on his pulse, raised his eyelid, pushed his lips apart.

"Well, sir? Had much of this?"

Wilfrid nodded.

"All right! You'll stay where you are, and shove in quinine, and that's all I can do for you. Pretty sharp bout."

Wilfrid nodded.

"There are no cards on you. What's your name?"

Wilfrid shook his head.

"All right! Don't worry! Take this."

◆

Chapter 30

Stepping from an omnibus, Dinny walked into the large of Wimbledon Common. After a nearly sleepless night, she had slipped out, leaving a note to say she would be away all day. She hurried over the grass into a birch grove, and lay down. The high moving clouds, the sunlight striking in and out of the birch-tree branches, the water wagtails, the little dry patches of sand, and that stout wood-pigeon, undismayed by her motionless figure, brought her neither peace nor the inclination to think of Nature. She lay on her back, quivering and dry-eyed, wondering for whose inscrutable delight she was thus suffering. The stricken do not look for outside help, they seek within. To go about exuding tragedy was abhorrent to her. She would not do that! But the sweetness of the wind, the moving clouds, the rustle of the breeze, the sound of children's voices, brought no hint of how she was to disguise herself and face life afresh. The isolation in which she had been ever since the meeting with Wilfrid under Foch's statue now showed nakedly. All her eggs had been in one basket, and the basket had fallen. She dug with her fingers at the sandy earth; and a dog, seeing a hole, came up and sniffed it. She had begun to live, and now she was dead. "No flowers by request!"

So sharp had been her realisation of finality yesterday evening that she did not even consider the possibility of tying up the broken thread. If he had pride, so had she! Not the same sort, but as deep in her marrow. No one had any real need of her! Why not go away? She had nearly three hundred pounds. The notion gave her neither exhilaration nor any real relief; but it would save her from making herself a nuisance to those who would expect her to be her old cheerful self. She thought of the hours she had spent with Wilfrid in places like this. So sharp was her memory that she had to cover her lips to prevent anguish welling out of them. Until she met him she had never felt alone. And now — she WAS alone! Chill, terrifying, endless! Remembering how she had found swift motion good for heartache, she got up and crossed the road where the Sunday stream of cars was already flowing out of town. Uncle Hilary had once exhorted her not to lose her sense of humour. But had she ever had one? At the end of Barnes Common she climbed on to a 'bus and went back to London. She must have something to eat, or she would be fainting. She got down near Kensington Gardens and went into an hotel.

After lunch she sat some time in the Gardens, and then walked to Mount Street. No one was in, and she sank down on the sofa in the drawing-room. Thoroughly exhausted, she fell asleep. Her aunt's entrance woke her, and, sitting up, she said:

"You can all be happy about me, Aunt Em. It's finished."

Lady Mont stared at her niece sitting there with such a ghostly little smile, and two tears, starting not quite together, ran down her cheeks.

"I didn't know you cried at funerals, too, Aunt Em."

She got up, went over to her aunt, and with her handkerchief removed the marks the tears had made.

"There!"

Lady Mont got up. "I MUST howl," she said, "I simply must." And she swayed rapidly out of the room.

Dinny sat on, that ghost of a smile still on her face. Blore brought in the tea-things, and she talked to him of Wimbledon, and his wife. He did not seem to know which of the two was in worse shape, but, as he was going out, he turned and said:

"And if I might suggest, Miss Dinny, a little sea air for you."

"Yes, Blore, I was thinking of it."

"I'm glad, miss; one overdoes it at this time of year."

He, too, seemed to know that her course was run. And, feeling suddenly that she could not go on thus attending her own funeral, she stole to the door, listened for sounds, then slipped down the stairs and away.

But she was so physically exhausted that she could scarcely drag herself as far as St. James's Park. There she sat down by the water. People, sunbeams, and ducks, shading leaves, spiky reeds, and this sirocco within her! A tall man walking from the Whitehall end made a little convulsive movement, as if to put his hand to his hat, corrected it at sight of her face, and lounged on. Realising what her face must be expressing, she got up, and, trailing on to Westminster Abbey, went in and sat down in a pew. There, bent forward, with her face resting on her arms, she stayed quite half an hour. She had not prayed, but she had rested, and the expression on her face had changed. She felt more fit to face people and not show so much.

It was past six, and she went on to South Square. Getting unseen to her room, she had a long hot bath, put on a dinner frock, and resolutely went down. Only Fleur and Michael were there, and neither of them asked her any questions. It was clear to her that they knew. She got through the evening somehow. When she was going up, both of them kissed her, and Fleur said:

“I’ve told them to put you a hot-water bottle; stuck against your back, it helps you to sleep. Good-night, bless you!”

Again Dinny had the feeling that Fleur had once suffered as she was suffering now. She slept better than she could have hoped.

With her early tea she received a letter with the heading of an hotel at Chingford.

“MADAM —

“The enclosed letter addressed to you was found in the pocket of a gentleman who is lying here with a very sharp attack of malaria. I am posting it on to you, and am

“Truly yours,

“ROGER QUEAL, M.D.”

She read the letter . . . “Whatever I do, forgive, and believe that I have loved you. Wilfrid.” And he was ill! All the impulses which sprang up she instantly thrust back. Not a second time would she rush in where angels feared to tread! But, hurrying down, she telephoned to Stack the news that he was lying at the Chingford hotel with an attack of malaria.

“He’ll want his pyjamas and his razors, then, miss. I’ll take ’em down to him.”

Forcing back the words: “Give him my love,” she said instead, “He knows where I am if there is anything I can do.”

The blacker bitterness of her mood was gone; yet she was as cut off from him as ever! Unless he came or sent for her she could make no move; and deep down she seemed to know that he would neither come nor send. No! He would strike his tent and flit away from where he had felt too much.

Towards noon Hubert came to say good-bye. It was at once clear to her that he, too, knew. He was coming back for the rest of his leave in October, he said. Jean was to stay at Condaford till after her child was born in November. She had been ordered to be out of the summer heat. He seemed to Dinny that morning like the old Hubert again. He dwelt on the advantage of being born at Condaford. And, endeavouring to be sprightly, she said:

“Quaint to find you talking like that, Hubert. You never used to care about Condaford.”

“It makes a difference to have an heir.”

“Oh! It’ll be an heir, will it?”

“Yes, we’ve made up our minds to a boy.”

“And will there be a Condaford by the time he comes into it?”

Hubert shrugged. “We’ll have a try at keeping it. Things don’t last unless you set yourself to keep them.”

“And not always then,” murmured Dinny.

❦

Chapter 31

Wilfrid's words: "You can tell her family I'm going away," and Dinny's: "It's finished," had travelled, if not like wildfire, throughout the Cherrell family. There was no rejoicing as over a sinner that repenteth. All were too sorry for her, with a sorrow nigh unto dismay. Each wanted to show sympathy, none knew how. Sympathy smelling of sympathy was worse than none. Three days passed, during which not one member of the family succeeded in expressing anything. Then Adrian had a brainwave: He would ask her to eat something with him, though why food should be regarded as consolatory neither he nor anyone else had ever known. He appointed a café which had perhaps more repute than merit.

Since Dinny was not of those young women who make the ravages of life into an excuse for French-varnishing their surfaces, he had every opportunity to note her pallor. He forbore to comment. Indeed, he found it difficult to talk at all, for he knew that, though men, when enthralled by women, remain devoted to their mental mainsprings, women, less bodily enthralled, stay mentally wrapped up in the men they love. He began, however, to tell her how someone had tried to 'sell him a pup.'

"He wanted five hundred pounds, Dinny, for a Cromagnon skull found in Suffolk. The whole thing looked extraordinarily genuine. But I happened to see the county archaeologist. 'Oh!' he said: 'So he's been trying to palm that off on you, has he? That's the well-known "pup." He's dug it up at least three times. The man ought to be in gaol. He keeps it in a cupboard and every five or six years digs a hole, puts it in, takes it out, and tries to sell it. It possibly IS a Cromagnon skull, but he picked it up in France, about twenty years ago. It would be unique, of course as a British product.' Thereon I went off to have another look at where it was found last time. And it was plain enough, when you already knew it, that he'd put the thing in. There's something about antiques that saps what the Americans call one's MORAL."

"What sort of man was he, uncle?"

"An enthusiastic-looking chap, rather like my hairdresser."

Dinny laughed. "You ought to do something, or he WILL sell it next time."

"The depression is against him, my dear. Bones and first editions are extraordinarily sensitive. He'll have to live a good ten years to get anything like a price."

"Do many people try to palm things off on you?"

"Some succeed, Dinny. I regret that 'pup,' though; it was a lovely skull. There aren't many as good nowadays."

"We English certainly are getting uglier."

"Don't you believe it. Put the people we meet in drawing-rooms and shops into cassocks and cowls, armour and jerkins, and you'll have just the faces of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries."

"But we do despise beauty, Uncle. We connect it with softness and immorality."

"Well, it makes people happy to despise what they haven't got. We're only about the third — no, the fourth — plainest people in Europe. But take away the Celtic infusions, and I admit we'd be the first."

Dinny looked round the café. Her survey added nothing to her conclusions, partly because she took but little in, and partly because the lunchers were nearly all Jews or Americans.

Adrian watched her with an ache. She looked so bone-listless.

"Hubert's gone, then?" he said.

"Yes."

"And what are you going to do, my dear?"

Dinny sat looking at her plate. Suddenly she raised her head and said:

"I think I shall go abroad, Uncle."

Adrian's hand went to his goatee.

"I see," he said, at last. "Money?"

"I have enough."

"Where?"

"Anywhere."

"By yourself?"

Dinny nodded.

"The drawback to going away," murmured Adrian, "is the having to come back."

"There doesn't seem to be anything much for me to do just now. So I think I'll cheer people up by not seeing them for a bit."

Adrian debated within himself.

"Well, my dear, only you can decide what's best for you. But if you felt like a long travel, it strikes me that Clare might be glad to see you in Ceylon."

Seeing by the surprised movement of her hands that the idea was new to her, he went on:

"I have a feeling that she may not be finding life very easy."

Her eyes met his.

"That's what I thought at the wedding, Uncle; I didn't like his face."

"You have a special gift for helping others, Dinny; and whatever's wrong about Christianity, it's not the saying 'To give is more blessed than to receive.'"

"Even the Son of Man liked His little joke, Uncle."

Adrian looked at her hard, and said:

"Well, if you do go to Ceylon, mind you eat your mangoes over a basin."

He parted from her a little later and, too much out of mood to go back to work, went to the Horse Show instead.

❦

Chapter 32

At South Square The Daily Phase was among those journals which politicians take lest they should miss reading correctly the temperature of Fleet Street. Michael pushed it over to Fleur at breakfast.

During the six days since Dinny's arrival neither of them had said a word to her on the subject of Wilfrid; and it was Dinny who now said: "May I see that?"

Fleur handed her the paper. She read, gave a little shudder, and went on with her breakfast. Kit broke the ensuing hush by stating Hobbs' average. Did Aunt Dinny think he was as great as W. G. Grace?

"I never saw either of them, Kit."

"Didn't you see W. G.?"

"I think he died before I was born."

Kit scrutinised her doubtfully.

"Oh!"

"He died in 1915," said Michael: "You'd have been eleven."

"But haven't you really seen Hobbs, Auntie?"

"No."

"I'VE seen him three times. I'm practising his hook to leg. The Daily Phase says Bradman is the best batsman in the world now. Do you think he's better than Hobbs?"

"Better news than Hobbs."

Kit stared.

"What is 'news'?"

"What newspapers are for."

"Do they make it up?"

"Not always."

"What news were you reading just now?"

"Nothing that would interest you."

"How do you know?"

"Kit, don't worry!" said Fleur.

"May I have an egg?"

"Yes."

The hush began again, till Kit stopped his eggspoon in midair and isolated a finger:

"Look! The nail's blacker than it was yesterday. Will it come off, Auntie?"

"How did you do that?"

"Pinched it in a drawer. I didn't cry."

"Don't boast, Kit."

Kit gave his mother a clear upward look and resumed his egg.

Half an hour later, when Michael was just settling down to his correspondence, Dinny came into his study.

"Busy, Michael?"

"No, my dear."

"That paper! Why can't they leave him alone?"

"You see The Leopard is selling like hot cakes. Dinny, how do things stand now?"

"I know he's been having malaria, but I don't even know where or how he is."

Michael looked at her face, masked in its desperate little smile, and said, hesitatingly:

“Would you like me to find out?”

“If he wants me, he knows where I am.”

“I’ll see Compson Grice. I’m not lucky with Wilfrid himself.”

When she was gone he sat staring at the letters he had not begun to answer, half dismayed, half angered. Poor dear Dinny! What a shame! Pushing the letters aside, he went out.

Compson Grice’s office was near Covent Garden, which, for some reason still to be discovered, attracts literature. When Michael reached it, about noon, that young publisher was sitting in the only well-furnished room in the building, with a newspaper cutting in his hand and a smile on his lips. He rose and said: “Hallo, Mont! Seen this in The Phase?”

“Yes.”

“I sent it round to Desert, and he wrote that at the top and sent it back. Neat, eh!”

Michael read in Wilfrid’s writing:

> “Whene’er the lord who rules his roosts
> Says: ‘Bite!’ he bites, says: ‘Boost!’ he boosts.”

“He’s in town, then?”

“Was half an hour ago.”

“Have you seen him at all?”

“Not since the book came out.”

Michael looked shrewdly at that comely fattish face. “Satisfied with the sales?”

“We’re in the forty-first thousand, and going strong.”

“I suppose you don’t know whether Wilfrid is returning to the East?”

“Haven’t the least little idea.”

“He must be pretty sick with the whole thing.”

Compson Grice shrugged.

“How many poets have ever made a thousand pounds out of a hundred pages of verse?”

“Small price for a soul, Grice.”

“It’ll be two thousand before we’ve done.”

“I always thought it a mistake to print The Leopard. Since he did it I’ve defended it, but it was a fatal thing to do.”

“I don’t agree.”

“Obviously. It’s done you proud.”

“You can sneer,” said Grice, with some feeling, “but he wouldn’t have sent it to me if he hadn’t wished it to come out. I am not my brother’s keeper. The mere fact that it turns out a scoop is nothing to the point.”

Michael sighed.

“I suppose not; but this is no joke for him. It’s his whole life.”

“Again, I don’t agree. That happened when he recanted to save himself being shot. This is expiation, and damned good business into the bargain. His name is known to thousands who’d never heard of it.”

“Yes,” said Michael, brooding, “there is that, certainly. Nothing like persecution to keep a name alive. Grice, will you do something for me? Make an excuse to find out what Wilfrid’s intentions are. I’ve put my foot into it with him and can’t go myself, but I specially want to know.”

“H’m!” said Grice. “He bites.”

Michael grinned. “He won’t bite his benefactor. I’m serious. Will you?”

“I’ll try. By the way, there’s a book by that French Canadian I’ve just published. Top-hole! I’ll send you a copy — your wife will like it.” ‘And,’ he added to himself, ‘talk about it.’ He smoothed back his sleek dark hair and extended his hand. Michael shook it with a little more warmth than he really felt and went away.

‘After all,’ he thought, ‘what is it to Grice except business? Wilfrid’s nothing to him! In these days we have to take what the gods send.’ And he fell to considering what was really making the public buy a book not concerned with sex, memoirs, or murders. The Empire! The prestige of the English! He did not believe it. No! What was making them buy it was that fundamental interest which attached to the question how far a person might go to save his life without losing what was called his soul. In other words, the book was being sold by that little thing — believed in some quarters to be dead — called Conscience. A problem posed to each reader's conscience, that he could not answer easily; and the fact that it had actually happened to the author brought it home to the reader that some awful alternative might at any moment be presented to himself. And what would he do then, poor thing? And Michael felt one of those sudden bursts of consideration and even respect for the public which often came over him and so affected his more intelligent friends that they alluded to him as 'Poor Michael!'

So meditating, he reached his room at the House of Commons, and had settled down to the consideration of a private bill to preserve certain natural beauties when a card was brought to him:

> General Sir Conway Cherrell
>
> "Can you see me?"

Pencilling: "Delighted, sir!" he handed the card back to the attendant and got up. Of all his uncles he knew Dinny's father least, and he waited with some trepidation.

The General came in, saying:

"Regular rabbit-warren this, Michael."

He had the confirmed neatness of his profession, but his face looked worn and worried.

"Luckily we don't breed here, Uncle Con."

The General emitted a short laugh.

"No, there's that. I hope I'm not interrupting you. It's about Dinny. She still with you?"

"Yes, sir."

The General hesitated, and then, crossing his hands on his stick, said firmly:

"You're Desert's best friend, aren't you?"

"Was. What I am now, I really don't know."

"Is he still in town?"

"Yes; he's been having a bout of malaria, I believe."

"Dinny still seeing him?"

"No, sir."

Again the General hesitated, and again seemed to firm himself by gripping his stick.

"Her mother and I, you know, only want what's best for her. We want her happiness; the rest doesn't matter. What do you think?"

"I really don't believe it matters what any of us think."

The General frowned.

"How do you mean?"

"It's just between those two."

"I understood that he was going away."

"He said so to my father, but he hasn't gone. His publisher told me just now that he was still at his rooms this morning."

"How is Dinny?"

"Very low in her mind. But she keeps her end up."

"He ought to do something."

"What, sir?"

"It's not fair to Dinny. He ought either to marry her or go right away."

"Would you find it easy, in his place, to make up your mind?"

"Perhaps not."

Michael made a restless tour of his little room.

“I think the whole thing is way below any question of just yes or no. It’s a case of wounded pride, and when you’ve got that, the other emotions don’t run straight. You ought to know that, sir. You must have had similar cases, when fellows have been court-martialled.”

The word seemed to strike the General with the force of a revelation. He stared at his nephew and did not answer.

“Wilfrid,” said Michael, “is being court-martialled, and it isn’t a short sharp business like a real court-martial — it’s a desperate long-drawn-out affair, with no end to it that I can grasp.”

“I see,” said the General, quietly: “But he should never have let Dinny in for it.”

Michael smiled. “Does love ever do what’s correct?”

“That’s the modern view, anyway.”

“According to report, the ancient one, too.”

The General went to the window and stood looking out.

“I don’t like to go and see Dinny,” he said, without turning round; “it seems like worrying her. Her mother feels the same. And there’s nothing we can do.”

His voice, troubled not for himself, touched Michael.

“I believe,” he said, “that in some way it’ll all be over very soon. And whichever way will be better for them and all of us than this.”

The General turned round.

“Let’s hope so. I wanted to ask you to keep in touch with us, and not let Dinny do anything without letting us know. It’s very hard waiting down there. I won’t keep you now; and thank you, it’s been a relief. Good-bye, Michael!”

He grasped his nephew’s hand, squeezed it firmly, and was gone.

Michael thought: ‘Hanging in the wind! There’s nothing worse. Poor old boy!’

❦

Chapter 33

Compson Grice, who had no mean disposition and a certain liking for Michael, went out to lunch mindful of his promise. A believer in the power of meals to solve difficulties, he would normally have issued an invitation and obtained his information over the second or third glass of really old brandy. But he was afraid of Wilfrid. Discussing his simple sole meunière and half-bottle of Chablis, he decided on a letter. He wrote it in the Club's little green-panelled writing-room, with a cup of coffee by his side and a cigar in his mouth.

"The Hotch Potch Club.

"Friday.

"DEAR DESERT —

"In view of the remarkable success of The Leopard and the probability of further large sales, I feel that I ought to know definitely what you would like me to do with the royalty cheques when they fall due. Perhaps you would be so good as to tell me whether you contemplate going back to the East, and if so when; and at the same time let me have an address to which I can remit with safety. Possibly you would prefer that I should simply pay your royalties into your bank, whatever that is, and take their receipt. Hitherto our financial transactions have been somewhat lean, but The Leopard will certainly have — indeed, is already having — an influence on the sales of your two previous books; and it will be advisable that you should keep me in touch with your whereabouts in future. Shall you be in Town much longer? I am always delighted to see you, if you care to look in.

"With hearty congratulations and best wishes,

"I am, sincerely yours,

"COMPSON GRICE."

This letter, in his elegant and upright hand, he addressed to Cork Street and sent at once by the club messenger. The remains of his recess he spent sounding in his rather whispering voice the praises of his French Canadian product, and then took a taxi back to Covent Garden. A clerk met him in the lobby.

"Mr. Desert is waiting up in your room, sir."

"Good!" said Compson Grice, subduing a tremor and thinking: 'Quick work!'

Wilfrid was standing at a window which commanded a slanting view of Covent Garden market; and Grice was shocked when he turned round — the face was so dark and wasted and had such a bitter look: the hand, too, had an unpleasant dry heat in the feel of it.

"So you got my letter?" he said.

"Thanks. Here's the address of my bank. Better pay all cheques into it and take their receipt."

"You don't look too fearfully well. Are you off again?"

"Probably. Well, good-bye, Grice. Thanks for all you've done."

Compson Grice said, with real feeling: "I'm terribly sorry it's hit you so hard."

Wilfrid shrugged and turned to the door.

When he was gone his publisher stood, twisting the bank's address, in his hands. Suddenly he said our loud: "I don't like his looks; I absolutely don't!" And he went to the telephone . . .

Wilfrid walked north; he had another visit to pay. He reached the museum just as Adrian was having his cup of 'Dover' tea and bun.

"Good!" said Adrian, rising. "I'm glad to see you. There's a spare cup. Do sit down."

He had experienced the same shock as Grice at the look on Desert's face and the feel of his hand.

Wilfrid took a sip of tea. "May I smoke?" He lighted a cigarette, and sat, hunched in his chair. Adrian waited for him to speak.

"Sorry to butt in on you like this," said Wilfrid, at last, "but I'm going back into the blue. I wanted to know which would hurt Dinny least — just to clear out or to write."

Adrian lived through a wretched and bleak minute.

“You mean that if you see her you can’t trust yourself.” Desert gave a shivering shrug.

“It’s not that exactly. It sounds brutal, but I’m so fed up that I don’t feel anything. If I saw her — I might wound her. She’s been an angel. I don’t suppose you can understand what’s happened in me. I can’t myself. I only know that I want to get away from everything and everybody.”

Adrian nodded.

“I was told you’d been ill — you don’t think that accounts for your present feeling? For God’s sake don’t make a mistake in your feelings now!”

Wilfrid smiled.

“I’m used to malaria. It’s not that. You’ll laugh, but I feel like bleeding to death inside. I want to get to where nothing and nobody remind me. And Dinny reminds me more than anyone.”

“I see,” said Adrian gravely. And he was silent, passing his hand over his bearded chin. Then he got up and began to walk about.

“Do you think it’s fair to Dinny or yourself not to try what seeing her might do?”

Wilfrid answered, almost with violence: “I tell you, I should hurt her.”

“You’ll hurt her any way; her eggs are all in one basket. And look here, Desert! You published that poem deliberately. I always understood you did so as a form of expiation, even though you had asked Dinny to marry you. I’m not such a fool as to want you to go on with Dinny if your feelings have really changed; but are you sure they have?”

“My feelings haven’t changed. I simply have none. Being a pariah dog has killed them.”

“Do you realise what you’re saying?”

“Perfectly! I knew I was a pariah from the moment I recanted, and that whether people knew it or not didn’t matter. All the same — it HAS mattered.”

“I see,” said Adrian again, and came to a standstill. “I suppose that’s natural.”

“Whether it is to others, I don’t know; it is to me. I am out of the herd, and I’ll stay there. I don’t complain. I side against myself.” He spoke with desperate energy.

Adrian said, very gently: “Then you just want to know how to hurt Dinny least? I can’t tell you: I wish I could. I gave you the wrong advice when you came before. Advice is no good, anyway. We have to wrestle things out for ourselves.”

Wilfrid stood up. “Ironical, isn’t it? I was driven to Dinny by my loneliness. I’m driven away from her by it. Well, goodbye, sir; I don’t suppose I shall ever see you again. And thanks for trying to help me.”

“I wish to God I could.”

Wilfrid smiled the sudden smile that gave him his charm.

“I’ll try what one more walk will do. I may see some writing on the wall. Anyway, you’ll know I didn’t want to hurt her more than I could help. Good-bye!”

Adrian’s tea was cold and his bun uneaten. He pushed them away. He felt as if he had failed Dinny, and yet for the life of him could not see what he could have done. That young man looked very queer! ‘Bleeding to death inside!’ Gruesome phrase! And true, judging by his face! Fibre sensitive as his, and a consuming pride! “Going back into the blue.” To roam about in the East — a sort of Wandering Jew; become one of those mysterious Englishmen found in out-of-the-way places, with no origins that they would speak of, and no future but their present. He filled a pipe and tried his best to feel that, after all, in the long run Dinny would be happier unmarried to him. And he did not succeed. There was only one flowering of real love in a woman’s life, and this was hers. He had no doubt on that point. She would make shift — oh! yes; but she would have missed ‘the singing and the gold.’ And, grabbing his battered hat, he went out. He strode along in the direction of Hyde Park; then, yielding to a whim, diverged towards Mount Street.

When Blore announced him his sister was putting the last red stitches in the tongue of one of the dogs in her French tapestry. She held it up.

“It ought to drip. He’s looking at that bunny. Would blue drips be right?”

“Grey, Em, on that background.”

Lady Mont considered her brother sitting in a small chair with his long legs hunched up.

"You look like a war correspondent — camp stools, and no time to shave. I do want Dinny to be married, Adrian. She's twenty-six. All that about bein' yellow. They could go to Corsica."

Adrian smiled. Em was so right, and yet so wrong!

"Con was here today," resumed his sister, "he'd been seein' Michael. Nobody knows anythin'. And Dinny just goes walks with Kit and Dandy, Fleur says, and nurses Catherine, and sits readin' books without turnin' the page."

Adrian debated whether to tell her of Desert's visit to him.

"And Con says," went on Lady Mont, "that he can't make two ends meet this year — Clare's weddin' and the Budget, and Jean expectin'— he'll have to cut down some trees, and sell the horses. We're hard up, too. It's lucky Fleur's got so much. Money is such a bore. What do you think?"

Adrian gave a start.

"Well, no one expects a good thing nowadays, but one wants enough to live on."

"It's havin' dependants. Boswell's got a sister that can only walk with one leg; and Johnson's wife's got cancer — poor thing! And everybody's got somebody or somethin'. Dinny says at Condaford her mother does everythin' in the village. So how it's to go on, I don't know. Lawrence doesn't save a penny."

"We're falling between two stools, Em; and one fine day we shall reach the floor with a bump."

"I suppose we shall live in almshouses." And Lady Mont lifted her work up to the light. "No, I shan't make it drip. Or else go to Kenya; they say there's somethin' that pays there."

"What I hate," said Adrian with sudden energy, "is the thought of Mr. Tom Noddy or somebody buying Condaford and using it for week-end cocktail parties."

"I should go and be a Banshee in the woods. There couldn't be Condaford without Cherrells."

"There dashed well could, Em. There's a confounded process called evolution; and England is its home."

Lady Mont sighed, and, getting up, swayed over to her parakeet.

"Polly! You and I will go and live in an almshouse."

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CHAPTER 34

When Compson Grice telephoned to Michael, or rather to Fleur, for Michael was not in, he sounded embarrassed.

"Is there any message I can give him, Mr. Grice?"

"Your husband asked me to find out Desert's movements. Well, Desert's just been in to see me, and practically said he was off again; but — er — I didn't like his looks, and his hand was like a man's in fever."

"He's been having malaria."

"Oh! Ah! By the way, I'm sending you a book I'm sure you'll like; it's by that French Canadian."

"Thank you, very much. I'll tell Michael when he comes in."

And Fleur stood thinking. Ought she to pass this on to Dinny? Without consulting Michael she did not like to, and he, tied tightly to the House just now, might not even be in to dinner. How like Wilfrid to keep one on tenterhooks! She always felt that she knew him better than either Dinny or Michael. They were convinced of a vein of pure gold in him. She, for whom he had once had such a pressing passion, could only assess that vein at nine carat. 'That, I suppose,' she thought, rather bitterly, 'is because my nature is lower than theirs.' People assessed others according to their own natures, didn't they? Still, it was difficult to give high value to one whose mistress she had not become, and who had then fled into the blue. There was always extravagance in Michael's likings; in Dinny — well, Dinny she did not really understand.

And so she went back to the letters she was writing. They were important, for she was rallying the best and brightest people to meet some high-caste Indian ladies who were over for the Conference. She had nearly finished when she was called to the telephone by Michael, asking if there were any message from Compson Grice. Having given him what news there was, she went on:

"Are you coming in to dinner? . . . Good! I dread dining alone with Dinny; she's so marvellously cheerful, it gives me the creeps. Not worry other people and all that, of course; but if she showed her feelings more it would worry us less . . . Uncle Con! . . . That's rather funny, the whole family seems to want now the exact opposite of what they wanted at first. I suppose it's the result of watching her suffer . . . Yes, she went in the car to sail Kit's boat on the Round Pond; they sent Dandy and the boat back in the car, and are walking home . . . All right dear boy. Eight o'clock; don't be late if you can help it . . . Oh! here ARE Kit and Dinny. Good-bye!"

Kit had come into the room. His face was brown, his eyes blue, his sweater the same colour as his eyes, his shorts darker blue; his green stockings were gartered below his bare knees, and his brown shoes had brogues; he wore no cap on his bright head.

"Auntie Dinny has gone to lie down. She had to sit on the grass. She says she'll be all right soon. D'you think she's going to have measles? I've had them, Mummy, so when she's isulated I can still see her. We saw a man who frightened her."

"What sort of man?"

"He didn't come near; a tall sort of man; he had his hat in his hand, and when he saw us, he almost ran."

"How do you know he saw you?"

"Oh! he went like that, and scooted."

"Was that in the Park?"

"Yes."

"Which?"

"The Green Park."

"Was he thin, and dark in the face?"

"Yes; do you know him too?"

"Why 'too,' Kit? Did Auntie Dinny know him?"

"*I* think so; she said: 'Oh!' like that, and put her hand here. And then she looked after him; and then she sat down on the grass. I fanned her with her scarf. I love Auntie Dinny. Has she a husband?"

"No."

When he had gone up, Fleur debated. Dinny must have realised that Kit would describe everything. She decided only to send up a message and some sal volatile.

The answer came back: "I shall be all right by dinner."

But at dinner-time a further message came to say she still felt rather faint: might she just go to bed and have a long night?

Thus it was that Michael and Fleur sat down alone.

"It was Wilfrid, of course."

Michael nodded.

"I wish to God he'd go. It's so wretched — the whole thing! D'you remember that passage in Turgenev, where Litvinov watches the train smoke curling away over the fields?"

"No. Why?"

"All Dinny's tissue going up in smoke."

"Yes," said Fleur between tight lips. "But the fire will burn out."

"And leave —?"

"Oh! She'll be recognisable."

Michael looked hard at the partner of his board. She was regarding the morsel of fish on her fork. With a little set smile on her lips she raised it to her mouth and began champing, as if chewing the cud of experience. Recognisable! Yes, SHE was as pretty as ever, though more firmly moulded, as if in tune with the revival of shape. He turned his eyes away, for he still squirmed when he thought of that business four years ago, of which he had known so little, suspected so much, and talked not at all. Smoke! Did all human passion burn away and drift in a blue film over the fields, obscure for a moment the sight of the sun and the shapes of the crops and the trees, then fade into air and leave the clear hard day; and no difference anywhere? Not quite! For smoke was burnt tissue, and where fire had raged there was alteration. Of the Dinny he had known from a small child up, the outline would be changed — hardened, sharpened, refined, withered? And he said:

"I must be back at the House by nine, the Chancellor's speaking. Why one should listen to him, I don't know, but one does."

"Why you should listen to anyone will always be a mystery. Did you ever know any speaker in the House change anyone's opinions?"

"No," said Michael with a wry smile, "but one lives in hopes. We sit day after day talking of some blessed measure, and then take a vote, with the same result as if we'd taken it at the end of the first two speeches. And that's gone on for hundreds of years."

"So filial!" said Fleur. "Kit thinks Dinny is going to have measles. He's asking, too, if she has a husband . . . Coaker, bring the coffee, please. Mr. Mont has to go."

When he had kissed her and gone, Fleur went up to the nurseries. Catherine was the soundest of sleepers, and it was pleasant to watch her, a pretty child with hair that would probably be like her own and eyes so hesitating between grey and hazel that they gave promise of becoming ice-green. One small hand was crumpled against her cheek, and she breathed lightly as a flower. Nodding to the nurse, Fleur pushed open the door into the other nursery. To wake Kit was dangerous. He would demand biscuits, and, very likely, milk, want light conversation, and ask her to read to him. But in spite of the door's faint creaking he did not wake. His bright head was thrust determinedly into the pillow from under which the butt of a pistol protruded. It was hot, and he had thrown back the clothes, so that, by the glimmer of the night-light his blue-pyjama'd figure was disclosed to the knees. His skin was brown and healthy, and he had a Forsyte's chin. Fleur moved up and stood quite close. He looked 'such a duck,' thus determinedly asleep in face of the opposition put up by his quickening imagination. With feathered finger-tips she gripped the sheet, pulled it up, and gingerly let it down over him; then stood back with her hands on her hips, and one eyebrow raised. He was at the best age in life, and would be for another two years until he went to school. No sex to bother him as yet! Everybody kind to him; everything an adventure out of books. Books! Michael's old books, her own, the few written since fit for children. He was at the wonderful age! She looked swiftly round the twilit room. His gun and sword lay ready on a chair! One supported disarmament, and armed children to the teeth! His other toys, mostly mechanised, would be in the schoolroom. No; there on the window-sill was the boat he had sailed with Dinny, its sails still set; and there on a cushion in the corner was ‘the silver dog,’ aware of her but too lazy to get up. She could see the slim feather of his tail cocked and waving gently at her. And, afraid lest she might disturb this admirable peace, she blew a kiss to both of them and stole back through the door. Nodding again to the nurse, she inspected Catherine’s eyelashes and went out. Down the stairs she tip-toed to the floor on which was Dinny’s room, above her own. Was it unfeeling not to look in and ask if there were anything she wanted? She moved closer to the door. Only half-past nine! She could not be asleep. Probably she would not sleep at all. It was hateful to think of her lying there silent and unhappy. Perhaps to talk would be a comfort, would take her mind off! She was raising her hand to knock when a sound came forth, smothered, yet unmistakable — the gasping sobs of one crying into her pillow. Fleur stood as if turned to stone. A noise she had not heard since she herself had made it nearly four years ago! It turned her sick with the force of memory — a horrible, but a sacred sound. Not for worlds would she go in! She covered her ears, drew back, and fled downstairs. For further protection from that searing sound she turned on the portable wireless. It gave forth from the second act of Madame Butterfly. She turned it off and sat down again at her bureau. She wrote rapidly a kind of formula: “Such a pleasure if, etc. — meet those very charming Indian ladies who, etc. — Yours, etc., Fleur Mont.” Over and over and over, and the sound of that sobbing in her ears! It was stuffy to-night! She drew the curtains aside and threw the window wider to let in what air there was. A hostile thing, life, full of silent menace and small annoyances. If you went towards and grasped life with both hands, it yielded, perhaps, then drew back to deal some ugly stroke. Half-past ten! What were they jabbering about now in Parliament? Some twopenny-ha’penny tax! She closed the window and drew the curtains again, stamped her letters, and stood looking round the room before turning out and going up. And, suddenly, came a memory — of Wilfrid’s face outside close to the glass of the window, on the night he fled from her to the East. If it were there now; if, for a second time in his strange life, he came like a disembodied spirit to that window, seeking now not her but Dinny? She switched off the light and groped her way to the window, cautiously drew the curtains apart a very little, and peered out. Nothing but the last of the artificially delayed daylight! Impatiently she dropped the curtain and went upstairs. Standing before her long mirror, she listened a moment, and then carefully did not. How like life, that! One shut eyes and ears to all that was painful — if one could. And who could blame one? Plenty, to which one could shut neither eyes nor ears, seeped-in even through closed lids and cotton-wool. She was just getting into bed when Michael came. She told him of the sobbing, and he in turn stood listening; but nothing penetrated the room’s solid roofing. He went into his dressing-room and came back presently in a dressing-gown she had given him, blue, with embroidered cuffs and collar, and began to walk up and down.

“Come to bed,” said Fleur; “you can’t help by doing that.”

They talked a little in bed. It was Michael who fell asleep. Fleur lay wakeful. Big Ben struck twelve. The town murmured on, but the house was very still. A little crack now and then, as though some board were settling down after the day’s pressure of feet; the snuffle, not loud, of Michael’s breathing — such, and the whispering, as it were, of her own thoughts, were its only noises. From the room above not a sound. She began to think of where they should go in the long vacation. Scotland had been spoken of, and Cornwall; she herself wanted the Riviera for a month at least. To come back brown all over; she had never been properly sun-browned yet! With Mademoiselle and Nanny the children would be safe! What was that? A door closing. Surely the creaking of stairs! She touched Michael.

“Yes?”

“Listen!”

Again that faint creaking.

“It began above,” whispered Fleur; “I think you ought to see.”

He got out of bed, put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and, opening the door quietly, looked out. Nothing on the landing, but the sound of someone moving in the hall! He slipped down the stairs.

There was a dim figure by the front door, and he said gently:

“Is that you, Dinny?”

“Yes.”

Michael moved forward. Her figure left the door, and he came on her sitting on the coat ‘sarcophagus.’ He could just see that her hand was raised, holding a scarf over her head and face.

“Is there anything I can get you?”

“No. I wanted some air.”

Michael checked his impulse to turn the light up. He moved forward, and in the darkness stroked her arm.

“I didn’t think you’d hear,” she said. “I’m sorry.”

Dared he speak of her trouble? Would she hate him for it or be grateful?

“My dear,” he said, “anything that’ll do you good.”

“It’s silly. I’ll go up again.”

Michael put his arm round her; he could feel that she was fully dressed. After a moment she relaxed against him, still holding the scarf so that it veiled her face and head. He rocked her gently — the least little movement side to side. Her body slipped till her head rested against his shoulder. Michael ceased to rock, ceased almost to breathe. As long as she would, let her rest there!

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Chapter 35

When Wilfrid left Adrian's room at the Museum, he had no plan or direction in his mind, and walked along like a man in one of those dreams where the theme is repeated over and over, and the only end is awakening. He went down the Kingsway to the Embankment, came to Westminster Bridge, turned on to it, and stood leaning over the parapet. A jump, and he would be out of it! The tide was running down — English water escaping to the seas, nevermore to come back, glad to go! Escape! Escape from all those who made him think of himself. To be rid of this perpetual self-questioning and self-consciousness! To end this damned mawkish indecision, this puling concern as to whether one would hurt her too much! But of course one would not hurt her too much! She would cry and get over it. Sentiment had betrayed him once! Not again! By God! Not again!

He stood there a long time, leaning on the parapet, watching the bright water and the craft creeping by; and every now and then a passing Cockney would stand beside him, as if convinced that he was looking out at something of sensational interest. And he was! He was seeing his own life finally 'in the blue,' unmoored, careering like the Flying Dutchman on far waters to the far ends of the world. But at least without need for bravado, kowtowing, appeal, or pretence, under his own flag, and that not at half-mast.

"I've 'eard," said a voice, "that lookin' at the water long enough will make 'em jump sometimes."

Wilfrid shuddered and walked away. God! How raw and jagged one had got! He walked off the bridge past the end of Whitehall into St. James's Park, skirted the long water up to the geraniums and the large stone males, females, and fruits in front of the Palace, passed into the Green Park, and threw himself down on the dry grass. He lay there perhaps an hour on his back with his hand over his eyes, grateful for the sun soaking into him. When he got up he felt dizzy, and had to stand some minutes to get his balance before moving towards Hyde Park Corner. He had gone but a little way when he started and swerved off to the right. Coming towards him, nearer the riding track, were a young woman and a little boy. Dinny! He had seen her gasp, her hand go to her heart. And he had swerved and walked away. It was brutal, horrible, but it was final. So a man, who had thrust a dagger home, would feel. Brutal, horrible, but final! No more indecision! Nothing now but to get away as quick as ever he could! He turned towards his rooms, striding along as if possessed, his lips drawn back in such a smile as a man has in a dentist's chair. He had stricken down the only woman who had ever seemed to him worth marrying, the only woman for whom he had felt what was worthy to be called real love. Well! Better strike her down like that than kill her by living with her! He was as Esau, and as Ishmael, not fit for a daughter of Israel. And a messenger boy turned and stared after him — the pace at which he walked was so foreign to the youth's habitual feelings. He crossed Piccadilly with no concern whatever for its traffic, and plunged into the narrow mouth of Bond Street. It suddenly struck him that he would never see Scott's hats again. The shop had just been shut, but those hats rested in rows, super-conventional hats, tropical hats, ladies' hats, and specimens of the newest Trilby or Homburg, or whatever they called it now. He strode on, rounded the scent of Atkinson's, and came to his own door. There he had to sit down at the foot of the stairs before he could find strength to climb. The spasmodic energy which had followed the shock of seeing her had ebbed out in utter lassitude. He was just beginning to mount when Stack and the dog came down. Foch rushed at his legs and stood against him, reaching his head up. Wilfrid crumpled his ears. To leave him once more without a master!

"I'm off early tomorrow morning, Stack. To Siam. I probably shan't be coming back."

"Not at all, sir?"

"Not at all."

"Would you like me to come too, sir?"

Wilfrid put his hand on the henchman's shoulder.

"Jolly good of you, Stack; but you'd be bored to death."

"Excuse me, sir, but you're hardly fit to travel alone at present."

"Perhaps not, but I'm going to."

The henchman bent his eyes on Wilfrid's face. It was a grave intent gaze, as if he were committing that face finally to heart.

"I've been with you a long time, sir."

“You have, Stack; and nobody could have been nicer to me. I’ve made provision in case anything happens to me. You’d prefer to go on here, I expect, keeping the rooms for when my father wants them.”

“I should be sorry to leave here, if I can’t come with you. Are you sure about that, sir?”

Wilfrid nodded. “Quite sure, Stack. What about Foch?”

Stack hesitated, then said with a rush: “I think I ought to tell you, sir, that when Miss Cherrell was here last — the night you went off to Epping — she said that if you was to go away at any time, she would be glad to have the dog. He’s fond of her, sir.”

Wilfrid’s face became a mask.

“Take him his run,” he said, and went on up the stairs.

His mind was once again in turmoil. Murder! But it was done! One did not bring a corpse to life with longing or remorse. The dog, if she wanted him, was hers, of course! Why did women cling to memories, when all they should wish should be to forget? He sat down at his bureau and wrote:

“I am going away for good. Foch comes to you with this. He is yours if you care to have him. I am only fit to be alone. Forgive me if you can, and forget me. — WILFRID.”

He addressed it, and sat on at the bureau slowly turning his head and looking round the room. Under three months since the day he had come back. He felt as if he had lived a lifetime. Dinny over there at the hearth, after her father had been! Dinny on the divan looking up at him! Dinny here, Dinny there!

Her smile, her eyes, her hair! Dinny, and that memory in the Arab tent, pulling at each other, wrestling for him. Why had he not seen the end from the beginning? He might have known himself! He took a sheet of paper and wrote:

“MY DEAR FATHER —

“England doesn’t seem to agree with me, and I am starting tomorrow for Siam. My bank will have my address from time to time. Stack will keep things going here as usual, so that the rooms will be ready whenever you want them. I hope you’ll take care of yourself. I’ll try and send you a coin for your collection now and then. Good-bye.

“Yours affectionately,

“WILFRID.”

His father would read it and say: “Dear me! Very sudden! Queer fellow!” And that was about all that anyone would think or say — except —!

He took another sheet of paper and wrote to his bank; then lay down, exhausted, on the divan.

Stack must pack, he hadn’t the strength. Luckily his passport was in order — that curious document which rendered one independent of one’s kind; that password to whatever loneliness one wanted. The room was very still, for at this hour of lull before dinner traffic began there was hardly any noise from the streets. The stuff which he took after attacks of malaria had opium in it, and a dreamy feeling came over him. He drew a long breath and relaxed. To his half-drugged senses scents kept coming — the scent of camels’ dung, of coffee roasting, carpets, spices, and humanity in the Suks, the sharp unscented air of the desert, and the foetid reek of some river village; and sounds — the whine of beggars, a camel’s coughing grunts, the cry of the jackal, Muezzin call, padding of donkeys’ feet, tapping of the silversmiths, the creaking and moaning of water being drawn. And before his half-closed eyes visions came floating; a sort of long dream-picture of the East as he had known it. Now it would be another East, further and more strange! . . . He slipped into a real dream . . . .

❦

Chapter 36

Seeing him turn away from her in the Green Park, Dinny had known for certain it was all over. The sight of his ravaged face had moved her to the depths. If only he could be happy again she could put up with it. For since the evening he left her in his rooms she had been steeling herself, never really believing in anything but this. After those moments with Michael in the dark hall she slept a little and had her coffee upstairs. A message was brought her about ten o'clock that a man with a dog was waiting to see her.

She finished dressing quickly, put on her hat, and went down.

It could only be Stack.

The henchman was standing beside the 'sarcophagus,' holding Foch on a lead. His face, full of understanding as ever, was lined and pale, as if he had been up all night.

"Mr. Desert sent this, miss." He held out a note.

Dinny opened the door of the drawing-room.

"Come in here, please, Stack. Let's sit down."

He sat down and let go of the lead. The dog went to her and put his nose on her knee. Dinny read the note.

"Mr. Desert says that I may have Foch."

Stack bent his gaze on his boots. "He's gone, miss. Went by the early service to Paris and Marseilles."

She could see moisture in the folds of his cheeks. He gave a loud sniff, and angrily brushed his hand over his face.

"I've been with him fourteen years, miss. It was bound to hit me. He talks of not coming back."

"Where has he gone?"

"Siam."

"A long way," said Dinny with a smile. "The great thing is that he should be happy again."

"That is so, miss. I don't know if you'd care to hear about the dog's food. He has a dry biscuit about nine, and shin of beef or sheep's head, cooked, with crumbled hound-meal, between six and seven, and nothing else. A good quiet dog, he is, perfect gentleman in the house. He'll sleep in your bedroom if you like."

"Do you stay where you are, Stack?"

"Yes, miss. The rooms are his lordship's. As I told you, Mr. Desert is sudden; but I think he means what he says. He never was happy in England."

"I'm sure he means what he says. Is there anything I can do for you, Stack?"

The henchman shook his head, his eyes rested on Dinny's face, and she knew he was debating whether he dared offer sympathy. She stood up.

"I think I'll take Foch a walk and get him used to me."

"Yes, miss. I don't let him off the lead except in the parks. If there's anything you want to know about him any time, you have the number."

Dinny put out her hand.

"Well, good-bye, Stack, and best wishes."

"The same to you, miss, I'm sure." His eyes had what was more than understanding in them, and the grip of his hand had a spasmodic strength. Dinny continued to smile till he was gone and the door closed, then sat down on the sofa with her hands over her eyes. The dog, who had followed Stack to the door, whined once, and came back to her. She uncovered her eyes, took Wilfrid's note from her lap, and tore it up.

"Well, Foch," she said, "what shall we do? Nice walk?"

The tail moved; he again whined slightly.

"Come along, then, boy."

She felt steady, but as if a spring had broken. With the dog on the lead she walked towards Victoria Station, and stopped before the statue. The leaves had thickened round it, and that was all the change. Man and horse, remote, active, and contained — ‘workmanlike’! A long time she stood there, her face raised, dry-eyed, thin and drawn; and the dog sat patiently beside her.

Then, with a shrug, she turned away and led him rapidly towards the Park. When she had walked some time, she went to Mount Street and asked for Sir Lawrence. He was in his study.

“Well, my dear,” he said, “that looks a nice dog; is he yours?”

“Yes. Uncle Lawrence, will you do something for me?”

“Surely.”

“Wilfrid has gone. He went this morning. He is not coming back. Would you be so very kind as to let my people know, and Michael, and Aunt Em, and Uncle Adrian. I don’t want ever to have to speak of it.”

Sir Lawrence inclined his head, took her hand and put it to his lips. “There was something I wanted to show you, Dinny.” He took from his table a little statuette of Voltaire. “I picked that up two days ago. Isn’t he a delightful old cynic? Why the French should be so much pleasanter as cynics than other people is mysterious, except, of course, that cynicism, to be tolerable, must have grace and wit; apart from those, it’s just bad manners. An English cynic is a man with a general grievance. A German cynic is a sort of wild boar. A Scandinavian cynic is a pestilence. An American jumps around too much to make a cynic, and a Russian’s state of mind is not constant enough. You might get a perfectly good cynic in Austria, perhaps, or northern China — possibly it’s a question of latitude.”

Dinny smiled.

“Give my love to Aunt Em, please. I’m going home this afternoon.”

“God bless you, my dear,” said Sir Lawrence. “Come here, or to Lippinghall, whenever you want; we love having you.” And he kissed her forehead.

When she had gone, he went to the telephone, and then sought his wife.

“Em, poor Dinny has just been here. She looks like a smiling ghost. It’s all over. Desert went off for good this morning. She doesn’t want ever to speak of it. Can you remember that?”

Lady Mont, who was arranging some flowers in a Chinese ginger jar, dropped them and turned round.

“Oh! dear!” she said. “Kiss me, Lawrence!”

They stood for a moment embraced. Poor Em! Her heart was soft as butter! She said into his shoulder: “Your collar’s all covered with hairs. You WILL brush your hair after you’ve put your coat on. Turn! I’ll pick them off.”

Sir Lawrence turned.

“I’ve telephoned to Condaford and Michael and Adrian. Remember, Em! The thing is as if it never was.”

“Of course I shall remember. Why did she come to you?”

Sir Lawrence shrugged. “She’s got a new dog, a black spaniel.”

“Very faithful, but they get fat. There! Did they say anything on the telephone?”

“Only: ‘Oh!’ and ‘I see,’ and ‘Of course.’”

“Lawrence, I want to cry; come back presently and take me somewhere.”

Sir Lawrence patted her shoulders and went out quickly. He, too, felt peculiar. Back in his study, he sat in thought. Desert’s flight was the only possible solution! Of all those affected by this incident, he had the clearest and most just insight into Wilfrid. True, probably, that the fellow had a vein of gold in him which his general nature did its best to hide! But to live with? Not on your life! Yellow? Of course he wasn’t that! The thing was not plain-sailing, as Jack Muskham and the pukka sahibs supposed, with their superstition that black was not white, and so on. No, no! Young Desert had been snared in a most peculiar way. Given his perverse nature, its revolts, humanitarianism, and want of belief, given his way of hob-nobbing with the Arabs, his case was as different from that of the ordinary Englishman as chalk from cheese. But, whatever his case, he was not a man to live with! Poor Dinny was well out of that! What pranks Fate played! Why should her choice have fallen there? If you came to that, why anything where love was concerned? It knew no laws, not even those of common sense. Some element in her had flown straight to its kindred element in him, disregarding all that was not kindred, and all outside circumstance. She might never get again the chance of that particular ‘nick,’ as Jack Muskham would call it. But — good Gad! — marriage was a lifelong business; yes, even in these days, no passing joke! For marriage you wanted all the luck and all the give and take that you could get. Not much give and take about Desert — restless, disharmonic, and a poet! And proud — with that inner self-depreciative pride which never let up on a man! A liaison, one of those leaping companionships young people went in for now — possibly; but that didn't fit Dinny; even Desert must have felt so. In her the physical without the spiritual seemed out of place. Ah! Well! Another long heartache in the world — poor Dinny.

'Where,' he thought, 'can I take Em at this time in the morning? The Zoo she doesn't like; I'm sick of the Wallace. Madame Tussaud's! Gaiety will break through. Madame Tussaud's!'

❦

Chapter 37

At Condaford Jean went straight from the telephone to find her mother-inlaw, and repeated Sir Lawrence's words with her usual decision. The gentle rather timid expression on Lady Cherrell's face changed to a startled concern.

"Oh!"

"Shall I tell the General?"

"Please, dear."

Alone again with her accounts, Lady Cherrell sat thinking. The only one of the family, except Hubert, who had never seen Wilfrid Desert, she had tried to keep an open mind, and had no definite opposition on her conscience. She felt now only a troubled sympathy. What could one do? And, as is customary in the case of another's bereavement, she could only think of flowers.

She slipped out into the garden and went to the rose beds, which, flanked by tall yew hedges, clustered round the old sundial. She plucked a basket full of the best blossoms, took them up to Dinny's narrow and conventual bedroom, and disposed them in bowls by the bedside and on the window-sill. Then, opening the door and mullioned window wide, she rang for the room to be dusted and the bed made. The Medici prints on the walls she carefully set exactly straight, and said:

"I've dusted the pictures, Annie. Keep the window and door open. I want it all to smell sweet. Can you do the room now?"

"Yes, m'lady."

"Then I think you'd better, I don't know what time Miss Dinny will be here."

Back with her accounts, she could not settle to them, and, pushing them into a drawer, went to find her husband. He, too, was seated before bills and papers without sign of animation. She went up to him and pressed his head against her.

"Jean's told you, Con?"

"Yes. It's the only thing, of course; but I hate Dinny to be sad."

They were silent till Lady Cherrell said:

"I'd tell Dinny about our being so hard up. It would take her mind off."

The General ruffled his hair. "I shall be three hundred down on the year. I might get a couple of hundred for the horses, the rest must come out of trees. I don't know which I dislike more. Do you think she could suggest something?"

"No, but she would worry, and that would prevent her troubling so much over the other thing."

"I see. Well, Jean or you tell her, then. I don't like to. It looks like hinting that I want to reduce her allowance. It's a pittance as it is. Make it plain there's no question of that. Travel would have been the thing for her, but where's the money to come from?"

Lady Cherrell did not know, and the conversation lapsed.

Into that old house, which for so many centuries human hopes, fears, births, deaths, and all the medley of everyday emotions had stamped with a look of wary age, had come an uneasiness which showed in every word and action, even of the maids. What attitude to adopt? How to show sympathy, and yet not show it? How to welcome, and yet make it clear that welcome did not carry rejoicing? Even Jean was infected. She brushed and combed the dogs, and insisted on taking the car to meet every afternoon train.

Dinny came by the third. Leading Foch, she stepped out of the carriage almost into Jean's arms.

"Hallo, my dear," said Jean, "here you are! New dog?"

"Yes; a darling."

"What have you got?"

"Only these things. It's no use looking for a porter, they're always trundling bicycles."

"I'll get them out."

"Indeed you won't! Hold Foch."

When, carrying her suitcase and dressing-bag, she reached the car, Dinny said:

"Would you mind if I walk up by the fields, Jean? It's good for Foch; and the train was stuffy; I should like a sniff of the hay."

"Yes, there's some down still. I'll take these along, and have fresh tea ready."

She left Dinny standing with a smile on her face. And all the way to the Grange she thought of that smile and swore under her breath . . . .

Entering the field path, Dinny let Foch off his lead. By the way he rushed to the hedgerow, she realised how he had missed all this. A country dog! For a moment his busy joy took up her attention; then the sore and bitter aching came back again. She called him and walked on. In the first of their own fields the hay was still lying out, and she flung herself down. When she once got home she must watch every word and look, must smile and smile, and show nothing! She wanted desperately these few minutes of abandonment. She didn't cry, but pressed herself against the hay-covered earth, and the sun burned her neck. She turned on her back and gazed up at the blue. She framed no thoughts, dissolved in aching for what was lost and could never be found now. And the hum of summer beat drowsily above her from the wings of insects drunk on heat and honey. She crossed her arms on her chest to compress the pain within her. If she could die, there, now, in full summer with its hum and the singing of the larks; die and ache no more! So she lay motionless, until the dog came and licked her cheek. And, ashamed, she got up and stood brushing the hay-seeds and stalks from her dress and stockings.

Past old Kismet in the next field she came to the thread of stream and crossed it into the disenchanted orchard, smelling of nettles and old trees; then on, to the garden and the flagstones of the terrace. One magnolia flower was out, but she dared not stop and sniff, lest its lemon-honey scent should upset her again; and, coming to the French window, she looked in.

Her mother was sitting with the look on her face that Dinny called 'waiting for Father.' Her father was standing with the look on his face that she called 'waiting for Mother.' Jean seemed expecting her cub to come round the corner.

'And I'm the cub,' thought Dinny, and stepped over the threshold, saying:

"Well, Mother darling, can I have some tea? . . ."

That evening, after good-night had been said, she came down again and went to her father's study. He was at his bureau, poring, with a pencil, over something he had written. She stole up, and read over his shoulder:

"Hunters for sale: Bay gelding, fifteen three, rising ten, sound, good-looking, plenty of bone, fine jumper. Mare: blue roan: fifteen one, rising nine, very clever, carries lady, show jumper, sound wind and limb. Apply Owner, Condaford Grange, Oxon."

"H'm!" he muttered, and crossed out the 'wind and limb.'

Dinny reached down and took the paper.

The General started and looked round.

"No," she said. And tore the sheet.

"Here! You mustn't do that. It took me —"

"No, Dad, you can't sell the horses, you'd be lost."

"But I MUST sell the horses, Dinny."

"I know. Mother told me. But it isn't necessary. I happen to have quite a lot." She put the notes she had been carrying about so long on his bureau.

The General got up.

"Impossible!" he said. "Very good of you, Dinny, but quite impossible!"

"You mustn't refuse me, Dad. Let me do something for Condaford. I've no use for it, and it happens to be just the three hundred Mother says you want."

"No use for it? Nonsense, my dear! Why! With that you could have a good long travel."

"I don't want a good long travel. I want to stay at home and help you both."

The General looked hard into her face.

"I should be ashamed to take it," he said. "It's my own fault that I've got behind."

"Dad! You never spend anything on yourself."

"Well, I don't know how it is — one little thing and another, it piles up."

"You and I will go into it. There must be things we could do without."

"The worst is having no capital. Something comes along and I have to meet it out of income; insurance is heavy, and with rates and taxes always going up, income gets smaller all the time."

"I know; it must be awful. Couldn't one breed something?"

"Costs money to start. Of course we could do perfectly well in London or Cheltenham, or abroad. It's keeping the place up, and the people dependent on it."

"Leave Condaford! Oh! no! Besides, who would take it? In spite of all you've done, we're not up to date, Dad."

"We're certainly not."

"We could never put 'this desirable residence' without blushing. People won't pay for other people's ancestors."

The General stared before him.

"I do frankly wish, Dinny, the thing wasn't such a trust. I hate bothering about money, screwing here and screwing there, and always having to look forward to see if you can make do. But, as you say, to sell's unthinkable. And who'd rent it? It wouldn't make a boys' school, or a country club, or an asylum. Those seem the only fates before country houses nowadays. Your Uncle Lionel's the only one of us who's got any money — I wonder if he'd like to take it on for his week-ends."

"No, Dad! No! Let's stick to it. I'm sure we can do it, somehow. Let me do the screwing and that. In the meantime you MUST take this. Then we shall start fair."

"Dinny, I—"

"To please me, dear."

The General drew her to him.

"That business of yours," he muttered into her hair. "My God, I wish —!"

She shook her head.

"I'm going out for a few minutes now, just to wander round. It's so nice and warm."

And, winding a scarf round her neck, she was gone through the opened window.

The last dregs of the long daylight had drained down beyond the rim, but warmth abode, for no air stirred, and no dew fell — a still, dry, dark night, with swarming stars. From the moment she stepped out Dinny was lost in it. But the old house shrouded in its creepers lived for her eyes, a dim presence with four still-lighted windows. She stood under an elm tree leaning against its trunk, with her arms stretched back and her hands clasping it behind her. Night was a friend — no eye to see, no ear to listen. She stared into it, unmoving, drawing comfort from the solidity and breadth behind her. Moths flew by, almost touching her face. Insentient nature, warm, incurious, busy even in the darkness. Millions of little creatures burrowed and asleep, hundreds floating or creeping about, billions of blades of grass and flowers straightening up ever so slowly in the comparative coolness of the night. Nature! Pitiless and indifferent even to the only creatures who crowned and petted her with pretty words! Threads broke and hearts broke, or whatever really happened to the silly things — Nature twitched no lip, heaved no sigh! One twitch of Nature's lip would have been more to her than all human sympathy. If, as in the 'Birth of Venus,' breezes could puff at her, waves like doves lap to her feet, bees fly round her seeking honey! If for one moment in this darkness she could feel at one with the starshine, the smell of earth, the twitter of that bat, the touch of a moth's wing on her nose!

With her chin tilted up and all her body taut against the tree trunk she stood, breathless from the darkness and the silence and the stars. Ears of a weasel, nose of a fox to hear and scent out what was stirring! In the tree above her head a bird chirped once. The drone of the last train, still far away, began, swelled, resolved itself into the sound of wheels and the sound of steam, stopped, then began again and faded out in a far drumming. All hushed once more! Where she stood the moat had been, filled in so long that this great elm tree had grown. Slow, the lives of trees, and one long fight with the winds; slow and tenacious like the life of her family clinging to this spot.

'I WILL not think of him,' she thought, 'I WILL not think of him!' As a child that refuses to remember what has hurt it, so would she be! And, instantly, his face formed in the darkness — his eyes and his lips. She turned round to the trunk and leaned her forehead on its roughness. But his face came between. Recoiling, she walked away over the grass swiftly and without noise, invisible as a spirit. Up and down she walked, and the wheeling soothed her.

‘Well,’ she thought, ‘I have had my hour. It can’t be helped. I must go in.’

She stood for a moment looking up at the stars, so far, so many, bright and cold. And with a faint smile she thought:

‘I wonder which is my lucky star!’

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ONE MORE - OVER THE RIVER

Chapter 1

Clare, who for seventeen months had been the wife of Sir Gerald Corven of the Colonial Service, stood on the boat deck of an Orient liner in the River Thames, waiting for it to dock. It was ten o'clock of a mild day in October, but she wore a thick tweed coat, for the voyage had been hot. She looked pale — indeed, a little sallow — but her clear brown eyes were fixed eagerly on the land and her slightly touched-up lips were parted, so that her face had the vividness to which it was accustomed. She stood alone, until a voice said:

"Oh! HERE you are!" and a young man, appearing from behind a boat, stood beside her. Without turning, she said:

"Absolutely perfect day! It ought to be lovely at home."

"I thought you'd be staying in Town for a night at least; and we could have had a dinner and theatre. Won't you?"

"My dear young man, I shall be met."

"Perfectly damnable, things coming to an end!"

"Often more damnable, things beginning."

He gave her a long look, and said suddenly:

"Clare, you realise, of course, that I love you?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"But you don't love me?"

"Wholly without prejudice."

"I wish — I wish you could catch fire for a moment."

"I am a respectable married woman, Tony."

"Coming back to England because —"

"Of the climate of Ceylon."

He kicked at the rail. "Just as it's getting perfect. I've not said anything, but I know that your — that Corven —"

Clare lifted her eyebrows, and he was silent; then both looked at the shore, becoming momentarily more and more a consideration.

When two young people have been nearly three weeks together on board a ship, they do not know each other half so well as they think they do. In the abiding inanity of a life when everything has stopped except the engines, the water slipping along the ship's sides, and the curving of the sun in the sky, their daily chair-to-chair intimacy gathers a queer momentum and a sort of lazy warmth. They know that they are getting talked about, and do not care. After all, they cannot get off the ship, and there is nothing else to do. They dance together, and the sway of the ship, however slight, favours the closeness of their contacts. After ten days or so they settle down to a life together, more continuous than that of marriage, except that they still spend their nights apart. And then, all of a sudden, the ship stops, and they stop, and there is a feeling, at least on one side, perhaps on both, that stocktaking has been left till too late. A hurried vexed excitement, not unpleasurable, because suspended animation is at an end, invades their faculties; they are faced with the real equation of land animals who have been at sea.

Clare broke the silence.

"You've never told me why you're called Tony when your name is James."

"That IS why. I WISH you'd be serious, Clare; we haven't much time before the darned ship docks. I simply can't bear the thought of not seeing you every day."

Clare gave him a swift look, and withdrew her eyes to the shore again. 'How clean!' she was thinking. He had, indeed, a clean oval-shaped brown face, determined, but liable to good humour, with dark grey eyes inclined to narrow with his thoughts, and darkish hair; and he was thin and active.

He took hold of a button of her coat.

"You haven't said a word about yourself out there, but you aren't happy, I know."

"I dislike people who talk about their private lives."

"Look!" he put a card into her hand: "That club always finds me."

She read:

MR. JAMES BERNARD CROOM,
The Coffee House,
St. James' Street.

"Isn't the Coffee House very out of date?"

"Yes, but it's still rather 'the thing.' My Dad put me down when I was born."

"I have an uncle by marriage who belongs — Sir Lawrence Mont, tall and twisty and thin; you'll know him by a tortoiseshell-rimmed eyeglass."

"I'll look out for him."

"What are you going to do with yourself in England?"

"Hunt a job. That's more than one man's work, it seems."

"What sort of job?"

"Anything except schoolmastering and selling things on commission."

"But does anybody ever get anything else nowadays?'

"No. It's a bad look-out. What I'd like would be an estate agency, or something to do with horses."

"Estates and horses are both dying out."

"I know one or two racing men rather well. But I expect I shall end as a chauffeur. Where are you going to stay?"

"With my people. At first, anyway. If you still want to see me when you've been home a week, Condaford Grange, Oxfordshire, will find me."

"Why did I ever meet you?" said the young man, with sudden gloom.

"Thank you."

"Oh! you know what I mean. God! she's casting anchor. Here's the tender! Oh! Clare!"

"Sir?"

"Hasn't it meant anything to you?"

Clare looked at him steadily before answering.

"Yes. But I don't know if it will ever mean any more. If it doesn't, thank you for helping me over a bad three weeks."

The young man stood silent, as only those can be silent whose feelings are raging for expression . . . .

The beginnings and endings of all human undertakings are untidy: the building of a house, the writing of a novel, the demolition of a bridge, and, eminently, the finish of a voyage. Clare landed from the tender in the usual hurly-burly, and, still attended by young Croom, came to rest in the arms of her sister.

"Dinny! How sweet of you to face this bally-hooley! My sister, Dinny Cherrell — Tony Croom. I shall be all right now, Tony. Go and look after your own things."

"I've got Fleur's car," said Dinny. "What about your trunks?"

"They're booked through to Condaford."

"Then we can go straight off."

The young man, going with them to the car, said 'Good-bye' with a jauntiness which deceived no one; and the car slid away from the dock.

Side by side the sisters looked at each other, a long and affectionate scrutiny; and their hands lay, squeezed together, on the rug.

"Well, ducky!" said Dinny, at last. "Lovely to see you! Am I wrong to read between the lines?"

"No. I'm not going back to him, Dinny."

"No, never, non?"

"No, never, non!"

“Oh! dear! Poor darling!”

“I won’t go into it, but it became impossible.” Clare was silent, then added suddenly, with a toss back of her head: “Quite impossible!”

“Did he consent to your coming?”

Clare shook her head. “I slipped off. He was away. I wirelessed him, and wrote from Suez.”

There was another silence. Then Dinny squeezed her hand and said:

“I was always afraid of it.”

“The worst of it is I haven’t a penny. Is there anything in hats now, Dinny?”

“‘All British’ hats — I wonder.”

“Or, perhaps, I could breed dogs — bull terriers; what d’you think?”

“I don’t at present. We’ll enquire.”

“How are things at Condaford?”

“We rub on. Jean has gone out to Hubert again, but the baby’s there — just a year old now. Cuthbert Conway Cherrell. I suppose we shall call him ‘Cuffs.’ He’s rather a duck.”

“Thank God I haven’t that complication! Certain things have their advantages.” Her face had the hardness of a face on a coin.

“Have you had any word from him?”

“No, but I shall, when he realises that I mean it.”

“Was there another woman?”

Clare shrugged.

Again Dinny’s hand closed on hers.

“I’m not going to make a song of my affairs, Dinny.”

“Is he likely to come home about it?”

“I don’t know. I won’t see him if he does.”

“But, darling, you’ll be hopelessly hung up.”

“Oh! don’t let’s bother about me. How have you been?” And she looked critically at her sister: “You look more Botticellian than ever.”

“I’ve become an adept at skimping. Also, I’ve gone in for bees.”

“Do they pay?”

“Not at present. But on a ton of honey we could make about seventy pounds.”

“How much honey did you have this year?”

“About two hundredweight.”

“Are there any horses still?”

“Yes, we’ve saved the horses, so far. I’ve got a scheme for a Condaford Grange bakery. The home farm is growing wheat at double what we sell it at. I want to mill and bake our own and supply the neighbourhood. The old mill could be set going for a few pounds, and there’s a building for the bakery. It wants about three hundred to start it. We’ve nearly decided to cut enough timber.”

“The local traders will rage furiously.”

“They will.”

“Can it really pay?”

“At a ton of wheat to the acre — vide Whitaker — we reckon thirty acres of our wheat, plus as much Canadian to make good light bread, would bring us in more than eight hundred and fifty pounds, less, say, five hundred, cost of milling and baking. It would mean baking one hundred and sixty two-pound loaves a day and selling about 56,000 loaves a year. We should need to supply eighty households, but that’s only the village, more or less. And we’d make the best and brightest bread.”

“Three hundred and fifty a year profit,” said Clare. “I wonder.”

“So do I,” said Dinny. “Experience doesn’t tell me that every estimate of profit should be halved, because I haven’t had any, but I suspect it. But even half would just tip the beam the right way for us, and we could extend operations gradually. We could plough a lot of grass in time.”

“It’s a scheme,” said Clare, “but would the village back you?”

“So far as I’ve sounded them — yes.”

“You’d want somebody to run it.”

“M’yes. It would have to be someone who didn’t mind what he did. Of course he’d have the future, if it went.”

“I wonder,” said Clare, again, and wrinkled her brows.

“Who,” asked Dinny suddenly, “was that young man?”

“Tony Croom? Oh! He was on a tea plantation, but they closed down.” And she looked her sister full in the face.

“Pleasant?”

“Yes, rather a dear. HE wants a job, by the way.”

“So do about three million others.”

“Including me.”

“You haven’t come back to a very cheery England, darling.”

“I gather we fell off the gold standard or something while I was in the Red Sea. What is the gold standard?”

“It’s what you want to be on when you’re off, and to be off when you’re on.”

“I see.”

“The trouble, apparently, is that our exports and carrying-trade profits and interests from investments abroad don’t any longer pay for our imports; so we’re living beyond our income. Michael says anybody could have seen that coming; but we thought ‘it would be all right on the night.’ And it isn’t. Hence the National Government and the election.”

“Can they do anything if they remain in?”

“Michael says ‘yes’; but he’s notably hopeful. Uncle Lawrence says they can put a drag on panic, prevent money going out of the country, keep the pound fairly steady, and stop profiteering; but that nothing under a wide and definite reconstruction that will take twenty years will do the trick; and during that time we shall all be poorer. Unfortunately no Government, he says, can prevent us liking play better than work, hoarding to pay these awful taxes, or preferring the present to the future. He also says that if we think people will work as they did in the war to save the country, we’re wrong; because, instead of being one people against an outside enemy, we’re two peoples against the inside enemy of ourselves, with quite opposite views as to how our salvation is to come.”

“Does he think the socialists have a cure?”

“No; he says they’ve forgotten that no one will give them food if they can neither produce it nor pay for it. He says that communism or free trade socialism only has a chance in a country which feeds itself. You see, I’ve been learning it up. They all use the word Nemesis a good deal.”

“Phew! Where are we going now, Dinny?”

“I thought you’d like lunch at Fleur’s; afterwards we can take the three-fifty to Condaford.”

Then there was silence, during which each thought seriously about the other, and neither was happy. For Clare was feeling in her elder sister the subtle change which follows in one whose springs have been broken and mended to go on with. And Dinny was thinking: ‘Poor child! Now we’ve both been in the wars. What will she do? And how can I help her?’

❦

Chapter 2

"What a nice lunch!" said Clare, eating the sugar at the bottom of her coffee cup: "The first meal on shore is lovely! When you get on board a ship and read the first menu, you think: 'My goodness! What an enchanting lot of things!' and then you come down to cold ham at nearly every meal. Do you know that stealing disappointment?"

"Don't I?" said Fleur. "The curries used to be good, though."

"Not on the return voyage. I never want to see a curry again. How's the Round Table Conference going?"

"Plodding on. Is Ceylon interested in India?"

"Not very. Is Michael?"

"We both are."

Clare's brows went up with delightful suddenness.

"But you can't know anything about it."

"I WAS in India, you know, and at one time I saw a lot of Indian students."

"Oh! yes, students. That's the trouble. They're so advanced and the people are so backward."

"If Clare's to see Kit and Kat before we start," said Dinny, "we ought to go up, Fleur."

The visit to the nurseries over, the sisters resumed their seats in the car.

"Fleur always strikes me," said Clare, "as knowing so exactly what she wants."

"She gets it, as a rule; but there've been exceptions. I've always doubted whether she really wanted Michael."

"D'you mean a love affair went wrong?"

Dinny nodded. Clare looked out of the window.

"Well, she's not remarkable in that."

Her sister did not answer.

"Trains," Dinny said, in their empty third-class compartment, "always have great open spaces now."

"I rather dread seeing Mother and Dad, Dinny, having made such an almighty bloomer. I really must get something to do."

"Yes, you won't be happy at Condaford for long."

"It isn't that. I want to prove that I'm not the complete idiot. I wonder if I could run an hotel. English hotels are still pretty backward."

"Good idea. It's strenuous, and you'd see lots of people."

"Is that caustic?"

"No, darling, just common sense; you never liked being buried."

"How does one go to work to get such a thing?"

"You have me there. But now's the time if ever, nobody's going to be able to travel. But I'm afraid there's a technical side to managing hotels that has to be learned. Your title might help."

"I shouldn't use his name. I should call myself Mrs. Clare."

"I see. Are you sure it wouldn't be wise to tell me more about things?"

Clare sat silent for a little, then said suddenly: "He's a sadist."

Looking at her flushed face, Dinny said: "I've never understood exactly what that means."

"Seeking sensation, and getting more sensation when you hurt the person you get it from. A wife is most convenient."

"Oh! darling!"

"There was a lot first, my riding whip was only the last straw."

"You don't mean —!" cried Dinny, horrified.

"Oh! yes."

Dinny came over to her side and put her arms round her.

"But, Clare, you must get free!"

"And how? My word against his. Besides, who would make a show of beastliness? You're the only person I could ever ever speak to of it."

Dinny got up and let down the window. Her face was as flushed as her sister's. She heard Clare say dully:

"I came away the first moment I could. It's none of it fit for publication. You see, ordinary passion palls after a bit, and it's a hot climate."

"Oh! heaven!" said Dinny, and sat down again opposite.

"My own fault. I always knew it was thin ice, and I've popped through, that's all."

"But, darling, at twenty-four you simply can't stay married and not married."

"I don't see why not; mariage manqué is very steadying to the blood. All I'm worrying about is getting a job. I'm not going to be a drag on Dad. Is his head above water, Dinny?"

"Not quite. We were breaking even, but this last taxation will just duck us. The trouble is how to get on without reducing staff. Everyone's in the same boat. I always feel that we and the village are one. We've got to sink or swim together, and somehow or other we're going to swim. Hence my bakery scheme."

"If I haven't got another job, could I do the delivering? I suppose we've still got the old car."

"Darling, you can help any way you like. But it all has to be started. That'll take till after Christmas. In the meantime there's the election."

"Who is our candidate?"

"His name is Dornford — a new man, quite decent."

"Will he want canvassers?"

"Rather!"

"All right. That'll be something to do for a start. Is this National Government any use?"

"They talk of 'completing their work'; but at present they don't tell us how."

"I suppose they'll quarrel among themselves the moment a constructive scheme is put up to them. It's all beyond me. But I can go round saying 'Vote for Dornford.' How's Aunt Em?"

"She's coming to stay tomorrow. She suddenly wrote that she hadn't seen the baby; says she's feeling romantic — wants to have the priest's room, and will I see that 'no one bothers to do her up behind, and that.' She's exactly the same."

"I often thought about her," said Clare. "Extraordinarily restful."

After that there was a long silence, Dinny thinking about Clare and Clare thinking about herself. Presently, she grew tired of that and looked across at her sister. Had Dinny really got over that affair of hers with Wilfrid Desert of which Hubert had written with such concern when it was on, and such relief when it was off? She had asked that her affair should never be spoken of, Hubert had said, but that was over a year ago. Could one venture, or would she curl up like a hedgehog? 'Poor Dinny!' she thought: 'I'm twenty-four, so she's twenty-seven!' And she sat very still looking at her sister's profile. It was charming, the more so for that slight tip-tilt of the nose which gave to the face a touch of adventurousness. Her eyes were as pretty as ever — that cornflower blue wore well; and their fringing was unexpectedly dark with such chestnut hair. Still, the face was thinner, and had lost what Uncle Lawrence used to call its 'bubble and squeak.' 'I should fall in love with her if I were a man,' thought Clare, 'she's GOOD. But it's rather a sad face, now, except when she's talking.' And Clare drooped her lids, spying through her lashes: No! one could not ask! The face she spied on had a sort of hard-won privacy that it would be unpardonable to disturb.

"Darling," said Dinny, "would you like your old room? I'm afraid the fantails have multiplied exceedingly — they coo a lot just under it."

"I shan't mind that."

"And what do you do about breakfast? Will you have it in your room?"

"My dear, don't bother about me in any way. If anybody does, I shall feel dreadful. England again on a day like this! Grass is really lovely stuff, and the elm trees, and that blue look!"

"Just one thing, Clare. Would you like me to tell Dad and Mother, or would you rather I said nothing?"

Clare's lips tightened.

"I suppose they'll have to know that I'm not going back."

"Yes; and something of the reason."

"Just general impossibility, then."

Dinny nodded. "I don't want them to think you in the wrong. We'll let other people think that you're home for your health."

"Aunt Em?" said Clare.

"I'll see to her. She'll be absorbed in the baby, anyway. Here we are, very nearly."

Condaford Church came into view, and the little group of houses, mostly thatched, which formed the nucleus of that scattered parish. The home-farm buildings could be seen, but not the Grange, for, situate on the lowly level dear to ancestors, it was wrapped from the sight in trees.

Clare, flattening her nose against the window, said:

"It gives you a thrill. Are you as fond of home as ever, Dinny?"

"Fonder."

"It's funny. I love it, but I can't live in it."

"Very English — hence America and the Dominions. Take your dressing-case, and I'll take the suitcase."

The drive up through the lanes, where the elms were flecked by little golden patches of turned leaves, was short and sweet in the lowered sunlight, and ended with the usual rush of dogs from the dark hall.

"This one's new," said Clare, of the black spaniel sniffing at her stockings.

"Yes, Foch. Scaramouch and he have signed the Kellogg Pact, so they don't observe it. I'm a sort of Manchuria." And Dinny threw open the drawing-room door.

"Here she is, Mother."

Advancing towards her mother, who stood smiling, pale and tremulous, Clare felt choky for the first time. To have to come back like this and disturb their peace!

"Well, Mother darling," she said, "here's your bad penny! You look just the same, bless you!"

Emerging from that warm embrace, Lady Cherrell looked at her daughter shyly and said:

"Dad's in his study."

"I'll fetch him," said Dinny.

In that barren abode, which still had its military and austere air, the General was fidgeting with a gadget he had designed to save time in the putting on of riding boots and breeches.

"Well?" he said.

"She's all right, dear, but it IS a split, and I'm afraid complete."

"That's bad!" said the General, frowning.

Dinny took his lapels in her hands.

"It's not her fault. But I wouldn't ask her any questions, Dad. Let's take it that she's just on a visit; and make it as nice for her as we can."

"What's the fellow been doing?"

"Oh! his nature. I knew there was a streak of cruelty in him."

"How d'you mean — knew it, Dinny?"

"The way he smiled — his lips."

The General uttered a sound of intense discomfort.

"Come along!" he said: "Tell me later."

With Clare he was perhaps rather elaborately genial and open, asking no questions except about the Red Sea and the scenery of Ceylon, his knowledge of which was confined to its spicy offshore scent and a stroll in the Cinnamon Gardens at

Colombo. Clare, still emotional from the meeting with her mother; was grateful for his reticence. She escaped rather quickly to her room, where her bags had already been unpacked.

At its dormer window she stood listening to the coorooing of the fantails and the sudden flutter and flip-flap of their wings climbing the air from the yew-hedged garden. The sun, very low, was still shining through an elm tree. There was no wind, and her nerves sucked up repose in that pigeon-haunted stillness, scented so differently from Ceylon. Native air, deliciously sane, fresh and homespun, with a faint tang of burning leaves. She could see the threading blue smoke from where the gardeners had lighted a small bonfire in the orchard. And almost at once she lit a cigarette. The whole of Clare was in that simple action. She could never quite rest and be still, must always move on to that fuller savouring which for such natures ever recedes. A fantail on the gutter of the sloped stone roof watched her with a soft dark little eye, preening itself slightly. Beautifully white it was, and had a pride of body; so too had that small round mulberry tree which had dropped a ring of leaves, with their unders uppermost, spangling the grass. The last of the sunlight was stirring in what yellowish-green foliage was left, so that the tree had an enchanted look. Seventeen months since she had stood at this window and looked down over that mulberry tree at the fields and the rising coverts! Seventeen months of foreign skies and trees, foreign scents and sounds and waters. All new and rather exciting, tantalising, unsatisfying. No rest! Certainly none in the white house with the wide verandah she had occupied at Kandy. At first she had enjoyed, then she had wondered if she enjoyed, then she had known she was not enjoying, lastly she had hated it. And now it was all over and she was back! She flipped the ash off her cigarette and stretched herself, and the fantail rose with a fluster.

❦

CHAPTER 3

Dinny was ‘seeing to’ Aunt Em. It was no mean process. With ordinary people one had question and answer and the thing was over. But with Lady Mont words were not consecutive like that. She stood with a verbena sachet in her hand, sniffing, while Dinny unpacked for her.

“This is delicious, Dinny. Clare looks rather yellow. It isn’t a baby, is it?”

“No, dear.”

“Pity! When we were in Ceylon everyone was havin’ babies. The baby elephants — so enticin’! In this room — we always played a game of feedin’ the Catholic priest with a basket from the roof. Your father used to be on the roof, and I was the priest. There was never anythin’ worth eatin’ in the basket. Your Aunt Wilmet was stationed in a tree to call ‘Cooee’ in case of Protestants.”

“‘Cooee’ was a bit premature, Aunt Em. Australia wasn’t discovered under Elizabeth.”

“No. Lawrence says the Protestants at that time were devils. So were the Catholics. So were the Mohammedans.”

Dinny winced and veiled her face with a corset belt.

“Where shall I put these undies?”

“So long as I see where. Don’t stoop too much! They were all devils then. Animals were treated terribly. Did Clare enjoy Ceylon?”

Dinny stood up with an armful of underthings.

“Not much.”

“Why not? Liver?”

“Auntie, you won’t say anything, except to Uncle Lawrence and Michael, if I tell you? There’s been a split.”

Lady Mont buried her nose in the verbena bag.

“Oh!” she said: “His mother looked it. D’you believe in ‘like mother like son’?”

“Not too much.”

“I always thought seventeen years’ difference too much, Dinny. Lawrence says people say: ‘Oh! Jerry Corven!’ and then don’t say. So, what was it?”

Dinny bent over a drawer and arranged the things.

“I can’t go into it, but he seems to be quite a beast.”

Lady Mont tipped the bag into the drawer, murmuring: “Poor dear Clare!”

“So, Auntie, she’s just to be home for her health.”

Lady Mont put her nose into a bowl of flowers. “Boswell and Johnson call them ‘God-eat-yers.’ They don’t smell. What disease could Clare have — nerves?”

“Climate, Auntie.”

“So many Anglo-Indians go back and back, Dinny.”

“I know, but for the present. Something’s bound to happen. So not even to Fleur, please.”

“Fleur will know whether I tell her or not. She’s like that. Has Clare a young man?”

“Oh! no!” And Dinny lifted a puce-coloured wrapper, recalling the expression of the young man when he was saying good-bye.

“On board ship,” murmured her Aunt dubiously.

Dinny changed the subject.

“Is Uncle Lawrence very political just now?”

“Yes, so borin’. Things always sound so when you talk about them. Is your candidate here safe, like Michael?”

“He’s new, but he’ll get in.”

“Married?”

"No."

Lady Mont inclined her head slightly to one side and scrutinised her niece from under half-drooped lids.

Dinny took the last thing out of the trunk. It was a pot of antiphlogistine.

"That's not British, Auntie."

"For the chest. Delia puts it in. I've had it, years. Have you talked to your candidate in private?"

"I have."

"How old is he?"

"Rather under forty, I should say."

"Does he do anything besides?"

"He's a K.C."

"What's his name?"

"Dornford."

"There were Dornfords when I was a girl. Where was that? Ah! Algeciras! He was a Colonel at Gibraltar."

"That would be his father, I expect."

"Then he hasn't any money."

"Only what he makes at the Bar."

"But they don't — under forty."

"He does, I think."

"Energetic?"

"Very."

"Fair?"

"No, darkish. He won the Bar point-to-point this year. Now, darling, will you have a fire at once, or last till dressing time?"

"Last. I want to see the baby."

"All right, he ought to be just in from his pram. Your bathroom's at the foot of these stairs, and I'll wait for you in the nursery."

The nursery was the same mullion-windowed, low-pitched room as that wherein Dinny and Aunt Em herself had received their first impressions of that jigsaw puzzle called life; and in it the baby was practising his totter. Whether he would be a Charwell or a Tasburgh when he grew up seemed as yet uncertain. His nurse, his aunt and his great-aunt stood, in triangular admiration, for him to fall alternatively into their outstretched hands.

"He doesn't crow," said Dinny.

"He does in the morning, Miss."

"Down he goes!" said Lady Mont.

"Don't cry, darling!"

"He never cries, Miss."

"That's Jean. Clare and I cried a lot till we were about seven."

"I cried till I was fifteen," said Lady Mont, "and I began again when I was forty-five. Did you cry, Nurse?"

"We were too large a family, my lady. There wasn't room like."

"Nanny had a lovely mother — five sisters as good as gold."

The nurse's fresh cheeks grew fresher; she drooped her chin, smiling, shy as a little girl.

"Take care of bow legs!" said Lady Mont: "That's enough totterin'."

The nurse, retrieving the still persistent baby, placed him in his cot, whence he frowned solemnly at Dinny, who said:

"Mother's devoted to him. She thinks he'll be like Hubert."

Lady Mont made the sound supposed to attract babies.

"When does Jean come home again?"

"Not till Hubert's next long leave."

Lady Mont's gaze rested on her niece.

"The rector says Alan has another year on the China station."

Dinny, dangling a bead chain over the baby, paid no attention. Never since the summer evening last year, when she came back home after Wilfrid's flight, had she made or suffered any allusion to her feelings. No one, perhaps not even she herself, knew whether she was heart-whole once more. It was, indeed, as if she had no heart. So long, so earnestly had she resisted its aching, that it had slunk away into the shadows of her inmost being, where even she could hardly feel it beating.

"What would you like to do now, Auntie? He has to go to sleep."

"Take me round the garden."

They went down and out on to the terrace.

"Oh!" said Dinny, with dismay, "Glover has gone and beaten the leaves off the little mulberry. They were so lovely, shivering on the tree and coming off in a ring on the grass. Really gardeners have no sense of beauty."

"They don't like sweepin'. Where's the cedar I planted when I was five?"

They came on it round the corner of an old wall, a spreading youngster of nearly sixty, with flattening boughs gilded by the level sunlight.

"I should like to be buried under it, Dinny. Only I suppose they won't. There'll be something stuffy."

"I mean to be burnt and scattered. Look at them ploughing in that field. I do love horses moving slowly against a skyline of trees."

"'The lowin' kine,'" said Lady Mont irrelevantly.

A faint clink came from a sheepfold to the East.

"Listen, Auntie!"

Lady Mont thrust her arm within her niece's.

"I've often thought," she said, "that I should like to be a goat."

"Not in England, tied to a stake and grazing in a mangy little circle."

"No, with a bell on a mountain. A he-goat, I think, so as not to be milked."

"Come and see our new cutting bed, Auntie. There's nothing now, of course, but dahlias, godetias, chrysanthemums, Michaelmas daisies, and a few pentstemons and cosmias."

"Dinny," said Lady Mont, from among the dahlias, "about Clare? They say divorce is very easy now."

"Until you try for it, I expect."

"There's desertion and that."

"But you have to BE deserted."

"Well, you said he made her."

"It's not the same thing, dear."

"Lawyers are so fussy about the law. There was that magistrate with the long nose in Hubert's extradition."

"Oh! but he turned out quite human."

"How was that?"

"Telling the Home Secretary that Hubert was speaking the truth."

"A dreadful business," murmured Lady Mont, "but nice to remember."

"It had a happy ending," said Dinny quickly.

Lady Mont stood, ruefully regarding her.

And Dinny, staring at the flowers, said suddenly: "Aunt Em, somehow there must be a happy ending for Clare."

❦

CHAPTER 4

The custom known as canvassing, more peculiar even than its name, was in full blast round Condaford. Every villager had been invited to observe how appropriate it would be if they voted for Dornford, and how equally appropriate it would be if they voted for Stringer. They had been exhorted publicly and vociferously, by ladies in cars, by ladies out of cars, and in the privacy of their homes by voices speaking out of trumpets. By newspaper and by leaflet they had been urged to perceive that they alone could save the country. They had been asked to vote early, and only just not asked to vote often. To their attention had been brought the startling dilemma that whichever way they voted the country would be saved. They had been exhorted by people who knew everything, it seemed, except how it would be saved. Neither the candidates nor their ladies, neither the mysterious disembodied voices, nor the still more incorporeal print, had made the faintest attempt to tell them that. It was better not; for, in the first place, no one knew. And, in the second place, why mention the particular when the general would serve? Why draw attention, even, to the fact that the general is made up of the particular; or to the political certainty that promise is never performance? Better, far better, to make large loose assertion, abuse the other side, and call the electors the sanest and soundest body of people in the world.

Dinny was not canvassing. She was 'no good at it,' she said; and, perhaps, secretly she perceived the peculiarity of the custom. Clare, if she noticed any irony about the business, was too anxious to be doing something to abstain. She was greatly helped by the way everybody took it. They had always been 'canvassed,' and they always would be. It was a harmless enough diversion to their ears, rather like the buzzing of gnats that did not bite. As to their votes, they would record them for quite other reasons — because their fathers had voted this or that before them, because of something connected with their occupation, because of their landlords, their churches, or their trades unions; because they wanted a change, while not expecting anything much from it; and not a few because of their common sense.

Clare, dreading questions, pattered as little as possible and came quickly to their babies or their health. She generally ended by asking what time they would like to be fetched. Noting the hour in a little book, she would come out not much the wiser. Being a Charwell — that is to say, no 'foreigner'— she was taken as a matter of course; and though not, like Dinny, personally known to them all, she was part of an institution, Condaford without Charwells being still almost inconceivable.

She was driving back from this dutiful pastime towards the Grange about four o'clock on the Saturday before the election, when a voice from an overtaking two-seater called her name, and she saw young Tony Croom.

"What on earth are you doing here, Tony?"

"I couldn't go any longer without a glimpse of you."

"But, my dear boy, to come down here is too terribly pointed."

"I know, but I've seen you."

"You weren't going to call, were you?"

"If I didn't see you otherwise. Clare, you look so lovely!"

"That, if true, is not a reason for queering my pitch at home."

"The last thing I want to do; but I've got to see you now and then, otherwise I shall go batty."

His face was so earnest and his voice so moved, that Clare felt for the first time stirred in that hackneyed region, the heart.

"That's bad," she said; "because I've got to find my feet, and I can't have complications."

"Let me kiss you just once. Then I should go back happy."

Still more stirred, Clare thrust forward her cheek.

"Well, quick!" she said.

He glued his lips to her cheek, but when he tried to reach her lips she drew back.

"No. Now Tony, you must go. If you're to see me, it must be in Town. But what is the good of seeing me? It'll only make us unhappy."

"Bless you for that 'us.'"

Clare's brown eyes smiled; their colour was like that of a glass of Malaga wine held up to the light.

"Have you found a job?"

"There are none."

"It'll be better when the election's over. I'M thinking of trying to get with a milliner."

"You!"

"I must do something. My people here are as hard pressed as everybody else. Now, Tony, you said you'd go."

"Promise to let me know the first day you come up."

Clare nodded, and re-started her engine. As the car slid forward gently, she turned her face and gave him another smile.

He continued to stand with his hands to his head till the car rounded a bend and she was gone.

Turning the car into the stable yard, she was thinking 'Poor boy!' and feeling the better for it. Whatever her position in the eyes of the law, or according to morality, a young and pretty woman breathes more easily when inhaling the incense of devotion. She may have strict intentions, but she has also a sense of what is due to her, and a dislike of waste. Clare looked the prettier and felt the happier all that evening. But the night was ridden by the moon; nearly full, it soared up in front of her window, discouraging sleep. She got up and parted the curtains. Huddling into her fur coat, she stood at the window. There was evidently a frost, and a ground mist stretched like fleece over the fields. The tall elms, ragged-edged, seemed to be sailing slowly along over the white vapour. The earth out there was unknown by her, as if it had dropped from that moon. She shivered. It might be beautiful, but it was cold, uncanny; a frozen glamour. She thought of the nights in the Red Sea, when she lay with bedclothes thrown off, and the very moon seemed hot. On board that ship people had 'talked' about her and Tony — she had seen many signs of it, and hadn't cared. Why should she? He had not even kissed her all those days. Not even the evening he came to her state-room and she had shown him photographs, and they had talked. A nice boy, modest and a gentleman! And if he was in love, now, she couldn't help it — she hadn't tried to 'vamp' him. As to what would happen, life always tripped one up, it seemed, whatever one did! Things must take care of themselves. To make resolutions, plans, lay down what was called 'a line of conduct,' was not the slightest use! She had tried that with Jerry. She shivered, then laughed, then went rigid with a sort of fury. No! If Tony expected her to rush into his arms he was very much mistaken. Sensual love! She knew it inside out. No, thank you! As that moonlight, now, she was cold! Impossible to speak of it even to her Mother, whatever she and Dad might be thinking.

Dinny must have told them something, for they had been most awfully decent. But even Dinny didn't know. Nobody should ever know! If only she had money it wouldn't matter. 'Ruined life,' of course, and all that, was just old-fashioned tosh. Life could always be amusing if one made it so. She was not going to skulk and mope. Far from that! But money she must somehow make. She shivered even in her fur coat. The moonlight seemed to creep into one's bones. These old houses — no central heating, because they couldn't afford to put it in! The moment the election was over she would go up to London and scout round. Fleur might know of something. If there was no future in hats, one might get a political secretaryship. She could type, she knew French well, people could read her handwriting. She could drive a car with anybody, or school a horse. She knew all about country house life, manners, and precedence. There must be lots of Members who wanted somebody like her, who could tell them how to dress, and how to decline this and that without anybody minding, and generally do their crossword puzzles for them. She'd had quite a lot of experience with dogs, and some with flowers, especially the arrangement of them in bowls and vases. And if it were a question of knowing anything about politics, she could soon mug that up. So, in that illusory cold moonshine, Clare could not see how they could fail to need her. With a salary and her own two hundred a year she could get along quite well! The moon, behind an elm tree now, no longer had its devastating impersonality, but rather an air of bright intrigue, peeping through those still thick boughs with a conspiring eye. She hugged herself, danced a few steps to warm her feet, and slipped back into her bed . . . .

Young Croom, in his borrowed two-seater, had returned to Town at an unobtrusive sixty miles an hour. His first kiss on Clare's cold but glowing cheek had given him slight delirium. It was an immense step forward. He was not a vicious young man. That Clare was married was to him no advantage. But whether, if she had not been married, his feelings towards her would have been of quite the same brand, was a question he left unexamined. The subtle difference which creeps into the charm of a woman who has known physical love, and the sting which the knowledge of that implants in a man's senses — such is food for a psychologist rather than for a straightforward young man really in love for the first time. He wanted her, as his wife if possible; if that were not possible, in any other way that was. He had been in Ceylon three years, hard-worked, seeing few white women, and none that he had cared for. His passion had, hitherto, been for polo, and his meeting with Clare had come just as he had lost both job and polo. Clare filled for him a yawning gap. As with Clare, so with him in the matter of money, only more so.

He had some two hundred pounds saved, and would then be 'bang up against it' unless he got a job. Having returned the two-seater to his friend's garage, he considered where he could dine most cheaply, and decided on his club. He was practically living there, except for a bedroom in Ryder Street, where he slept and breakfasted on tea and boiled eggs. A simple room it was, on the ground floor, with a bed and a dress cupboard, looking out on the tall back of another building, the sort of room that his father, coming on the Town in the 'nineties, had slept and breakfasted in for half the money.

On Saturday nights the Coffee House was deserted, save for a certain number of 'old buffers' accustomed to week-ending in St. James's Street. Young Croom ordered the three-course dinner and ate it to the last crumb. He drank Bass, and went down to the smoking-room for a pipe. About to sink into an armchair, he noticed standing before the fire a tallish thin man with twisting dark eyebrows and a little white moustache, who was examining him through a tortoiseshell-rimmed monocle. Acting on the impulse of a lover craving connection with his lady, he said:

"Excuse me, sir, but aren't you Sir Lawrence Mont?"

"That has been my lifelong conviction."

Young Croom smiled.

"Then, sir, I met your niece, Lady Corven, coming home from Ceylon. She said you were a member here. My name's Croom."

"Ah!" said Sir Lawrence, dropping his eyeglass: "I probably knew your father — he was always here, before the war."

"Yes, he put me down at birth. I believe I'm about the youngest in the Club."

Sir Lawrence nodded. "So you met Clare. How was she?"

"All right, I think, sir."

"Let's sit down and talk about Ceylon. Cigar?"

"Thank you, sir, I have my pipe."

"Coffee, anyway? Waiter, two coffees. My wife is down at Condaford staying with Clare's people. An attractive young woman."

Noting those dark eyes, rather like a snipe's, fixed on him, young Croom regretted his impulse. He had gone red, but he said bravely:

"Yes, sir, I thought her delightful."

"Do you know Corven?"

"No," said young Croom shortly.

"Clever fellow. Did you like Ceylon?"

"Oh! yes. But it's given me up."

"Not going back?"

"Afraid not."

"It's a long time since I was there. India has rather smothered it. Been in India?"

"No, sir."

"Difficult to know how far the people of India really want to cut the painter. Seventy per cent peasants! Peasants want stable conditions and a quiet life. I remember in Egypt before the war there was a strong nationalist agitation, but the fellaheen were all for Kitchener and stable British rule. We took Kitchener away and gave them unstable conditions in the war, and so they went on the other tack. What were you doing in Ceylon?"

"Running a tea plantation. But they took up economy, amalgamated three plantations, and I wasn't wanted any more. Do you think there's going to be a recovery, sir? I can't understand economics."

"Nobody can. There are dozens of causes of the present state of things, and people are always trying to tie it to one. Take England: There's the knock-out of Russian trade, the comparative independence of European countries, the great shrinkage of Indian and Chinese trade; the higher standard of British living since the war; the increase of national expenditure from two hundred-odd millions to eight hundred millions, which means nearly six hundred millions a year less to employ labour with. When they talk of over-production being the cause, it certainly doesn't apply to us. We haven't produced so little for a long time past. Then there's dumping, and shocking bad organisation, and bad marketing of what little food we produce. And there's our habit of thinking it'll be 'all right on the night,' and general spoiled-child attitude. Well, those are all special English causes, except that the too high standard of living and the spoiled-child attitude are American too."

"And the other American causes, sir?"

"The Americans certainly have over-produced and over-speculated. And they've been living so high that they've mortgaged their future — instalment system and all that. Then they're sitting on gold, and gold doesn't hatch out. And, more than all, they don't realise yet that the money they lent to Europe during the war was practically money they'd made out of the war. When they agree to general cancellation of debts they'll be agreeing to general recovery, including their own."

"But will they ever agree?"

"You never know what the Americans will do, they're looser-jointed than we of the old world. They're capable of the big thing, even in their own interests. Are you out of a job?"

"Very much so."

"What's your record?"

"I was at Wellington and at Cambridge for two years. Then this tea thing came along, and I took it like a bird."

"What age are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"Any notion of what you want to do?"

Young Croom sat forward.

"Really, sir, I'd have a shot at anything. But I'm pretty good with horses. I thought possibly I might get into a training stable; or with a breeder; or get a riding mastership."

"Quite an idea. It's queer about the horse — he's coming in as he goes out. I'll talk to my cousin Jack Muskham — he breeds bloodstock. And he's got a bee in his bonnet about the re-introduction of Arab blood into the English thoroughbred. In fact he's got some Arab mares coming over. Just possibly he might want someone."

Young Croom flushed and smiled.

"That would be frightfully kind of you, sir. It sounds ideal. I've had Arab polo ponies."

"Well," murmured Sir Lawrence thoughtfully, "I don't know that anything excites my sympathy more than a man who really wants a job and can't find one. We must get this election over first, though. Unless the socialists are routed horse-breeders will have to turn their stock into potted meat. Imagine having the dam of a Derby winner between brown bread and butter for your tea — real 'Gentleman's Relish!'"

He got up.

"I'll say good-night, now. My cigar will just last me home."

Young Croom rose too, and remained standing till that spare and active figure had vanished.

'Frightfully nice old boy!' he thought, and in the depths of his armchair he resigned himself to hope and to Clare's face wreathed by the fumes of his pipe.

❦

Chapter 5

On that cold and misty evening, which all the newspapers had agreed was to 'make history,' the Charwells sat in the drawing-room at Condaford round the portable wireless, a present from Fleur. Would the voice breathe o'er Eden, or would it be the striking of Fate's clock? Not one of those five but was solemnly convinced that the future of Great Britain hung in the balance; convinced, too, that their conviction was detached from class or party. Patriotism divorced from thought of vested interest governed, as they supposed, their mood. And if they made a mistake in so thinking, quite a number of other Britons were making it too. Across Dinny's mind, indeed, did flit the thought: 'Does anyone know what will save the country and what won't?' But, even by her, time and tide, incalculably rolling, swaying and moulding the lives of nations, was ungauged. Newspapers and politicians had done their work and stamped the moment for her as a turning point. In a sea-green dress, she sat, close to the 'present from Fleur,' waiting to turn it on at ten o'clock, and regulate its stridency. Aunt Em was working at a new piece of French tapestry, her slight aquilinity emphasised by tortoise-shell spectacles. The General nervously turned and re-turned The Times and kept taking out his watch. Lady Charwell sat still and a little forward, like a child in Sunday School before she has become convinced that she is going to be bored. And Clare lay on the sofa, with the dog Foch on her feet.

"Time, Dinny," said the General; "turn the thing on."

Dinny fingered a screw, and 'the thing' burst into music. "'Rings on our fingers and bells on our toes,'" she murmured, "'We have got music wherever we goes.'"

The music stopped, and the voice spoke:

"This is the first election result: Hornsey . . . Conservative, no change."

The General added: "H'm!" and the music began again.

Aunt Em, looking at the portable, said: "Coax it, Dinny. That burrin'!"

"It always has that, Auntie."

"Blore does something to ours with a penny. Where is Hornsey — Isle of Wight?"

"Middlesex, darling."

"Oh! yes! I was thinkin' of Southsea. There he goes again."

"These are some more election results. . . . Conservative, gain from Labour. . . . Conservative, no change . . . . Conservative, gain from Labour."

The General added: "Ha!" and the music began again.

"What nice large majorities!" said Lady Mont: "Gratifyin'!"

Clare got off the sofa and squatted on a footstool against her mother's knees. The General had dropped The Times. The 'voice' spoke again:

" . . . Liberal National, gain from Labour. . . . Conservative, no change. . . . Conservative, gain from Labour."

Again and again the music spurted up and died away; and the voice spoke.

Clare's face grew more and more vivid, and above her Lady Charwell's pale and gentle face wore one long smile. From time to time the General said: "By George!" and "This is something like!"

And Dinny thought: 'Poor Labour!'

On and on and on the voice breathed o'er Eden.

"Crushin'," said Lady Mont: "I'm gettin' sleepy."

"Go to bed, Auntie. I'll put a slip under your door when I come up."

Lady Charwell, too, got up. When they were gone, Clare went back to the sofa and seemed to fall asleep. The General sat on, hypnotised by the chant of victory. Dinny, with knees crossed and eyes closed, was thinking: 'Will it really make a difference; and, if it does, shall I care? Where is HE? Listening as we are? Where? Where?' Not so often now, but quite often enough, that sense of groping for Wilfrid returned to her. In all these sixteen months since he left her she had found no means of hearing of him. For all she knew he might be dead. Once — only once — she had broken her resolve never to speak of her disaster, and had asked Michael. Compson Grice, his publisher, had, it seemed received a letter from him written in Bangkok, which said he was well and had begun to write. That was nine months ago. The veil, so little lifted, had dropped again. Heartache — well, she was used to it.

"Dad, it's two o'clock. It'll be like this all the time now. Clare's asleep."

"I'm not," said Clare.

"You ought to be. I'll let Foch out for his run, and we'll all go up."

The General rose.

"Enough's as good as a feast. I suppose we'd better."

Dinny opened the French window and watched the dog Foch trotting out in semblance of enthusiasm. It was cold, with a ground mist, and she shut the window. If she didn't he would neglect his ritual and with more than the semblance of enthusiasm trot in again. Having kissed her father and Clare, she turned out the lights and waited in the hall. The wood fire had almost died. She stood with her foot on the stone hearth, thinking. Clare had spoken of trying to get a secretaryship to some new Member of Parliament. Judging by the returns that were coming in, there would be plenty of them. Why not to their own new member? He had dined with them, and she had sat next him. A nice man, well read, not bigoted. He even sympathised with Labour, but did not think they knew their way about as yet. In fact he was rather notably what the drunken youth in the play called: 'A Tory Socialist.' He had opened out to her and been very frank and pleasant. An attractive man, with his crisp dark hair, brown complexion, little dark moustache and rather high soft voice; a good sort, energetic and upright-looking. But probably he already had a secretary. However, if Clare was in earnest, one could ask. She crossed the hall to the garden door. There was a seat in the porch outside, and under it Foch would be crouched, waiting to be let in. Sure enough, he emerged, fluttering his tail, and padded towards the dogs' communal water-bowl. How cold and silent! Nothing on the road; even the owls quiet; the garden and the fields frozen, moonlit, still, away up to that long line of covert! England silvered and indifferent to her fate, disbelieving in the Voice o'er Eden; old and permanent and beautiful, even though the pound had gone off gold. Dinny gazed at the unfeverish night. Men and their policies — how little they mattered, how soon they passed, a dissolving dew on the crystal immensity of God's toy! How queer — the passionate intensity of one's heart, and the incalculable cold callousness of Time and Space! To join, to reconcile? . . .

She shivered and shut the door.

At breakfast the next morning she said to Clare:

"Shall we strike while the iron's hot, and go and see Mr. Dornford?"

"Why?"

"In case he wants a secretary, now he's in."

"Oh! Is he in?"

"Very much so."

Dinny read the figures. The usual rather formidable Liberal opposition had been replaced by a mere five thousand Labour votes.

"The word 'national' is winning this election," said Clare. "Where I went canvassing in the town they were all Liberals. I just used the word 'national,' and they fell."

Hearing that the new Member would be at his headquarters all the morning, the sisters started about eleven o'clock. There was so much coming and going round the doors that they did not like to enter.

"I do hate asking for things," said Clare.

Dinny, who hated it quite as much, answered:

"Wait here and I'll just go in and congratulate him. I might have a chance of putting in a word. He's seen you, of course."

"Oh! yes, he's seen me all right."

Eustace Dornford, K.C., new member elect, was sitting in a room that seemed all open doors, running his eye over the lists his agent was putting on the table before him. From one of those doors Dinny could see his riding boots under the table, and his bowler hat, gloves and riding whip upon it. Now that she was nearly in the presence it seemed impossible to intrude at such a moment, and she was just slipping away when he looked up.

"Excuse me a moment, Minns. Miss Cherrell!"

She stopped and turned. He was smiling and looking pleased.

"Anything I can do for you?"

She put out her hand.

"I'm awfully glad you've won. My sister and I just wanted to congratulate you."

He squeezed her hand, and Dinny thought: 'Oh! dear! this is the last moment to ask him,' but she said:

"It's perfectly splendid, there's never been such a majority here."

"And never will be again. That's my luck. Where's your sister?"

"In the car."

"I'd like to thank her for canvassing."

"Oh!" said Dinny, "she enjoyed it;" and, suddenly feeling that it was now or never, added: "She's at a loose end, you know, badly wants something to do. Mr. Dornford, you don't think — this is too bad — but I suppose she wouldn't be of any use to you as a secretary, would she? There, it's out! She does know the county pretty well; she can type, and speak French, and German a little, if that's any use." It had come with a rush, and she stood looking at him ruefully. But his eager expression had not changed.

"Let's go and see her," he said.

Dinny thought: 'Gracious! I hope he hasn't fallen in love with her!' and she glanced at him sidelong. Still smiling, his face looked shrewd now. Clare was standing beside the car. 'I wish,' thought Dinny, 'I had her coolness.' Then she stood still and watched. All this triumphal business, these people coming and going, those two talking so readily and quickly; the clear and sparkling morning! He came back to her.

"Thank you most awfully, Miss Cherrell. It'll do admirably. I did want someone, and your sister is very modest."

"I thought you'd never forgive me for asking at such a moment."

"Always delighted for you to ask anything at any moment. I must go back now, but I'll hope to see you again very soon."

Gazing after him as he re-entered the building, she thought: 'He has very nicely cut riding breeches!' And she got into the car.

"Dinny," said Clare, with a laugh, "he's in love with you."

"What!"

"I asked for two hundred, and he made it two hundred and fifty at once. How did you do it in one evening?"

"I didn't. It's you he's in love with, I'm afraid."

"No, no, my dear. I have eyes, and I know it's you; just as you knew that Tony Croom was in love with me."

"I could see that."

"And I could see this."

Dinny said quietly: "That's absurd. When do you begin?"

"He's going back to Town today. He lives in the Temple — Harcourt Buildings. I shall go up this afternoon and start in the day after tomorrow."

"Where shall you live?"

"I think I shall take an unfurnished room or a small studio, and decorate and furnish it gradually myself. It'll be fun."

"Aunt Em is going back this afternoon. She would put you up till you find it."

"Well," said Clare, pondering; "perhaps."

Just before they reached home Dinny said:

"What about Ceylon, Clare? Have you thought any more?"

"What's the good of thinking? I suppose he'll do something, but I don't know what, and I don't care."

"Haven't you had a letter?"

"No."

“Well, darling, be careful.”

Clare shrugged: “Oh! I’ll be careful.”

“Could he get leave if he wanted?”

“I expect so.”

“You’ll keep in touch with me, won’t you?”

Clare leaned sideways from the wheel and gave her cheek a kiss.

❦

Chapter 6

Three days after their meeting at the Coffee House, young Croom received a letter from Sir Lawrence Mont, saying that his cousin Muskham was not expecting the Arab mares till the spring. In the meantime he would make a note of Mr. Croom and a point of seeing him soon. Did Mr. Croom know any vernacular Arabic?

'No,' thought young Croom, 'but I know Stapylton.'

Stapylton, of the Lancers, who had been his senior at Wellington, was home from India on leave. A noted polo player, he would be sure to know the horse jargon of the East; but, having broken his thigh-bone schooling a steeplechaser, he would keep; the business of finding an immediate 'job of work' would not. Young Croom continued his researches. Everyone said: 'Wait till the election's over!'

On the morning after the election, therefore, he issued from Ryder Street with the greater expectation, and, on the evening after, returned to the Coffee House, with the less, thinking: 'I might just as well have gone to Newmarket and seen the Cambridgeshire.'

The porter handed him a note, and his heart began to thump. Seeking a corner, he read:

"DEAR TONY—

"I have got the job of secretary to our new member, Eustace Dornford, who's a K.C. in the Temple. So I've come up to Town. Till I find a tent of my own, I shall be at my Aunt Lady Mont's in Mount Street. I hope you've been as lucky. I promised to let you know when I came up; but I adjure you to sense and not sensibility, and to due regard for pride and prejudice.

"Your shipmate and well-wisher,

"CLARE CORVEN."

'The darling!' he thought. 'What luck!' He read the note again, placed it beneath the cigarette case in his left-hand waistcoat pocket, and went into the smoking-room. There, on a sheet of paper stamped with the Club's immemorial design, he poured out an ingenuous heart:

"DARLING CLARE —

"Your note has perked me up no end. That you will be in Town is magnificent news. Your uncle has been very kind to me, and I shall simply have to call and thank him. So do look out for me about six o'clock tomorrow. I spend all my time hunting a job, and am beginning to realise what it means to poor devils to be turned down day after day. When my pouch is empty, and that's not far away, it'll be even worse for me. No dole for this child, unfortunately. I hope the pundit you're going to take in hand is a decent sort. I always think of M.P.'s as a bit on the wooden side. And somehow I can't see you among Bills and petitions and letters about public-house licences and so forth. However, I think you're splendid to want to be independent. What a thumping majority! If they can't do things with that behind them, they can't do things at all. It's quite impossible for me not to be in love with you, you know, and to long to be with you all day and all night, too. But I'm going to be as good as I can, because the very last thing I want is to cause you uneasiness of any sort. I think of you all the time, even when I'm searching the marble countenance of some fish-faced blighter to see if my piteous tale is weakening his judgment. The fact is I love you terribly. To-morrow, Thursday, about six! "Good-night, dear and lovely one,

"YOUR TONY."

Having looked up Sir Lawrence's number in Mount Street, he addressed the note, licked the envelope with passion, and went out to post it himself. Then, suddenly, he did not feel inclined to return to the Coffee House. The place had a grudge against his state of mind. Clubs were so damned male, and their whole attitude to women so after-dinnerish — half contempt, half lechery! Funk-holes they were, anyway, full of comfort, secured against women, immune from writs; and men all had the same armchair look once they got inside. The Coffee House, too, about the oldest of all clubs, was stuffed with regular buffers, men you couldn't imagine outside a club. 'No!' he thought. 'I'll have a chop somewhere, and go to that thing at Drury Lane.'

He got a seat rather far back in the upper boxes, but, his sight being very good, he saw quite well. He was soon absorbed. He had been out of England long enough to have some sentiment about her. This pictorial pageant of her history for the last thirty years moved him more than he would have confessed to anyone sitting beside him. Boer war, death of the Queen, sinking of the Titanic, Great War, Armistice, health to 1931 — if anyone asked him afterwards, he would probably say: 'Marvellous! but gave me the pip rather!' While sitting there it seemed more than the 'pip'; the heartache of a lover, who wants happiness with his mistress and cannot reach it; the feeling of one who tries to stand upright and firm and is for ever being swayed this way and that. The last words rang in his ears as he went out: 'Greatness and dignity and peace.' Moving and damned ironical! He took a cigarette from his case and lighted it. The night was dry and he walked, threading his way through the streams of traffic, with the melancholy howling of street-singers in his ears. Sky-signs and garbage! People rolling home in their cars, and homeless night-birds! 'Greatness and dignity and peace!'

'I must absolutely have a drink,' he thought. The Club seemed possible again now, even inviting, and he made towards it. '"Farewell, Piccadilly! Good-bye, Leicester Square!"' Marvellous that scene, where those Tommies marched up in a spiral through the dark mist, whistling; while in the lighted front of the stage three painted girls rattled out: '"We don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go."' And from the boxes on the stage at the sides people looked down and clapped! The whole thing there! The gaiety on those girls' painted faces getting more and more put-on and heart-breaking! He must go again with Clare! Would it move her? And suddenly he perceived that he didn't know. What did one know about anyone, even the woman one loved? His cigarette was scorching his lip, and he spat out the butt. That scene with the honeymooning couple leaning over the side of the Titantic, everything before them, and nothing before them but the cold deep sea! Did that couple know anything except that they desired each other? Life was damned queer, when you thought about it! He turned up the Coffee House steps, feeling as if he had lived long since he went down them . . . .

It was just six o'clock when he rang the bell at Mount Street on the following day.

A butler, with slightly raised eyebrows, opened the door.

"Is Sir Lawrence Mont at home?"

"No, sir. Lady Mont is in, sir."

"I'm afraid I don't know Lady Mont. I wonder if I could see Lady Corven for a moment?"

One of the butler's eyebrows rose still higher. 'Ah!' he seemed to be thinking.

"If you'll give me your name, sir."

Young Croom produced a card.

"'Mr. James Bernard Croom,'" chanted the butler.

"Mr. Tony Croom, tell her, please."

"Quite! If you'll wait in here a moment. Oh! here is Lady Corven."

A voice from the stairs said:

"Tony? What punctuality! Come up and meet my Aunt."

She was leaning over the stair-rail, and the butler had disappeared.

"Put your hat down. How can you go about without a coat? I shiver all the time."

Young Croom came close below her.

"Darling!" he murmured.

She placed one finger to her lips, then stretched it down to him, so that he could just reach it with his own.

"Come along!" She had opened a door when he reached the top, and was saying: "This is a shipmate, Aunt Em. He's come to see Uncle Lawrence. Mr. Croom, my Aunt, Lady Mont."

Young Croom was aware of a presence slightly swaying towards him. A voice said: "Ah! Ships! Of course! How d'you do?"

Young Croom, aware that he had been 'placed,' saw Clare regarding him with a slightly mocking smile. If only they could be alone five minutes, he would kiss that smile off her face! He would —!

"Tell me about Ceylon, Mr. Craven."

"Croom, Auntie. Tony Croom. Better call him Tony. It isn't his name, but everybody does."

"Tony! Always heroes. I don't know why."

"This Tony is quite ordinary."

"Ceylon. Did you know her there, Mr. — Tony?"

"No. We only met on the ship."

"Ah! Lawrence and I used to sleep on deck. That was in the 'naughty nineties.' The river here used to be full of punts, I remember."

"It still is, Aunt Em."

Young Croom had a sudden vision of Clare and himself in a punt up a quiet backwater. He roused himself and said:

"I went to Cavalcade last night. Great!"

"Ah!" said Lady Mont. "That reminds me." She left the room.

Young Croom sprang up.

"Tony! Behave!"

"But surely that's what she went for!"

"Aunt Em is extraordinarily kind, and I'm not going to abuse her kindness."

"But, Clare, you don't know what —"

"Yes, I do. Sit down again."

Young Croom obeyed.

"Now listen, Tony! I've had enough physiology to last me a long time. If you and I are going to be pals, it's got to be platonic."

"Oh, God!" said young Croom.

"But it's got to; or else — we simply aren't going to see each other."

Young Croom sat very still with his eyes fixed on hers, and there passed through her the thought: 'It's going to torture him. He looks too nice for that. I don't believe we ought to see each other.'

"Look!" she said, gently, "you want to help me, don't you? There's lots of time, you know. Some day — perhaps."

Young Croom grasped the arms of his chair. His eyes had a look of pain.

"Very well," he said slowly, "anything so long as I can see you. I'll wait till it means something more than physiology to you."

Clare sat examining the glacé toe of her slowly wiggling shoe; suddenly she looked straight into his brooding eyes.

"If," she said, "I had not been married, you would wait cheerfully and it wouldn't hurt you. Think of me like that."

"Unfortunately I can't. Who could?"

"I see. I am fruit, not blossom — tainted by physiology."

"Don't! Oh! Clare, I will be anything you want to you. And if I'm not always as cheery as a bird, forgive me."

She looked at him through her eyelashes and said: "Good!"

Then came silence, during which she was conscious that he was fixing her in his mind from her shingled dark head to her glacé kid toe. She had not lived with Jerry Corven without having been made conscious of every detail of her body. She could not help its grace or its provocation. She did not want to torture him, but she could not find it unpleasant that she did. Queer how one could be sorry and yet pleased, and, withal, sceptical and a little bitter. Give yourself, and after a few months how much would he want you! She said abruptly:

"Well, I've found rooms — a quaint little hole — used to be an antique shop, in a disused mews."

He said eagerly: "Sounds jolly. When are you going in?"

"Next week."

"Can I help?"

"If you can distemper walls."

"Rather! I did all my bungalow in Ceylon, two or three times over."

"We should have to work in the evenings, because of my job."

"What about your boss? Is he decent?"

"Very, and in love with my sister. At least, I think so."

“Oh!” said young Croom dubiously.

Clare smiled. He was so obviously thinking: ‘Could a man be that when he sees YOU every day?’

“When can I come first?”

“To-morrow evening, if you like. It’s 2, Melton Mews, off Malmesbury Square. I’ll get the stuff in the morning, and we’ll begin upstairs. Say six-thirty.”

“Splendid!”

“Only, Tony — no importunities. ‘Life is real, life is earnest.’”

Grinning ruefully, he put his hand on his heart.

“And you must go now. I’ll take you down and see if my Uncle’s come in.”

Young Croom stood up.

“What is happening about Ceylon?” he said, abruptly. “Are you being worried?”

Clare shrugged. “Nothing is happening so far.”

“That can’t possibly last. Have you thought things out?”

“Thinking won’t help me. It’s quite likely he’ll do nothing.”

“I can’t bear your being —” he stopped.

“Come along,” said Clare, and led the way downstairs.

“I don’t think I’ll try to see your Uncle,” said young Croom. “To-morrow at half-past six, then.” He raised her hand to his lips, and marched to the door. There he turned. She was standing with her head a little on one side, smiling. He went out, distracted.

A young man, suddenly awakened amid the doves of Cytherea, conscious for the first time of the mysterious magnetism which radiates from what the vulgar call ‘a grass widow,’ and withheld from her by scruples or convention, is to be pitied. He has not sought his fate. It comes on him by stealth, bereaving him ruthlessly of all other interest in life. It is an obsession replacing normal tastes with a rapturous aching. Maxims such as ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery,’ ‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife,’ ‘Blessed are the pure in heart,’ become singularly academic. Young Croom had been brought up to the tinkling of the school bell: ‘Play the game!’ He now perceived its strange inadequacy. What WAS the game? Here was she, young and lovely, fleeing from a partner seventeen years older than herself, because he was a brute; she hadn’t said so, but of course he must be! Here was himself, desperately in love with her, and liked by her — not in the same way, but still as much as could be expected! And nothing to come of it but tea together! There was a kind of sacrilege in such waste.

Thus preoccupied he passed a man of middle height and alert bearing, whose rather cat-like eyes and thin lips were set into a brown face with the claws of many little wrinkles, and who turned to look after him with a slight contraction of the mouth which might have been a smile.

❦

Chapter 7

After young Croom had gone Clare stood for a moment in the hall recollecting the last time she had gone out of that front door, in a fawn-coloured suit and a little brown hat, between rows of people saying: “Good luck!” and “Good-bye, darling!” and “Give my love to Paris!” Eighteen months ago, and so much in between! Her lip curled, and she went into her Uncle’s study.

“Oh! Uncle Lawrence, you ARE in! Tony Croom’s been here to see you.”

“That rather pleasant young man without occupation?”

“Yes. He wanted to thank you.”

“For nothing, I’m afraid.” And Sir Lawrence’s quick dark eyes, like a snipe’s or woodcock’s, roved sceptically over his pretty niece. She was not, like Dinny, a special favourite, but she was undoubtedly attractive. It was early days to have messed up her marriage; Em had told him and said that it wasn’t to be mentioned. Well, Jerry Corven! People had always shrugged and hinted. Too bad! But no real business of his.

A subdued voice from the door said:

“Sir Gerald Corven has called, Sir Lawrence.”

Involuntarily Sir Lawrence put his finger to his lips. The butler subdued his voice still further.

“I put him in the little room and said I would see if Lady Corven was in.”

Sir Lawrence noted Clare’s hands hard pressed down on the back of the chair behind which she was standing.

“ARE you in, Clare?”

She did not answer, but her face was hard and pale as stone.

“A minute, Blore. Come back when I ring.”

The butler withdrew.

“Now, my dear?”

“He must have taken the next boat. Uncle, I don’t want to see him.”

“If we only say you’re out, he’ll probably come again.”

Clare threw back her head. “Well, I’ll see him!”

Sir Lawrence felt a little thrill.

“If you’d tell me what to say, I’d see him for you.”

“Thank you, Uncle, but I don’t see why you should do my dirty work.”

Sir Lawrence thought: ‘Thank God!’

“I’ll be handy in case you want me. Good luck, my dear!” And he went out.

Clare moved over to the fire; she wanted the bell within reach. She had the feeling, well known to her, of settling herself in the saddle for a formidable jump. ‘He shan’t touch me, anyway,’ she thought. She heard Blore’s voice say:

“Sir Gerald Corven, my lady.” Quaint! Announcing a husband to his wife! But staff knew everything!

Without looking she saw perfectly well where he was standing. A surge of shamed anger stained her cheeks. He had fascinated her; he had used her as every kind of plaything. He had —!

His voice, cuttingly controlled, said:

“Well, my dear, you were very sudden.” Neat and trim, as ever, and like a cat, with that thin-lipped smile and those daring despoiling eyes!

“What do you want?”

“Only yourself.”

“You can’t have me.”

“Absurd!”

He made the quickest kind of movement and seized her in his arms. Clare bent her head back and put her finger on the bell.

“Move back, or I ring!” and she put her other hand between his face and hers. “Stand over there and I’ll talk to you, otherwise you must go.”

“Very well! But it’s ridiculous.”

“Oh! Do you think I should have gone if I hadn’t been in earnest?”

“I thought you were just riled, and I don’t wonder. I’m sorry.”

“It’s no good discussing what happened. I know you, and I’m not coming back to you.”

“My dear, you have my apology, and I give you my word against anything of the sort again.”

“How good of you!”

“It was only an experiment. Some women adore it, if not at the time.”

“You are a beast.”

“And beauty married me. Come, Clare, don’t be silly, and make us a laughing-stock! You can fix your own conditions.”

“And trust you to keep them! Besides, that’s not my idea of a life. I’m only twenty-four.”

The smile left his lips.

“I see. I noticed a young man come out of this house. Name and estate?”

“Tony Croom. Well?”

He walked over to the window, and after a moment’s contemplation of the street, turned and said:

“You have the misfortune to be my wife.”

“So I was thinking.”

“Quite seriously, Clare, come back to me.”

“Quite seriously, no.”

“I have an official position, and I can’t play about with it. Look at me!” He came closer. “I may be all you think me, but I’m neither a humbug nor old-fashioned. I don’t trade on my position, or on the sanctity of marriage, or any of that stuff. But they still pay attention to that sort of thing in the Service, and I can’t afford to let you divorce me.”

“I didn’t expect it.”

“What then?”

“I know nothing except that I’m not coming back.”

“Just because of —?”

“And a great deal else.” The cat-like smile had come back and prevented her from reading what he was thinking.

“Do you want me to divorce you?”

Clare shrugged. “You have no reason.”

“So you would naturally say.”

“And mean.”

“Now look here, Clare, this is all absurd, and quite unworthy of anyone with your sense and knowledge of things. You can’t be a perpetual grass widow. You didn’t dislike the life out there.”

“There are some things that can’t be done to me, and you have done them.”

“I’ve said that they shan’t be done again.”

“And I’ve said that I can’t trust you.”

“This is going round the mulberry bush. Are you going to live on your people?”

“No. I’ve got a job.”

“Oh! What?”

“Secretary to our new Member.”

“You’ll be sick of that in no time.”

“I don’t think so.”

He stood staring at her without his smile. For a moment she could read his thoughts, for his face had the expression which preludes sex. Suddenly he said: “I won’t stand for another man having you.”

It was a comfort to have seen for once the bottom of his mind. She did not answer.

“Did you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“I meant it.”

“I could see that.”

“You’re a stony little devil.”

“I wish I had been.”

He took a turn up and down the room, and came to a stand dead in front of her.

“Look at me! I’m not going back without you. I’m staying at the Bristol. Be sensible, there’s a darling, and come to me there. We’ll start again. I’ll be ever so nice to you.”

Her control gave way, and she cried out: “Oh, for God’s sake, understand! You killed all the feeling I had for you.”

His eyes dilated and then narrowed, his lips became a line. He looked like a horse-breaker.

“And understand ME,” he said, very low, “you either come back to me or I divorce you. I won’t leave you here, to kick your heels.”

“I’m sure you’ll have the approval of every judicious husband.”

The smile reappeared on his lips.

“For that,” he said, “I’m going to have a kiss.” And before she could stop him he had fastened his lips on hers. She tore herself away and pressed the bell. He went quickly to the door.

“Au revoir!” he said, and went out.

Clare wiped her lips. She felt bewildered and exhausted, and quite ignorant whether to him or to her the day had gone.

She stood leaning her forehead on her hands over the fire, and became aware that Sir Lawrence had come back and was considerately saying nothing.

“Awfully sorry, Uncle; I shall be in my digs next week.”

“Have a cigarette, my dear.”

Clare took the cigarette, and inhaled its comfort. Her uncle had seated himself and she was conscious of the quizzical expression of his eyebrows.

“Conference had its usual success?”

Clare nodded.

“The elusive formula. The fact is, human beings are never satisfied with what they don’t want, however cleverly it’s put. Is it to be continued in our next?”

“Not so far as I’m concerned.”

“Pity there are always two parties to a conference.”

“Uncle Lawrence,” she said suddenly, “what is the law of divorce now?”

The baronet uncrossed his long thin legs.

“I’ve never had any particular truck with it. I believe it’s less old-fashioned than it was, but see Whitaker.” He reached for the red-backed volume. “Page 258 — here you are, my dear.”

Clare read in silence, while he gazed at her ruefully. She looked up and said.

“Then, if I want him to divorce me, I’ve got to commit adultery.”

“That is, I believe, the elegant way they put it. In the best circles, however, the man does the dirty work.”

“Yes, but he won’t. He wants me back. Besides, he’s got his position to consider.”

“There is that, of course,” said Sir Lawrence, thoughtfully; “a career in this country is a tender plant.”

Clare closed the Whitaker.

“If it weren’t for my people,” she said, “I’d give him cause tomorrow and have done with it.”

“You don’t think a better way would be to give partnership another trial?”

Clare shook her head.

“I simply couldn’t.”

“That’s that, then,” said Sir Lawrence, “and it’s an awkward ‘that.’ What does Dinny say?”

“I haven’t discussed it with her. She doesn’t know he’s here.”

“At present, then, you’ve no one to advise you?”

“No. Dinny knows why I left, that’s all.”

“I should doubt if Jerry Corven is a very patient man.”

Clare laughed.

“We’re neither of us long-suffering.”

“Do you know where he is staying?”

“At the Bristol.”

“It might,” said Sir Lawrence slowly, “be worth while to keep an eye on him.”

Clare shivered. “It’s rather degrading; besides, Uncle, I don’t want to hurt his career. He’s very able, you know.”

Sir Lawrence shrugged. “To me,” he said, “and to all your kin, his career is nothing to your good name. How long has he got over here?”

“Not long, I should think.”

“Would you like me to see him, and try to arrange that you go your own ways?”

Clare was silent, and Sir Lawrence, watching her, thought: ‘Attractive, but a lot of naughty temper. Any amount of spirit, and no patience at all.’ Then she said:

“It was all my fault, nobody wanted me to marry him. I hate to bother you. Besides, he wouldn’t consent.”

“You never know,” murmured Sir Lawrence. “If I get a natural chance, shall I?”

“It would be lovely of you, only —”

“All right, then. In the meantime young men without jobs — are they wise?”

Clare laughed. “Oh, I’ve ‘larned’ him. Well, thank you frightfully, Uncle Lawrence. You’re a great comfort. I was an awful fool; but Jerry has a sort of power, you know; and I’ve always liked taking risks. I don’t see how I can be my mother’s daughter, she hates them; and Dinny only takes them on principle.” She sighed. “I won’t bore you any more now.” And, blowing a kiss, she went out.

Sir Lawrence stayed in his armchair thinking: ‘Putting my oar in! A nasty mess, and going to be nastier! Still, at her age something’s got to be done. I must talk to Dinny.’

❦

Chapter 8

From Condaford the hot airs of election time had cleared away, and the succeeding atmosphere was crystallised in the General's saying:

"Well, those fellows got their deserts."

"Doesn't it make you tremble, Dad, to think what THESE fellows' deserts will be if they don't succeed in putting it over now?"

The General smiled.

"'Sufficient unto the day,' Dinny. Has Clare settled down?"

"She's in her diggings. Her work so far seems to have been writing letters of thanks to people who did the dirty work at the cross-roads."

"Cars? Does she like Dornford?"

"She says he's quite amazingly considerate."

"His father was a good soldier. I was in his brigade in the Boer War for a bit." He looked at his daughter keenly, and added: "Any news of Corven?"

"Yes, he's over here."

"Oh! I wish I wasn't kept so in the dark. Parents have to stand on the mat nowadays, and trust to what they can hear through the keyhole."

Dinny drew his arm within hers.

"One has to be so careful of their feelings. Sensitive plants, aren't you, Dad?"

"Well, it seems to your mother and me an extraordinarily bad look-out. We wish to goodness the thing could be patched up."

"Not at the expense of Clare's happiness, surely?"

"No," said the General, dubiously, "no; but there you are at once in all these matrimonial things. What is and will be her happiness? She doesn't know, and you don't, and I don't. As a rule in trying to get out of a hole you promptly step into another."

"Therefore don't try? Stay in your hole? That's rather what Labour wanted to do, isn't it?"

"I ought to see him," said the General, passing over the simile, "but I can't go blundering in the dark. What do you advise, Dinny?"

"Let the sleeping dog lie until it gets up to bite you."

"You think it will?"

"I do."

"Bad!" muttered the General. "Clare's too young."

That was Dinny's own perpetual thought. What at the first blush she had said to her sister: "You must get free," remained her conviction. But how was she to get free? Knowledge of divorce had been no part of Dinny's education. She knew that the process was by no means uncommon, and she had as little feeling against it as most of her generation. To her father and mother it would probably seem lamentable, doubly so if Clare were divorced instead of divorcing — that would be a stigma on her to be avoided at almost all cost. Since her soul-racking experience with Wilfrid, Dinny had been very little in London. Every street, and above all the park, seemed to remind her of him and the desolation he had left in her. It was now, however, obvious to her that Clare could not be left unsupported in whatever crisis was befalling.

"I think I ought to go up, Dad, and find out what's happening."

"I wish to God you would. If it's at all possible to patch things up, they ought to be."

Dinny shook her head.

"I don't believe it is, and I don't believe you'd wish it if Clare had told you what she told me."

The General stared. "There it is, you see. In the dark."

“Yes, dear, but till she tells you herself I can’t say more.”

“Then the sooner you go up the better.”

Free from the scent of horse, Melton Mews was somewhat strikingly impregnated with the odour of petrol. This bricked alley had become, indeed, the haunt of cars. To right and to left of her, entering late that afternoon, the doors of garages gaped or confronted her with more or less new paint. A cat or two stole by, and the hinder parts of an overalled chauffeur bending over a carburettor could be seen in one opening; otherwise life was at a discount, and the word ‘mews’ no longer justified by manure.

No. 2 had the peacock-green door of its former proprietress, whom, with so many other luxury traders, the slump had squeezed out of business. Dinny pulled a chased bell-handle, and a faint tinkle sounded, as from some errant sheep. There was a pause, then a spot of light showed for a moment on a level with her face, was obscured, and the door was opened. Clare, in a jade-green overall, said:

“Come in, my dear. This is the lioness in her den, ‘the Douglas in her hall!’”

Dinny entered a small, almost empty room hung with the green Japanese silk of the antique dealer and carpeted with matting. A narrow spiral staircase wormed into it at the far corner, and a subdued light radiated from a single green-paper-shaded bulb hanging in the centre. A brass electric heater diffused no heat.

“Nothing doing here so far,” said Clare. “Come upstairs.”

Dinny made the tortuous ascent, and stepped into a rather smaller sitting-room. It had two curtained windows looking over the mews, a couch with cushions, a little old bureau, three chairs, six Japanese prints, which Clare had evidently just been hanging, an old Persian rug over the matted floor, an almost empty bookcase, and some photographs of the family standing on it. The walls were distempered a pale grey, and a gas fire was burning.

“Fleur gave me the prints and the rug, and Aunt Em stumped up the bureau. I took the other things over.”

“Where do you sleep?”

“On that couch — quite comfy. I’ve got a little bath-dressing-room next door, with a geyser, and a what-d’ye-call-it, and a cupboard for clothes.”

“Mother told me to ask what you wanted.”

“I could do with our old Primus stove, some blankets and a few knives and forks and spoons, and a small tea-set, if there’s one to spare, and any spare books.”

“Right!” said Dinny. “Now, darling, how are you?”

“Bodily fine, mentally rather worried. I told you he was over.”

“Does he know of this place?”

“Not so far. You and Fleur and Aunt Em — oh! and Tony Croom — are the only people who know of it. My official address is Mount Street. But he’s bound to find out if he wants to.”

“You saw him?”

“Yes, and told him I wasn’t coming back; and I’m not, Dinny; that’s flat, to save breath. Have some tea? I can make it in a brown pot.”

“No, thank you, I had it on the train.” She was sitting on one of the taken-over chairs, in a bottle-green suit that went beautifully with her beech-leaf-coloured hair.

“How jolly you look, sitting there!” said Clare, curling up on the sofa. “Gasper?”

Dinny was thinking the same about her sister. Graceful creature, one of those people who couldn’t look ungraceful; with her dark short hair, and dark, alive eyes, and ivory pale face, and not too brightened lips holding the cigarette, she looked — well, ‘desirable.’ And, in all the circumstances, the word appeared to Dinny an awkward one. Clare had always been vivid and attractive, but without question marriage had subtly rounded, deepened, and in some sort bedevilled that attraction. She said suddenly:

“Tony Croom, you said?”

“He helped me distemper these walls; in fact, he practically did them, while I did the bathroom — these are better.”

Dinny’s eyes took in the walls with apparent interest.

"Quite neat. Mother and Father are nervous, darling."

"They would be."

"Naturally, don't you think?"

Clare's brows drew down. Dinny suddenly remembered how strenuously they had once debated the question of whether eyebrows should be plucked. Thank heaven! Clare never had yet.

"I can't help it, Dinny. I don't know what Jerry's going to do."

"I suppose he can't stay long, without giving up his job?"

"Probably not. But I'm not going to bother. What will be will."

"How quickly could a divorce be got? I mean against him?"

Clare shook her head, and a dark curl fell over her forehead, reminding Dinny of her as a child.

"To have him watched would be pretty revolting. And I'm not going into court to describe being brutalised. It's only my word against his. Men are safe enough."

Dinny got up and sat down beside her on the couch.

"I could kill him!" she said.

Clare laughed.

"He wasn't so bad in many ways. Only I simply won't go back. If you've once been skinned, you can't."

Dinny sat, silent, with closed eyes.

"Tell me," she said, at last, "how you stand with Tony Croom."

"He's on probation. So long as he behaves I like to see him."

"If," said Dinny slowly, "he were known to come here, it would be all that would be wanted, wouldn't it?"

Clare laughed again.

"Quite enough for men of the world, I should think; I believe juries can never withstand being called that. But you see, Dinny, if I begin to look at things from a jury's point of view, I might as well be dead. And, as a matter of fact, I feel very much alive. So I'm going straight ahead. Tony knows I've had enough physiology to last me a long time."

"Is he in love with you?"

Their eyes, brown and blue, met.

"Yes."

"Are you in love with him?"

"I like him — quite a lot. Beyond that I've no feeling at present."

"Don't you think that while Jerry is here —?"

"No. I think I'm safer while he's here than when he goes. If I don't go back with him he'll probably have me watched. That's one thing about him — he does what he says he'll do."

"I wonder if that's an advantage. Come out and have some dinner."

Clare stretched herself.

"Can't, darling. I'm dining with Tony in a little grubby restaurant suited to our joint means. This living on next to nothing is rather fun."

Dinny got up and began to straighten the Japanese prints. Clare's recklessness was nothing new. To come the elder sister! To be a wet blanket! Impossible! She said:

"These are good, my dear. Fleur has very jolly things."

"D'you mind if I change?" said Clare, and vanished into the bathroom.

Left alone with her sister's problem, Dinny had the feeling of helplessness which comes to all but such as constitutionally 'know better.' She went dejectedly to the window and drew aside the curtain. All was darkish and dingy. A car had drawn out of a neighbouring garage and stood waiting for its driver.

'Imagine trying to sell antiques here!' she thought. She saw a man come round the corner close by and stop, looking at the numbers. He moved along the opposite side, then came back and stood still just in front of No. 2. She noted the assurance and strength in that trim over-coated figure.

‘Good heavens!’ she thought: ‘Jerry!’ She dropped the curtain and crossed quickly to the bathroom door. As she opened it she heard the desolate tinkling of the sheep-bell installed by the antique dealer.

Clare was standing in her underthings under the single bulb, examining her lips with a hand-glass. Dinny filled the remains of the four feet by two of standing room.

“Clare,” she said, “it’s HIM!”

Clare turned. The gleam of her pale arms, the shimmer of her silk garments, the startled light in her dark eyes, made her even to her sister something of a vision.

“Jerry?”

Dinny nodded.

“Well, I won’t see him.” She looked at the watch on her wrist. “And I’m due at seven. Damn!”

Dinny, who had not the faintest desire that she should keep her rash appointment, said, to her own surprise:

“Shall I go? He must have seen the light.”

“Could you take him away with you, Dinny?”

“I can try.”

“Then do, darling. It’d be ever so sweet of you. I wonder how he’s found out. Hell! It’s going to be a persecution.”

Dinny stepped back into the sitting-room, turned out the light there, and went down the twisting stair. The sheep-bell tinkled again above her as she went. Crossing that little empty room to the door, she thought: ‘It opens inwards, I must pull it to behind me.’ Her heart beat fast, she took a deep breath, opened the door swiftly, stepped out and pulled it to with a slam. She was chest to chest with her brother-inlaw, and she started back with an admirably impromptu: “Who is it?”

He raised his hat, and they stood looking at each other.

“Dinny! Is Clare in?”

“Yes; but she can’t see anyone.”

“You mean she WON’T see ME?”

“If you like to put it that way.”

He stood looking intently at her with his daring eyes.

“Another day will do. Which way are you going?”

“To Mount Street.”

“I’ll come with you, if I may.”

“Do.”

She moved along at his side, thinking: ‘Be careful!’ For in his company she did not feel towards him quite as in his absence. As everybody said, Jerry Corven had charm!

“Clare’s been giving me bad marks, I suppose?”

“We won’t discuss it, please; whatever she feels, I do too.”

“Naturally. Your loyalty’s proverbial. But consider, Dinny, how provocative she is.” His eyes smiled round at her. That vision — of neck, and curve, and shimmer, dark hair and eyes! Sex appeal — horrible expression! “You’ve no idea how tantalising. Besides, I was always an experimentalist.”

Dinny stood still suddenly: “This is my sister, you know.”

“You’re sure, I suppose? It seems queer when one looks at you both.”

Dinny walked on, and did not answer.

“Now listen, Dinny,” began that pleasant voice. “I’m a sensualist, if you like, but what does it matter? Sex is naturally aberrational. If anyone tells you it isn’t, don’t believe them. These things work themselves out, and anyway they’re not important. If Clare comes back to me, in two years’ time she won’t even remember. She likes the sort of life, and I’m not fussy. Marriage is very much a go-as-you-please affair.”

“You mean that by that time you’ll be experimenting with someone else?”

He shrugged, looked round at her, and smiled.

“Almost embarrassing this conversation, isn’t it? What I want you to grasp is that I’m two men. One, and it’s the one that matters, has his work to do and means to do it. Clare should stick to that man, because he’ll give her a life in which she won’t rust; she’ll be in the thick of affairs and people who matter; she’ll have stir and movement — and she loves both. She’ll have a certain power, and she’s not averse from that. The other man — well, he wants his fling, he takes it, if you like; but the worst is over so far as she’s concerned — at least, it will be when we’ve settled down again. You see, I’m honest, or shameless if you like it better.”

“I don’t see, in all this,” said Dinny drily, “where love comes in.”

“Perhaps it doesn’t. Marriage is composed of mutual interest and desire. The first increases with the years, the latter fades. That ought to be exactly what she wants.”

“I can’t speak for Clare, but I don’t see it that way.”

“You haven’t tried yourself out, my dear.”

“No,” said Dinny, “and on those lines I trust I never may. I should dislike alternation between commerce and vice.”

He laughed.

“I like your bluntness. But seriously, Dinny, you ought to influence her. She’s making a great mistake.”

A sudden fury seized on Dinny.

“I think,” she said, between her teeth, “it was you who made the great mistake. If you do certain things to certain horses you’re never on terms with them again.”

He was silent at that.

“You don’t want a divorce in the family,” he said at last, and looked round at her steadily. “I’ve told Clare that I can’t let her divorce me. I’m sorry, but I mean that. Further, if she won’t come back to me, she can’t go as she pleases.”

“You mean,” said Dinny, between her teeth, “that if she does come back to you she can?”

“That’s what it would come to, I daresay.”

“I see. I think I’ll say good-night.”

“As you please. You think me cynical. That’s as may be. I shall do my best to get Clare back. If she won’t come she must watch out.”

They had stopped under a lamp-post and with an effort Dinny forced her eyes to his. He was as formidable, shameless, and mesmerically implacable as a cat, with that thin smile and unflinching stare. She said, quietly: “I quite understand. Goodnight!”

“Good-night, Dinny! I’m sorry, but it’s best to know where we stand. Shake hands?”

Rather to her surprise she let him take her hand, then turned the corner into Mount Street.

❦

Chapter 9

She entered her Aunt's house with all her passionate loyalty to her own breed roused, yet understanding better what had made Clare take Jerry Corven for husband. There WAS mesmerism about him, and a clear shameless daring which had its fascination. One could see what a power he might be among native peoples, how ruthlessly, yet smoothly, he would have his way with them; and how he might lay a spell over his associates. She could see, too, how difficult he might be to refuse physically, until he had outraged all personal pride.

Her Aunt's voice broke her painful absorption with the words: "Here she is, Adrian."

At the top of the stairs her Uncle Adrian's goatee-bearded face was looking over his sister's shoulder.

"Your things have come, my dear. Where have you been?"

"With Clare, Auntie."

"Dinny," said Adrian, "I haven't seen you for nearly a year."

"This is where we kiss, Uncle. Is all well in Bloomsbury, or has the slump affected bones?"

"Bones in esse are all right; in posse they look dicky — no money for expeditions. The origin of Homo sapiens is more abstruse than ever."

"Dinny, we needn't dress. Adrian's stoppin' for dinner. Lawrence will be so relieved. You can pow-wow while I loosen my belt, or do you want to tighten yours?"

"No, thank you, Auntie."

"Then go in there."

Dinny entered the drawing-room and sat down beside her Uncle. Grave and thin and bearded, wrinkled, and brown even in November, with long legs crossed and a look of interest in her, he seemed as ever the ideal pillar-box for confidences.

"Heard about Clare, Uncle?"

"The bare facts, no whys or wherefores."

"They're not 'nice.' Did you ever know a sadist?"

"Once — at Margate. My private school. I didn't know at the time, of course, but I've gathered it since. Do you mean that Corven is one?"

"So Clare says. I walked here with him from her rooms. He's a very queer person."

"Not mentally abnormal?" said Adrian, with a shudder.

"Saner than you or I, dear; he wants his own way regardless of other people; and when he can't get it he bites. Could Clare get a divorce from him without publicly going into their life together?"

"Only by getting evidence of a definite act of misconduct."

"Would that have to be over here?"

"Well, to get it over there would be very expensive, and doubtful at that."

"Clare doesn't want to have him watched at present."

"It's certainly an unclean process," said Adrian.

"I know, Uncle; but if she won't, what chance is there?"

"None."

"At present she's in the mood that they should leave each other severely alone; but if she won't go back with him, he says she must 'look out for herself.'"

"Is there anybody else involved, then, Dinny?"

"There's a young man in love with her, but she says it's quite all right."

"H'm! 'Youth's a stuff —' as Shakespeare said. Nice young man?"

"I've only seen him for a few minutes; he looked quite nice, I thought."

"That cuts both ways."

"I trust Clare completely."

"You know her better than I do, my dear; but I should say she might get very impatient. How long can Corven stay over here?"

"Not more than a month at most, she thinks; he's been here a week already."

"He's seen her?"

"Once. He tried to again today. I drew him off. She dreads seeing him, I know."

"As things are he has every right to see her, you know."

"Yes," said Dinny, and sighed.

"Can't your Member that she's with suggest a way out? He's a lawyer."

"I wouldn't like to tell him. It's so private. Besides, people don't like being involved in matrimonial squabbles."

"Is he married?"

"No."

She saw him look at her intently, and remembered Clare's laugh and words: "Dinny, he's in love with you."

"You'll see him here tomorrow night," Adrian went on. "Em's asked him to dinner, I gather; Clare too, I believe. Quite candidly, Dinny, I don't see anything to be done. Clare may change her mind and go back, or Corven may change his and let her stay without bothering about her."

Dinny shook her head. "They're neither of them like that. I must go and wash, Uncle."

Adrian reflected upon the undeniable proposition that everyone had his troubles. His own at the moment were confined to the fact that his step-children, Sheila and Ronald Ferse, had measles, so that he was something of a pariah in his own house, the sanctity attaching to an infectious disease having cast his wife into purdah. He was not vastly interested in Clare. She had always been to him one of those young women who took the bit between their teeth and were bound to fetch up now and again with broken knees. Dinny, to him, was worth three of her. But if Dinny were going to be worried out of her life by her sister's troubles, then, indeed, they became important to Adrian. She seemed to have the knack of bearing vicarious burdens: Hubert's, his own, Wilfrid Desert's, and now Clare's.

And he said to his sister's parakeet: "Not fair, Polly, is it?"

The parakeet, who was used to him, came out of its open cage on to his shoulder and tweaked his ear.

"You don't approve, do you?"

The green bird emitted a faint chattering sound and clutched its way on to his waistcoat. Adrian scratched its poll.

"Who's going to scratch her poll? Poor Dinny!"

His sister's voice startled him:

"I can't have Dinny scratched again."

"Em," said Adrian, "did any of US worry about the others?"

"In large families you don't. I was the nearest — gettin' Lionel married, and now he's a judge — depressin'. Dornford — have you seen him?"

"Never."

"He's got a face like a portrait. They say he won the long jump at Oxford. Is that any good?"

"It's what you call desirable."

"Very well made," said Lady Mont. "I looked him over at Condaford."

"My dear Em!"

"For Dinny, of course. What do you do with a gardener who WILL roll the stone terrace?"

"Tell him not to."

"Whenever I look out at Lippin'hall, he's at it, takin' the roller somewhere else. There's the gong, and here's Dinny; we'll go in."

Sir Lawrence was at the sideboard in the dining-room, extracting a crumbled cork.

"Lafite '65. Goodness knows what it'll be like. Decant it very gently, Blore. What do you say, Adrian, warm it a little or no?"

"I should say no, if it's that age."

"I agree."

Dinner began in silence. Adrian was thinking of Dinny, Dinny of Clare, and Sir Lawrence of the claret.

"French art," said Lady Mont.

"Ah!" said Sir Lawrence: "that reminds me, Em; some of old Forsyte's pictures are going to be lent. Considering he died saving them, they owe it to him."

Dinny looked up.

"Fleur's father? Was he a nice man, Uncle?"

"Nice?" repeated Sir Lawrence: "It's not the word. Straight, yes: careful, yes — too careful for these times. He got a picture on his head, you know, in the fire — poor old chap. He knew something about French art, though. This exhibition that's coming would have pleased him."

"There'll be nothing in it to touch 'The Birth of Venus,'" said Adrian.

Dinny gave him a pleased look.

"That was divine," she said.

Sir Lawrence cocked his eyebrow.

"I've often thought of going into the question: Why a nation ceases to be poetic. The old Italians — and look at them now!"

"Isn't poetry an effervescence, Uncle? Doesn't it mean youth, or at least enthusiasm?"

"The Italians were never young, and they're enthusiastic enough now. When we were in Italy last May you should have seen the trouble they took over our passports."

"Touchin'!" agreed Lady Mont.

"It's only a question," said Adrian, "of the means of expression. In the fourteenth century the Italians were expressing themselves in daggers and verse, in the fifteenth and sixteenth in poison, sculpture and painting, in the seventeenth in music, in the eighteenth in intrigue, in the nineteenth in rebellion, and in the twentieth their poetry is spelled in wireless and rules."

"I did get so tired," murmured Lady Mont, "of seein' rules I couldn't read."

"You were fortunate, my dear; I could."

"There's one thing about the Italians," continued Adrian; "century by century they throw up really great men of one sort or another. Is that climate, blood, or scenery, Lawrence?"

Sir Lawrence shrugged. "What do you think of the claret? Put your nose to it, Dinny. Sixty years ago, you two young women wouldn't be here, and Adrian and I would be soppy about it. It's as near perfect as makes no matter."

Adrian sipped and nodded.

"Absolutely prime!"

"Well, Dinny?"

"I'm sure it's perfect, dear — wasted on me."

"Old Forsyte would have appreciated this; he had wonderful sherry. Do you get the bouquet, Em?"

Lady Mont, who was holding her glass with her elbow on the table, moved her nostrils delicately.

"Such nonsense," she murmured, "almost any flower beats it."

The remark caused complete silence.

Dinny's eyes were the first to come to the level.

"How are Boswell and Johnson, Auntie?"

"I was tellin' Adrian: Boswell's taken to rollin' the stone terrace, and Johnson's lost his wife — poor thing. He's a different man. Whistles all the time. His tunes ought to be collected."

"Survivals of old England?"

"No, modern — he just wanders."

"Talking of survivals," said Sir Lawrence, "did you ever read Ask Mamma, Dinny?"

"No; who wrote it?"

"Surtees. You should. It's a corrective."

"Of what, Uncle?"

"Modernity."

Lady Mont lowered her glass; it was empty.

"So wise of them to be stoppin' this picture exhibition at 1900. D'you remember, Lawrence — in Paris, all those wiggly things we saw, and so much yellow and light blue — scrolls and blobs and faces upside-down? Dinny, we'd better go up."

And when presently Blore brought the message — Would Miss Dinny go down to the study? She murmured:

"It's about Jerry Corven. Don't encourage your Uncle — he thinks he can do good, but he can't." . . .

"Well, Dinny?" said Sir Lawrence: "I always like talking to Adrian; he's a well-tempered fellow with a mind of his own. I told Clare I would see Corven, but it's no good seeing him without knowing what one wants to say. And not much then, I'm afraid. What do YOU think?"

Dinny, who had seated herself on the edge of her chair, set her elbows on her knees. It was an attitude from which Sir Lawrence augured ill.

"Judging from what he said to me today, Uncle Lawrence, his mind's made up. Either Clare must go back to him or he'll try to divorce her."

"How will your people feel about that?"

"Very badly."

"You know there's a young man hanging round?"

"Yes."

"He hasn't a bean."

Dinny smiled. "We're used to that."

"I know, but no beans when you're out of bounds is serious. Corven might claim damages, he looks a vindictive sort of chap."

"D'you really think he would? It's very bad form, nowadays, isn't it?"

"Form matters very little when a man's monkey is up. I suppose you couldn't get Clare to apply the closure to young Croom?"

"I'm afraid Clare will refuse to be dictated to about whom she sees. She thinks the break-up is entirely Jerry's fault."

"I," said Sir Lawrence, emitting a slow puff, "am in favour of having Corven watched while he's over here, and collecting a shot, if possible, to fire across his bows, but she doesn't like the idea of that."

"She believes in his career, and doesn't want to spoil it. Besides, it's so revolting."

Sir Lawrence shrugged.

"What would you? The law's the law. He belongs to Burton's. Shall I waylay him there and appeal to him to leave her here quietly, and see if absence will make her heart grow fond again?"

Dinny wrinkled her brows.

"It might be worth trying, but I don't believe he'll budge."

"What line are you going to take yourself?"

"Back Clare in whatever she does or doesn't do."

Sir Lawrence nodded, having received the answer he expected.

❦

Chapter 10

The quality which from time immemorial has made the public men of England what they are, tempted so many lawyers into Parliament, caused so many divines to put up with being bishops, floated so many financiers, saved so many politicians from taking thought for the morrow, and so many judges from the pangs of remorse, was present in Eustace Dornford to no small degree. Put more shortly, he had an excellent digestion; could eat and drink at all times without knowing anything about it afterwards. He was an indefatigably hard worker even at play; and there was in him just that added fund of nervous energy which differentiates the man who wins the long jump from the man who loses it. And now, though his practice was going up by leaps and bounds since, two years ago, he had taken silk, he had stood for Parliament. And yet he was the last sort of man to incur the epithet 'go-getter.' His pale-brown, hazel-eyed, well-featured face had a considerate, even a sensitive look, and a pleasant smile. He had kept a little fine dark moustache, and his wig had not yet depleted his natural hair, which was dark and of rather curly texture. After Oxford he had eaten dinners and gone into the Chambers of a well-known Common Law Junior. Being a subaltern in the Shropshire Yeomanry when the war broke out, he had passed into the Cavalry, and not long after into the trenches, where he had known better luck than most people. His rise at the Bar after the war had been rapid. Solicitors liked him. He never fell foul of judges, and as a cross-examiner stood out, because he almost seemed to regret the points he scored. He was a Roman Catholic, from breeding rather than observance. Finally, he was fastidious in matters of sex, and his presence at a dinner-table on circuit had, if not a silencing, at least a moderating effect on tongues.

He occupied in Harcourt Buildings a commodious set of chambers designed for life as well as learning. Early every morning, wet or fine, he went for a ride in the Row, having already done at least two hours' work on his cases. By ten o'clock, bathed, breakfasted, and acquainted with the morning's news, he was ready for the Courts. When at four those Courts rose, he was busy again till half-past six on his cases. The evenings, hitherto free, would now be spent at the House: and since it would be seldom that he could go to bed without working an hour or so on some case or other, his sleep was likely to be curtailed from six hours to five, or even four.

The arrangement come to with Clare was simple. She arrived at a quarter to ten, opened his correspondence, and took his instructions from ten to a quarter past. She remained to do what was necessary, and came again at six o'clock, ready for anything fresh or left over.

On the evening after that last described, at the hour of eight-fifteen, he entered the drawing-room in Mount Street, was greeted, and introduced to Adrian, who had again been bidden. Discussing the state of the pound and other grave matters, they waited, till Lady Mont said suddenly: "Soup. What have you done with Clare, Mr. Dornford?"

His eyes, which had hitherto taken in little but Dinny, regarded his hostess with a faint surprise.

"She left the Temple at half-past six, saying we should meet again."

"Then," said Lady Mont, "we'll go down."

There followed one of those discomfortable hours well known to well-bred people, when four of them are anxious upon a subject which they must not broach to the fifth, and the fifth becomes aware of this anxiety.

They were, indeed, too few for the occasion, for all that each one of them said could be heard by the others. It was impossible for Eustace Dornford to be confidential with either of his neighbours; and since he instinctively felt that without a preliminary confidence he would only put his foot into it, he was careful to be public-minded and keep to such topics as the Premier, the undiscovered identity of certain poisoners, the ventilation of the House of Commons, the difficulty of knowing exactly what to do with one's hat there, and other subjects of general interest. But, by the end of dinner he was so acutely aware that they were burning to say things he mustn't hear, that he invented a professional telephone call, and was taken out of the room by Blore.

The moment he had gone Dinny said:

"She must have been waylaid, Auntie. Could I be excused and go and see?"

Sir Lawrence answered:

"Better wait till we break, Dinny; a few minutes can't matter now."

"Don't you think," said Adrian, "that Dornford ought to know how things stand? She goes to him every day."

"I'll tell him," said Sir Lawrence.

"No," said Lady Mont. "Dinny must tell him. Wait for him here, Dinny. We'll go up."

Thus it was that, returning to the dining-room after his trunk-call to someone whom he knew to be away from home, Dornford found Dinny waiting. She handed him the cigars and said:

"Forgive us, Mr. Dornford. It's about my sister. Please light up, and here's coffee. Blore, would you mind getting me a taxi?"

When they had drunk their coffee, and were standing together by the fire, she turned her face to it and went on hurriedly:

"You see, Clare has split from her husband, and he's just come over to take her back. She won't go, and it's rather a difficult time for her."

Dornford made a considerate sound.

"I'm very glad you told me. I've been feeling unhappy all dinner."

"I must go now, I'm afraid, and find out what's happened."

"Could I come with you?"

"Oh! thank you, but —"

"It would be a real pleasure."

Dinny stood hesitating. He looked like a present help in trouble; but she said: "Thank you, but perhaps my sister wouldn't like it."

"I see. Any time I can help, please let me know."

"Your taxi's at the door, Miss."

"Some day," she said, "I'd like to ask you about divorce."

In the taxi she wondered what she would do if she could not get in; and then what she would do if she could get in and Corven were there. She stopped the cab at the corner of the Mews.

"Stay here, please, I'll let you know in a minute if I want you again."

Dark and private loomed that little backwater.

'Like one's life,' thought Dinny, and pulled at the ornamental bell. It tinkled all forlorn, and nothing happened. Again and again she rang, then moved backward to look up at the windows. The curtains — she remembered they were heavy — had been drawn close; she could not decide whether or no there was light behind them. Once more she rang and used the knocker, holding her breath to listen. No sound at all! At last, baffled and disquiet, she went back to the cab. Clare had said Corven was staying at the Bristol, and she gave that address. There might be a dozen explanations; only why, in a town of telephones, had Clare not let them know? Half-past ten! Perhaps she had by now!

The cab drew up at the hotel. "Wait, please!" Entering its discreetly gilded hall, she stood for a moment at a loss. The setting seemed unsuitable for private trouble.

"Yes, madam?" said a page-boy's voice.

"Could you find out for me, please, if my brother-inlaw, Sir Gerald Corven, is in the hotel?"

What should she say if they brought him to her? Her figure in its evening cloak was reflected in a mirror, and that it was straight filled her with a sort of surprise — she felt so as if she were curling and creeping this way and that. But they did not bring him to her. He was not in his room, nor in any of the public rooms. She went out again to her cab.

"Back to Mount Street, please."

Dornford and Adrian were gone, her Aunt and Uncle playing piquet.

"Well, Dinny?"

"I couldn't get into her rooms, and he was not in his hotel."

"You went there?"

"It was all I could think of to do."

Sir Lawrence rose. "I'll telephone to Burton's." Dinny sat down beside her Aunt.

"I feel she's in trouble, Auntie. Clare's never rude."

"Kidnapped or locked up," said Lady Mont. "There was a case when I was young. Thompson, or Watson — a great fuss. Habeas corpus, or something — husbands can't now. Well, Lawrence?"

"He hasn't been in the Club since five o'clock. We must just wait till the morning. She may have forgotten, you know; or got the evening mixed."

"But she told Mr. Dornford that they would meet again."

"So they will, tomorrow morning. No good worrying, Dinny."

Dinny went up, but did not undress. Had she done all she could? The night was clear and fine and warm for November. Only a quarter of a mile or so away, was that backwater of Mews — should she slip out and go over there again?

She threw off her evening frock, put on a day dress, hat and fur coat, and stole downstairs. It was dark in the hall. Quietly drawing back the bolts, she let herself out, and took to the streets. When she entered the Mews — where a couple of cars were being put away for the night — she saw light coming from the upper windows of No. 2. They had been opened and the curtains drawn aside. She rang the bell.

After a moment Clare, in her dressing-gown, opened the door.

"Was it you who came before, Dinny?"

"Yes."

"Sorry I couldn't let you in. Come up!"

She led the way up the spiral stairs, and Dinny followed.

Upstairs it was warm and light, the door into the tiny bathroom open, and the couch in disorder. Clare looked at her sister with a sort of unhappy defiance.

"Yes, I've had Jerry here, he's not been gone ten minutes."

A horrified shiver went down Dinny's spine.

"After all, he's come a long way," said Clare; "good of you to worry, Dinny."

"Oh! darling!"

"He was outside here when I got back from the Temple. I was an idiot to let him in. After that — oh! well, it doesn't matter! I'll take care it doesn't happen again."

"Would you like me to stay?"

"Oh! no. But have some tea. I've just made it. I don't want anyone to know of this."

"Of course not. I'll say you had a bad headache and couldn't get out to telephone."

When they were drinking the tea Dinny said:

"This hasn't altered your plans?"

"God! no!"

"Dornford was there to-night. We thought it best to tell him you were having a difficult time."

Clare nodded.

"It must all seem very funny to you."

"It seems to me tragic."

Clare shrugged, then stood up and threw her arms round her sister. After that silent embrace, Dinny went out into the Mews, now dark and deserted. At the corner leading into the Square she almost walked into a young man.

"Mr. Croom, isn't it?"

"Miss Cherrell? Have you been at Lady Corven's?"

"Yes."

"Is she all right?"

His face was worried, and his voice anxious. Dinny took a deep breath before answering:

"Oh! yes. Why not?"

"She was saying last night that man was over here. It worries me terribly."

Through Dinny shot the thought: ‘If he’d met “that man”!’ But she said, quietly:

“Walk with me as far as Mount Street.”

“I don’t mind your knowing,” he said, “I’m over head and ears in love with her. Who wouldn’t be? Miss Cherrell, I don’t think she ought to be in that place alone. She told me he came yesterday while you were there.”

“Yes. I took him away with me, as I’m taking you. I think my sister should be left to herself.”

He seemed to hunch himself together.

“Have YOU ever been in love?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then you know.”

Yes, she knew!

“It’s absolute torture not to be with her, able to see that she’s all right. She takes it all lightly, but I can’t.”

Takes it all lightly! Clare’s face looking at her! She did not answer.

“The fact is,” said young Croom, with incoherence, “people can say and think what they like, but if they felt as I feel, they simply couldn’t. I won’t bother her, I really won’t; but I can’t stand her being in danger from that man.”

Dinny controlled herself to say quietly: “I don’t think Clare’s in any danger. But she might be if it were known that you —” He met her eyes squarely.

“I’m glad she’s got you. For God’s sake look after her, Miss Cherrell.”

They had reached the corner of Mount Street, and she held out her hand.

“You may be certain that whatever Clare does I shall stick by her. Good-night! And cheer up!”

He wrung her hand, and went off as if the devil were after him. Dinny went in, and slid the bolts quietly.

On what thin ice! She could hardly drag one foot before the other as she went upstairs, and sank down on her bed exhausted.

❦

Chapter 11

When Sir Lawrence Mont reached Burton's Club the following afternoon he was feeling, in common with many who undertake to interfere in the affairs of others, an uneasy self-importance coupled with a desire to be somewhere else. He did not know what the deuce he was going to say to Corven, or why the deuce he should say it, since, in his opinion, by far the best solution would be for Clare to give her marriage another trial. Having discovered from the porter that Sir Gerald was in the Club, he poked his nose gingerly into three rooms before locating the back of his quarry seated in the corner of an apartment too small to be devoted to anything but writing. He sat down at a table close to the door, so that he could simulate surprise when Corven came up to leave the room. The fellow was an unconscionable time. Noting a copy of the British Statesman's vade-mecum beside him, he began idly looking up the figures of British imports. He found potatoes: consumption sixty-six million five hundred thousand tons, production eight million eight hundred and seventy-four thousand tons! Somebody the other day had written to say that we imported forty million pounds' worth of bacon every year. Taking a sheet of paper he wrote: "Prohibition and protection, in regard to food that we CAN produce here. Annual Imports: Pigs, £40,000,000; Poultry say, £12,000,000; Potatoes — God knows how much! All this bacon, all these eggs, and half these potatoes could be produced here. Why not a five-year plan? By prohibition lessen the import of bacon and eggs one-fifth every year, and the import of potatoes by one-tenth every year, increasing home production gradually to replace them. At the end of five years our bacon and eggs and half our potatoes would be all-British. We should save eighty millions on our Imports Bill and our trade would practically be balanced."

Taking another sheet of paper, he wrote:

"To the Editor of The Times.

"The Three P. Plan.

"SIR—

"A simple plan for the balancing of our trade would seem to merit the attention of all those not wedded to the longest way round. There are three articles of food on importing which we expend annually some ——— pounds, but which could be produced in our own country without, I venture to think, causing the price of living to rise to any material extent if we took the simple precaution of hanging a profiteer at the beginning. These articles are Pigs, Poultry, Potatoes. There would be no need to put on duties, for all that is required is —"

But at this moment, becoming aware that Corven was passing from the room, he said:

"Hallo!"

Corven turned and came towards him.

Hoping that he showed as little sign of embarrassment as his nephew twice removed by marriage, Sir Lawrence rose.

"Sorry I didn't see you when you called the other day. Have you got long leave?"

"Another week only, and then I shall have to fly the Mediterranean probably."

"Not a good month for flying. What do you think of this adverse balance of trade?"

Jerry Corven shrugged.

"Something to keep them busy for a bit. They never see two inches before their noses."

"'Tiens! Une montagne!' Remember the Caran d'Ache cartoon of Buller in front of Ladysmith? No, you wouldn't. It's thirty-two years ago. National character doesn't change much, does it? How's Ceylon? Not in love with India, I hope?"

"Nor with us particularly, but we jog on."

"The climate doesn't suit Clare, apparently."

Corven's expression remained watchful and slightly smiling.

"The hot weather didn't, but that's over."

"Are you taking her back with you?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if that's wise."

"To leave her would be less so. One's either married or not."

Sir Lawrence, watching his eyes, thought: 'Shan't go further. It's hopeless. Besides, he's probably right. Only I would bet —'

"Forgive me," said Corven, "I must get these letters off." He turned and moved away, trim and assured.

'H'm!' thought Sir Lawrence, 'not exactly what you'd call fruitful.' And he sat down again to his letter to The Times.

"I must get precise figures," he muttered. "I'll turn Michael on to it" . . . And his thoughts went back to Corven. Impossible, in such cases, to know where the blame really lay. After all, a misfit was a misfit, no amount of pious endeavour, or even worldly wisdom, would cure it. 'I ought to have been a judge,' he thought, 'then I could have expressed my views. Mr. Justice Mont in the course of his judgment said: "It is time to warn the people of this country against marriage. That tie, which was all very well under Victoria, should now only be contracted in cases where there is full evidence to show that neither party has any individuality to speak of" . . . I think I'll go home to Em.' He blotted the perfectly dry letter to The Times, put it into his pocket, and sought the darkening, placidity of Pall Mall. He had stopped to look in at the window of his wine merchant's in St. James's Street, and consider once more where the extra ten per cent on his surtax was to come from, when a voice said:

"Good evening, Sir Lawrence!" It was the young man called Croom.

They crossed the street together.

"I wanted to thank you, sir, for speaking to Mr. Muskham. I've seen him today."

"How did you find him?"

"Oh! very affable. Of course I agree it IS a bee in his bonnet about introducing that cross of Arab blood into our racehorses."

"Did you show him you thought so?"

Young Croom smiled: "Hardly! But the Arab horse is so much smaller."

"There's something in it, all the same. Jack's only wrong in expecting quick results. It's like politics, people won't lay down for the future. If a thing doesn't work within five years, we think it's no good. Did Jack say he'd take you on?"

"He'll give me a trial. I'm to go down for a week, so that he can see me with horses. But the mares are not going to Royston. He's got a place for them above Oxford near Bablock Hythe. I should be there if I pass muster. It's not till the spring, though."

"Jack's a formalist," said Sir Lawrence, as they entered the Coffee House; "you'll have to mind your p's and q's."

Young Croom smiled.

"You bet. Everything's simply perfect at his stud farm. Luckily I really am frightfully keen about horses. I didn't feel at sea with Mr. Muskham. It's an immense relief to have a chance again; and there's nothing I'd like better."

Sir Lawrence smiled — enthusiasm was always pleasant.

"You must know my son," he said, "he's an enthusiast too, though he must be thirty-seven by now. You'll be in his constituency — no, just out of it. You'll be in Dornford's, I expect. By the way, you know my niece is acting secretary for him?"

Young Croom nodded.

"I don't know," murmured Sir Lawrence, "whether that'll go on now Corven's over." And he watched the young man's expression.

It had perceptibly darkened. "Oh! it will. She won't go back to Ceylon."

It was said with frowning suddenness, and Sir Lawrence thought: 'This is where I weigh myself.' Young Croom followed him to the weighing machine, as if he did not know how not to. He was very red.

"What makes you sure of that?" said Sir Lawrence, looking up from the historic chair. Young Croom went even redder.

"One doesn't come away just to go back."

"Or one does. If Life were a racehorse it'd be always up before the stewards for running in and out."

"I happen to know Lady Corven won't, sir."

It was clear to Sir Lawrence that he had lighted on a moment when feeling gets the better of discretion. So the young man WAS in love with her! Was this a chance to warn him off the course? Or was it more graceful to take no notice?

"Just eleven stone," he said; "do you go up or down, Mr. Croom?"

"I keep about ten twelve."

Sir Lawrence scrutinised his lean figure.

"Well, you look very fit. Extraordinary what a shadow can be cast on life by the abdomen. However, you won't have to worry till you're fifty."

"Surely, sir, you've never had any bother there?"

"Not to speak of; but I've watched it darken so many doors. And now I must be getting on. Good-night to you!"

"Good-night, sir. I really am awfully grateful."

"Not at all. My cousin Jack doesn't bet, and if you take my advice, you won't either."

Young Croom said heartily: "I certainly shan't, sir."

They shook hands and Sir Lawrence resumed his progress up St. James's Street.

'That young man,' he was thinking, 'impresses me favourably, and I can't think why — he appears to be going to be a nuisance. What I ought to have said to him was: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife." But God so made the world that one doesn't say what one ought!' The young were very interesting; one heard of them being disrespectful to Age and all that, but really he couldn't see it. They seemed to him fully as well-mannered as he himself had been at their age, and easier to talk to. One never knew what they were thinking, of course; but that might be as well. After all, one used to think that the old — and Sir Lawrence winced on the kerbstone of Piccadilly — were only fit to be measured for their coffins. 'Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis'; but was that true? No more really than the difference in the pronunciation of Latin since one's youth. Youth would always be Youth and Age would be Age, with the same real divergence and distrust between them, and the same queer hankering by Age to feel as Youth was feeling and think as Youth was thinking; the same pretence that it wouldn't so feel and think for the world, and, at the back of all, the instinct that, really given the chance, Age wouldn't have its life over again. Merciful — that! With stealthy quietude Life, as it wore one out, supplied the adjustment of a suitable lethargy. At each stage of existence the zest for living was tailored to what man had before him and no more. That fellow Goethe had attained immortality to the tunes of Gounod by fanning a dying spark into a fullblown flame. 'Rats!' thought Sir Lawrence: 'and very German rats! Would I choose the sighing and the sobbing, the fugitive raptures and the lingering starvations in front of that young man, if I could? I would not! Sufficient unto the old buffer is the bufferism thereof. Is that policeman never going to stop this blamed traffic?' No, there was no real change! Men drove cars now to the same tick as the old horse-bus and hansom-cab drivers had driven their slipping, sliding, clattering gees. Young men and women experienced the same legal or illegal urge towards each other. The pavements were different, and the lingo in which those youthful hankerings were expressed. But — Lord Almighty! — the rules of the road, the collisions and slips and general miraculous avoidances, the triumphs, mortifications, and fulfilments for better for worse, were all the same as ever. 'No,' he thought; 'the Police may make rules, Divines write to the papers, Judges express themselves as they like, but human nature will find its own way about as it did when I was cutting my wisdom teeth.'

The policeman reversed his sleeves, and Sir Lawrence crossed, pursuing his way to Berkeley Square. Here was change enough! The houses of the great were going fast. Piecemeal, without expressed aim, almost shamefacedly, in true English fashion, London was being rebuilt. The dynastic age was gone, with its appendages, feudalism, and the Church. Even wars would now be fought for peoples and their markets. No more dynastic or religious wars. Well, that was something! 'We're getting more like insects daily,' thought Sir Lawrence. And how interesting! Religion was nearly dead because there was no longer real belief in future life; but something was struggling to take its place — service — social service — the ants' creed, the bees' creed! Communism had formulated it and was whipping it into the people from the top. So characteristic! They were always whipping something into somebody in Russia. The quick way, no doubt, but the sure way? No! The voluntary system remained the best, because when once it got hold it lasted — only it was so darned slow! Yes, and darned ironical! So far the sense of social service was almost the perquisite of the older families, who had somehow got hold of the notion that they must do something useful to pay for their position. Now that they were dying out would the sense of service persist? How were the 'people' to pick it up? 'Well,' thought Sir Lawrence, 'after all, there's the bus conductor; and the fellow in the shop, who'll take infinite trouble to match the colour of your socks; and the woman who'll look after her neighbour's baby, or collect for the waifs and strays; and the motorist who'll stop and watch you tinkering at your car; and the postman who’s grateful for a tip; and the almost anybody who’ll try and pull you out of a pond if he can really see you’re in it. What’s wanted is the slogan: “Fresh air and exercise for good instincts.” One might have it on all the buses, instead of: “Canon’s Colossal Crime,” or “Strange Sweepstake Swindle.” And that reminds me to ask Dinny what she knows about Clare and that young man.’

So thinking, he paused before his house door, and inserted his key in its latch.

❦

CHAPTER 12

In spite of Sir Gerald Corven's assurance, the course before a husband wishing to resume the society of his wife is not noticeably simple, especially if he has but a week wherein to encompass his desire. The experience of that evening had made Clare wary. On leaving the Temple at lunch-time the day after, a Saturday, she took train for Condaford, where she carefully refrained from saying that she had sought asylum. On Sunday morning she lay long in bed, with the windows wide open, watching the sky beyond the tall denuded elms. The sun shone in upon her, the air was mild and alive with sounds surprised into life, the twittering once more of birds, the lowing of a cow, the occasional caw of a rook, the continual cooing of the fantails. There was but little poetry in Clare, but for a moment to her easeful stretched-out being came a certain perception of the symphony which is this world. The lacing of the naked boughs and those few leaves against the soft, gold-bright, moving sky; that rook balancing there; the green and fallow upland, the far line of trees; and all those sounds, and the pure unscented air on her face; the twittering quietude and perfect freedom of each separate thing, and yet the long composure of design — all this for a moment drew her out of herself into a glimpse of the universal.

The vision passed; she thought instead of Thursday night, and Tony Croom, and the dirty little boy outside the restaurant in Soho, who had said in such endearing tones: "Remember the poor old guy, lady; remember the poor old guy." If Tony had seen her the next night! How irrelevant was event to feeling, how ignorant were even the closest of each other! She uttered a little discomfited laugh. Where ignorance was bliss, indeed!

The village church bell began ringing now. Marvellous how her father and mother continued to go every Sunday, hoping — she supposed — for the best; or was it because if they didn't the village wouldn't, and the church would fall into disuse, or at least behind the chapel? It was nice to lie here in one's own old room, feel safe, and warm, and idle, with a dog on one's feet! Till next Saturday she was at bay, like a chased vixen taking advantage of every cover; and Clare drew taut her lips, as a vixen does at sight of hounds. Go back he must — he had said — with her or without. Well, it would be without!

Her sense of asylum was rudely shaken about four o'clock, when, returning from a walk with the dogs, she saw a car outside and was met by her mother in the hall.

"Jerry's with your father."

"Oh!"

"Come up to my room, dear."

In that first-floor room adjoining her bedroom Lady Charwell's personality had always more scope than in the rest of the old, tortuous, worn-down house, so full of relics and the past tense. This room's verbena-scented, powder-blue scheme had a distinct if faded elegance. It had been designed; the rest of the house had grown, emerging here and there into small oases of modernity, but for the most part a wilderness strewn with the débris of Time.

Clare turned and turned a china figure, in front of the wood fire. She had not foreseen this visit. Now were conjoined the forces of creed, convention, and comfort, and against them was only a defence that it was hateful to lay bare. She waited for her mother to speak.

"You see, darling, you haven't told us anything."

But how tell one who looked and spoke like that? She flushed, went pale, and said: "I can only say there's a beast in him. I know it doesn't show; but there is, Mother, there is!"

Lady Charwell, too, had flushed. It did not suit her, being over fifty.

"Your father and I will help you all we can, dear; only, of course, it is so important to take a right decision now."

"And I, having made a wrong one already, can only be trusted to make another? You've got to take my word, Mother; I simply can't talk about it, and I simply won't go back with him."

Lady Charwell had sat down, a furrow between her grey-blue eyes which seemed fixed on nothing. She turned them on her daughter, and said, hesitating:

"You're sure it's not just the beast that is in nearly all men?"

Clare laughed.

"Oh! no. I'm not easily upset."

Lady Charwell sighed.

"Don't worry, Mother dear; it'll be all right once we've got this over. Nothing really matters nowadays."

"So they say, but one has the bad habit still of believing that it does."

At this near approach to irony Clare said quickly: "It matters that one should keep one's self-respect. Really, with him I couldn't."

"We'll say no more then. Your father will want to see you. You'd better take your things off."

Clare kissed her and went out. There was no sound from below, and she went on up to her room. She felt her will-power stiffening. The days when men disposed of their women folk were long over, and — whatever Jerry and her father were concocting — she would not budge! When the summons came, she went to the encounter, blade-sharp, and hard as stone.

They were standing in the General's office-like study, and she felt at once that they were in agreement. Nodding to her husband, she went over to her father.

"Well?"

But Corven spoke first.

"I leave it to you, sir."

The General's lined face looked mournful and irritated. He braced himself. "We've been going into this, Clare. Jerry admits that you've got much on your side, but he's given me his word that he won't offend you again. I want to appeal to you to try and see his point of view. He says, I think rightly, that it's more to your interest even than to his. The old ideas about marriage may have gone, but, after all, you both took certain vows — but leaving that aside —"

"Yes," said Clare.

The General twirled his little moustache, and thrust the other hand deep into his pocket.

"Well, what on earth is going to happen to you both? You can't have a divorce — there's your name, and his position, and — after only eighteen months. What are you going to do? Live apart? That's not fair to you, or to him."

"Fairer to both of us than living together will be."

The General glanced at her hardened face. "So you say now; but we've both of us had more experience than you."

"That was bound to be said sooner or later. You want me to go back with him?"

The General looked acutely unhappy.

"You know, my dear, that I only want what's best for you."

"And Jerry has convinced you that IS the best. Well, it's the worst. I'm not going, Dad, and there's an end of it."

The General looked at her face, looked at the face of his son-inlaw, shrugged his shoulders, and began filling his pipe.

Jerry Corven's eyes, which had been passing from face to face, narrowed and came to rest on Clare's. That look lasted a long time, and neither flinched.

"Very well," he said, at last, "I will make other arrangements. Good-bye, sir; good-bye, Clare!" And turning on his heel, he went out.

In the silence that followed, the sound of his car crunching away on the drive could be heard distinctly. The General, smoking glumly, kept his glance averted; Clare went to the window. It was growing dark outside, and now that the crisis was over she felt unstrung.

"I wish to God," said her father's voice, "that I could understand this business."

Clare did not move from the window: "Did he tell you he'd used my riding whip on me?"

"What!" said the General.

Clare turned round.

"Yes."

"On YOU?"

"Yes. That was not my real reason, but it put the finishing touch. Sorry to hurt you, Dad!"

"By God!"

Clare had a moment of illumination. Concrete facts! Give a man a fact!

"The ruffian!" said the General: "The ruffian! He told me he spent the evening with you the other day; is that true?"

A slow flush had burned up in her cheeks.

"He practically forced himself in."

"The ruffian!" said the General once more.

When she was alone again, she meditated wryly on the sudden difference that little fact about the whip had made in her father's feelings. He had taken it as a personal affront, an insult to his own flesh and blood. She felt that he could have stood it with equanimity of someone else's daughter; she remembered that he had even sympathised with her brother's flogging of the muleteer, which had brought such a peck of trouble on them all. How little detached, how delightfully personal, people were! Feeling and criticising in terms of their own prejudices! Well! She was over the worst now, for her people were on her side, and she would make certain of not seeing Jerry alone again. She thought of the long look he had given her. He was a good loser, because for him the game was never at an end. Life itself — not each item of life — absorbed him. He rode Life, took a toss, got up, rode on; met an obstacle, rode over it, rode through it, took the scratches as all in the day's work. He had fascinated her, ridden through and over her; the fascination was gone, and she wondered that it had ever been. What was he going to do now? Well! One thing was certain: somehow, he would cut his losses!

❦

Chapter 13

One who gazes at the Temple's smooth green turf, fine trees, stone-silled buildings, and pouter pigeons, feels dithyrambic, till on him intrudes the vision of countless bundles of papers tied round with pink tape, unending clerks in little outer chambers sucking thumbs and waiting for solicitors, calf-bound tomes stored with reports of innumerable cases so closely argued that the light-minded sigh at sight of them and think of the Café Royal. Who shall deny that the Temple harbours the human mind in excelsis, the human body in chairs; who shall gainsay that the human spirit is taken off at its entrances and left outside like the shoes of those who enter a mosque? Not even to its Grand Nights is the human spirit admitted, for the legal mind must not 'slop over,' and warning is given by the word 'Decorations' on the invitation cards. On those few autumn mornings when the sun shines, the inhabitant of the Temple who faces East may possibly feel in his midriff as a man feels on a hilltop, or after hearing a Brahms symphony, or even when seeing first daffodils in spring; if so, he will hastily remember where he is, and turn to: Collister v. Daverday: Popdick intervening.

And yet, strangely, Eustace Dornford, verging on middle age, was continually being visited, whether the sun shone or not, by the feeling of one who sits on a low wall in the first spring warmth, seeing life as a Botticellian figure advancing towards him through an orchard of orange trees and spring flowers. At less expenditure of words, he was 'in love' with Dinny. Each morning when he saw Clare he was visited by a longing not to dictate on parliamentary subjects, but rather to lead her to talk about her sister. Self-controlled, however, and with a sense of humour, he bowed to his professional inhibitions, merely asking Clare whether she and her sister would dine with him, "on Saturday — here, or at the Café Royal?"

"Here would be more original."

"Would you care to ask a man to make a fourth?"

"But won't you, Mr. Dornford?"

"You might like someone special."

"Well, there's young Tony Croom, who was on the boat with me. He's a nice boy."

"Good! Saturday, then. And you'll ask your sister?"

Clare did not say: "She's probably on the doorstep," for, as a fact, she was. Every evening that week she was coming at half-past six to accompany Clare back to Melton Mews. There were still chances, and the sisters were not taking them.

On hearing of the invitation Dinny said: "When I left you late that night I ran into Tony Croom, and we walked back to Mount Street together."

"You didn't tell him about Jerry's visit to me?"

"Of course not!"

"It's hard on him, as it is. He really is a nice boy, Dinny."

"So I saw. And I wish he weren't in London."

Clare smiled. "Well, he won't be for long; he's to take charge of some Arab mares for Mr. Muskham down at Bablock Hythe."

"Jack Muskham lives at Royston."

"The mares are to have a separate establishment in a milder climate."

Dinny roused herself from memories with an effort.

"Well, darling, shall we strap-hang on the Tube, or go a bust in a taxi?"

"I want air. Are you up to walking?"

"Rather! We'll go by the Embankment and the Parks."

They walked quickly, for it was cold. Lamplit and star-covered, that broad free segment of the Town had a memorable dark beauty; even on the buildings, their daylight features abolished, was stamped a certain grandeur.

Dinny murmured: "London at night IS beautiful."

"Yes, you go to bed with a beauty and wake up with a barmaid. And, what's it all for? A clotted mass of energy like an ant-heap."

"'So fatiguin',' as Aunt Em would say."

"But what IS it all for, Dinny?"

"A workshop trying to turn out perfect specimens; a million failures to each success."

"Is that worth while?"

"Why not?"

"Well, what is there to BELIEVE in?"

"Character."

"How do you mean?"

"Character's our way of showing the desire for perfection. Nursing the best that's in one."

"Hum!" said Clare. "Who's to decide what's best within one?"

"You have me, my dear."

"Well, I'm too young for it, anyway."

Dinny hooked her arm within her sister's.

"You're older than I am, Clare."

"No, I've had more experience perhaps, but I haven't communed with my own spirit and been still. I feel in my bones that Jerry's hanging round the Mews."

"Come into Mount Street, and we'll go to a film."

In the hall Blore handed Dinny a note.

"Sir Gerald Corven called, Miss, and left this for you."

Dinny opened it.

"DEAR DINNY —

"I'm leaving England tomorrow instead of Saturday. If Clare will change her mind I shall be very happy to take her. If not, she must not expect me to be long-suffering. I have left a note to this effect at her lodgings, but as I do not know where she is, I wrote to you also, so as to be sure that she knows. She or a message from her will find me at the Bristol up to three o'clock tomorrow, Thursday. After that 'à la guerre comme à la guerre.'

"With many regrets that things are so criss-cross and good wishes to yourself,

"I am,

"Very sincerely yours,

"GERALD CORVEN."

Dinny bit her lip.

"Read this!"

Clare read the note.

"I shan't go, and he can do what he likes."

While they were titivating themselves in Dinny's room, Lady Mont came in.

"Ah!" she said: "Now I can say my piece. Your Uncle has seen Jerry Corven again. What are you goin' to do about him, Clare?"

As Clare swivelled round from the mirror, the light fell full on cheeks and lips whose toilet she had not quite completed.

"I'm never going back to him, Aunt Em."

"May I sit on your bed, Dinny? 'Never' is a long time, and — er — that Mr. Craven. I'm sure you have principles, Clare, but you're too pretty."

Clare put down her lipstick.

"Sweet of you, Aunt Em; but really I know what I'm about."

"So comfortin'! When I say that myself, I'm sure to make a gaffe."

"If Clare promises, she'll perform, Auntie."

Lady Mont sighed. "I promised my father not to marry for a year. Seven months — and then your uncle. It's always somebody."

Clare raised her hands to the little curls on her neck.

"I'll promise not to 'kick over' for a year. I ought to know my own mind by then; if I don't, I can't have got one."

Lady Mont smoothed the eiderdown.

"Cross your heart."

"I don't think you should," said Dinny quickly.

Clare crossed her fingers on her breast.

"I'll cross where it ought to be."

Lady Mont rose.

"She ought to stay here to-night, don't you think, Dinny?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell them, then. Sea-green IS your colour, Dinny. Lawrence says I haven't one."

"Black and white, dear."

"Magpies and the Duke of Portland. I haven't been to Ascot since Michael went to Winchester — savin' our pennies. Hilary and May are comin' to dinner. They won't be dressed."

"Oh!" said Clare suddenly: "Does Uncle Hilary know about me?"

"Broad-minded," murmured Lady Mont. "I can't help bein' sorry, you know."

Clare stood up.

"Believe me, Aunt Em, Jerry's not the sort of man who'll let it hurt him long."

"Stand back to back, you two; I thought so — Dinny by an inch."

"I'm five foot five," said Clare, "without shoes."

"Very well. When you're tidy, come down."

So saying, Lady Mont swayed to the door, said to herself: "Solomon's seal — remind Boswell," and went out.

Dinny returned to the fire, and resumed her stare at the flames.

Clare's voice, close behind her, said: "I feel inclined to sing, Dinny. A whole year's holiday from everything. I'm glad Aunt Em made me promise. But isn't she a scream?"

"Emphatically not. She's the wisest member of our family. Take life seriously and you're nowhere. She doesn't. She may want to, but she can't."

"But she hasn't any real worries."

"Only a husband, three children, several grandchildren, two households, three dogs, some congenital gardeners, not enough money, and two passions — one for getting other people married, and one for French tapestry; besides trying hard not to get fat on it all."

"Oh! she's a duck all right. What d'you advise about these 'tendrils,' Dinny? They're an awful plague. Shall I shingle again?"

"Let them grow at present, we don't know what's coming; it might be ringlets."

"Do you believe that women get themselves up to please men?"

"Certainly not."

"To excite and annoy each other, then?"

"Fashion mostly; women are sheep about appearance."

"And morals?"

"Have we any? Man-made, anyway. By nature we've only got feelings."

"I've none now."

"Sure?"

Clare laughed. “Oh! well, in hand, anyhow.” She put on her dress, and Dinny took her place at the mirror . . . .

The slum parson does not dine out to observe human nature. He eats. Hilary Charwell, having spent the best part of his day, including meal-times, listening to the difficulties of parishioners who had laid up no store for the morrow because they had never had store enough for today, absorbed the good food set before him with perceptible enjoyment. If he was aware that the young woman whom he had married to Jerry Corven had burst her bonds, he gave no sign of it. Though seated next to her, he never once alluded to her domestic existence, conversing freely on the election, French art, the timber wolves at Whipsnade Zoo, and a new system of building schools with roofs that could be used or not as the weather dictated. Over his face, long, wrinkled, purposeful, and shrewdly kind, flitted an occasional smile, as if he were summing something up; but he gave no indication of what that something was, except that he looked across at Dinny, as though saying: “You and I are going to have a talk presently.”

No such talk occurred, for he was summoned by telephone to a death-bed before he had finished his glass of port. Mrs. Hilary went with him.

The two sisters settled down to bridge with their Uncle and Aunt, and at eleven o’clock went up to bed.

“Armistice day,” said Clare, turning into her bedroom. “Did you realise?”

“Yes.”

“I was in a bus at eleven o’clock. I noticed two or three people looking funny. How can one be expected to feel anything? I was only ten when the war stopped.”

“I remember the Armistice,” said Dinny, “because Mother cried. Uncle Hilary was with us at Condaford. He preached on: ‘They also serve who only stand and wait.’”

“Who serves except for what he can get from it?”

“Lots of people do hard jobs all their lives for mighty little return.”

“Well, yes.”

“Why do they?”

“Dinny, I sometimes feel as if you might end up religious. Unless you marry, you will.”

“‘Get thee to a nunnery, go!’”

“Seriously, ducky, I wish I could see more of ‘the old Eve’ in you. In my opinion you ought to be a mother.”

“When doctors find a way without preliminaries.”

“You’re wasting yourself, my dear. At any moment that you liked to crook your little finger, old man Dornford would fall on his knees to you. Don’t you like him?”

“As nice a man as I’ve seen for a long time.”

“‘Murmured she coldly, turning towards the door.’ Give me a kiss.”

“Darling,” said Dinny, “I do hope things are going to be all right. I shan’t pray for you, in spite of my look of decline; but I’ll dream that your ship comes home.”

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Chapter 14

Young croom's second visit to England's Past at Drury Lane was the first visit of the other three members of Dornford's little dinner party, and by some fatality, not unconnected with him who took the tickets, they were seated two by two; young Croom with Clare in the middle of the tenth row, Dornford and Dinny in returned stalls at the end of the third . . . .

"Penny for your thoughts, Miss Cherrell?"

"I was thinking how the English face has changed since 1900."

"It's the hair. Faces in pictures a hundred to a hundred and fifty years ago are much more like ours."

"Drooping moustaches and chignons do hide expression, but was there the expression?"

"You don't think the Victorians had as much character?"

"Probably more, but surely they suppressed it; even in their dresses, always more stuff than was needed; frock-coats, high collars, cravats, bustles, button boots."

"The leg WAS on their nerves, but the neck wasn't."

"I give you the woman's necks. But look at their furniture: tassels, fringes, antimacassars, chandeliers, enormous sideboards. They DID play hide-and-seek with the soul, Mr. Dornford."

"And every now and then it popped out, like little Edward after unclothing himself under his mother's dining-table at Windsor."

"He never did anything quite so perfect again."

"I don't know. He was another Restoration in a mild way. Big opening of floodgates under him." . . .

"He HAS sailed, hasn't he, Clare?"

"Yes, he's sailed all right. Look at Dornford! He's fallen for Dinny completely. I wish she'd take to him."

"Why shouldn't she?"

"My dear young man, Dinny's been in very deep waters. She's in them even now."

"I don't know anyone I'd like better for a sister-inlaw."

"Don't you wish you may get her?"

"God! Yes! Don't I!"

"What do YOU think of Dornford, Tony?"

"Awfully decent, not a bit dry."

"If he were a doctor he'd have a wonderful bedside manner. He's a Catholic."

"Wasn't that against him in the election?"

"It would have been, but his opponent was an atheist, so they cried quits."

"Terrible humbug, politics."

"But rather fun."

"Still, Dornford won that Bar point-to-point — he must have guts."

"Lots. I should say he'd face anything in his quiet way. I'm quite fond of him."

"Oh!"

"No intention to incite you, Tony."

"This is like being on board ship, sitting side by side, and — stymied. Come out for a cigarette."

"People are coming back. Prepare yourself to point me the moral of the next act. At present I don't see any."

"Wait!" . . .

Dinny drew in her breath.

"That's terrible. I can just remember the Titanic. Awful, the waste in the world!"

"You're right."

"Waste of life, and waste of love."

"Have YOU come up against much waste?"

"Yes."

"You don't care to talk about it?"

"No."

"I don't believe that your sister's going to be wasted. She's too vivid."

"Yes, but her head's in chancery."

"She'll duck from under."

"I can't bear to think of her life being spoiled. Isn't there some legal dodge, Mr. Dornford; without publicity, I mean?"

"If he would give cause, there need be very little of that."

"He won't. He's feeling vindictive."

"I see. Then I'm afraid there's nothing for it but to wait. These things generally disentangle themselves. Catholics are not supposed to believe in divorce. But if YOU feel this is a case for one —"

"Clare's only twenty-four. She can't live alone the rest of her life."

"Were YOU thinking of doing that?"

"I! That's different."

"Yes, you're very unlike, but to have you wasted would be far worse. Just as much worse as wasting a lovely day in winter is than wasting one in summer."

"The curtain's going up." . . .

"I wonder," muttered Clare: "It didn't look to me as if their love would have lasted long. They were eating each other like sugar."

"My God, if you and I on that boat had been —"

"You're very young, Tony."

"Two years older than you."

"And about ten years younger."

"Don't you really believe in love lasting, Clare?"

"Not passion. And after that generally the deluge. Only with those two on the Titanic it came too soon. A COLD sea! Ugh!"

"Let me pull your cloak up."

"I don't believe I like this show too frightfully, Tony. It digs into you, and I don't want to be dug into."

"I liked it better the first time, certainly."

"Thank you!"

"It's being close to you, and not close enough. But the war part of the play's the best."

"The whole thing makes me feel I don't want to be alive."

"That's 'the satire.'"

"One half of him is mocking the other. It gives me the fidgets. Too like oneself."

"I wish we'd gone to a movie, I could have held your hand."

"Dornford's looking at Dinny as if she were the Madonna of the future that he wanted to make a Madonna of the past."

"So he does, you say."

"He really has a nice face. I wonder what he'll think of the war part. 'Weigh-hey! Up she rises!'" . . .

Dinny sat with closed eyes, acutely feeling the remains of moisture on her cheeks.

"But she never would have done that," she said, huskily, "not waved a flag and cheered. Never! She might have mixed in the crowd, but never that!"

"No, that's a stage touch. Pity! But a jolly good act. Really good!"

"Those poor gay raddled singing girls, getting more and more wretched and raddled, and that 'Tipperary' whistling! The war must have been AWFUL!"

"One got sort of exalted."

"Did that feeling last?"

"In a way. Does that seem rather horrible to you?"

"I never can judge what people ought to feel. I've heard my brother say something of the kind."

"It wasn't the 'Into Battle' feeling either — I'm not the fighting man. It's a cliché to say it was the biggest thing that will ever be in one's life."

"You still feel that?"

"It has been up to now. But —! I must tell you while I've a chance — I'm in love with you, Dinny. I know nothing about you, you know nothing about me. That doesn't make any difference. I fell in love with you at once; it's been getting deeper ever since. I don't expect you to say anything, but you might think about it now and then . . . ."

Clare shrugged her shoulders.

"Did people really go on like that at the Armistice? Tony! Did people —?"

"What?"

"Really go on like that?"

"I don't know."

"Where were you?"

"At Wellington, my first term. My father was killed in the war."

"Oh! I suppose mine might have been, and my brother. But even then! Dinny says my mother cried when the Armistice came."

"So did mine, I believe."

"The bit I liked best was that between the son and the girl. But the whole thing makes you feel too much. Take me out, I want a cigarette. No, we'd better not. One always meets people."

"Damn!"

"Coming here with you was the limit. I've promised solemnly not to give offence for a whole year. Oh! cheer up! You'll see lots of me . . . ."

"'Greatness, and dignity, and peace,'" murmured Dinny, standing up, "and the greatest of these is 'dignity.'"

"The hardest to come by, anyway."

"That girl singing in the night club, and the jazzed sky! Thank you awfully, Mr. Dornford. I shan't forget this play easily."

"Nor what I said to you?"

"It was very sweet of you, but the aloe only blooms once in a hundred years."

"I can wait. It's been a wonderful evening for me."

"Those two!"

"We'll pick them up in the hall."

"Do you think England ever had greatness and dignity and peace?"

"No."

"But 'There's a green hill far away, without a city wall.' Thank you — I've had this cloak three years."

"Charming it is!"

"I suppose most of these people will go on to night clubs now."

"Not five per cent."

"I should like a sniff of home air to-night, and a long look at the stars . . . ."

Clare turned her head.

"Don't, Tony!"

“How then?”

“You’ve been with me all the evening.”

“If only I could take you home!”

“You can’t, my dear. Squeeze my little finger, and pull yourself together.”

“Clare!”

“Look! They’re just in front — now vanish! Get a good long drink at the Club and dream of horses. There! Was that close enough? Good-night, dear Tony!”

“God! Good-night!”

❦

Chapter 15

Time has been compared with a stream, but it differs — you cannot cross it, grey and even-flowing, wide as the world itself, having neither ford nor bridge; and though, according to philosophers, it may flow both up and down, the calendar as yet follows it but one way.

November, then, became December, but December did not become November. Except for a cold snap or two the weather remained mild. Unemployment decreased; the adverse balance of trade increased; seven foxes escaped for every one killed; the papers fluttered from the storms in their tea-cups; a great deal of income tax was paid; still more was not; the question: "Why has prosperity gone to pot?" continued to bewilder every mind; the pound went up, the pound went down. In short, time flowed, but the conundrum of existence remained unsolved.

At Condaford the bakery scheme was dropped. Every penny that could be raised was to be put into pigs, poultry and potatoes. Sir Lawrence and Michael were now deep in the 'Three P. Plan,' and Dinny had become infected. She and the General spent all their days preparing for the millennium which would follow its adoption. Eustace Dornford had expressed his adherence to the proposition. Figures had been prepared to show that in ten years one hundred millions a year could be knocked off Britain's purchasing bill by graduated prohibition of the import of these three articles of food, without increasing the cost of living. With a little organisation, a fractional change in the nature of the Briton, and the increase of wheat offals, the thing was as good as done. In the meantime, the General borrowed slightly on his life assurance policy and paid his taxes.

The new Member, visiting his constituency, spent Christmas at Condaford, talking almost exclusively of pigs, instinct telling him that they were just then the surest line of approach to Dinny's heart. Clare, too, spent Christmas at home. How, apart from secretarial duties, she had spent the intervening time, was tacitly assumed. No letter had come from Jerry Corven, but it was known from the papers that he was back in Ceylon. During the days between Christmas and the New Year the habitable part of the old house was full: Hilary, his wife, and their daughter Monica; Adrian and Diana, with Sheila and Ronald, now recovered from the measles — no such family gathering had been held for years. Even Sir Lionel and Lady Alison drove down for lunch on New Year's Eve. With such an overwhelming Conservative majority it was felt that 1932 would be important. Dinny was run off her legs. She gave no sign of it, but had less an air of living in the past. So much was she the party's life and soul that no one could have told she had any of her own. Dornford gazed at her in speculation. What was behind that untiring cheerful selflessness? He went so far as to ask of Adrian, who seemed to be her favourite.

"This house wouldn't work without your niece, Mr. Cherrell."

"It wouldn't. Dinny's a wonder."

"Doesn't she ever think of herself?"

Adrian looked at him sideways. The pale-brown, rather hollow-cheeked face, with its dark hair, and hazel eyes, was sympathetic; for a lawyer and a politician, he looked sensitive. Inclined, however, to a sheepdog attitude where Dinny was concerned, he answered with caution:

"Why no, no more than reason; indeed, not so much."

"She looks to me sometimes as if she'd been through something pretty bad."

Adrian shrugged. "She's twenty-seven."

"Would you mind awfully telling me what it was? This isn't curiosity. I'm — well, I'm in love with her, and terrified of butting in and hurting her through ignorance."

Adrian took a long gurgling pull at his pipe.

"If you're in dead earnest —"

"Absolutely dead earnest."

"It might save her a pang or two. She was terribly in love, the year before last, and it came to a tragic end."

"Death?"

"No. I can't tell you the exact story, but the man had done something that placed him, in a sense — or at all events he thought so — outside the pale; and he put an end to their engagement rather than involve Dinny, and went off to the Far East. It was a complete cut. Dinny has never spoken of it since, but I'm afraid she'll never forget."

"I see. Thank you very much. You've done me a great service."

"Sorry if it's hurt," murmured Adrian; "but better, perhaps, to have one's eyes open."

"Much."

Resuming the tune on his pipe, Adrian stole several glances at his silent neighbour. That averted face wore an expression not exactly dashed or sad, but as if contending deeply with the future. 'He's the nearest approach,' he thought, 'to what I should like for her — sensitive, quiet, and plucky. But things are always so damnably perverse!'

"She's very different from her sister," he said at last.

Dornford smiled.

"Ancient and modern."

"Clare's a pretty creature, though."

"Oh, yes, and lots of qualities."

"They've both got grit. How does she do her work?"

"Very well; quick in the uptak', good memory, heaps of savoir-faire."

"Pity she's in such a position. I don't know why things went wrong, and I don't see how they can come right."

"I've never met Corven."

"Quite nice to meet; but, by the look of him, a streak of cruelty."

"Dinny says he's vindictive."

Adrian nodded. "I should think so. And that's bad when it comes to divorce. But I hope it won't — always a dirty business, and probably the wrong person tarred. I don't remember a divorce in our family."

"Nor in mine, but we're Catholics."

"Judging by your experience in the Courts, should you say English morality is going downhill?"

"No. On the upgrade, if anything."

"But surely the standard is slacker?"

"People are franker, not quite the same thing."

"You lawyers and judges, at all events," said Adrian, "are exceptionally moral men."

"Oh! Where did you get that from?"

"The papers."

Dornford laughed.

"Well!" said Adrian, rising. "Let's have a game of billiards . . . ."

On the Monday after New Year's Day the party broke up. In the afternoon Dinny lay down on her bed and went to sleep. The grey light failed and darkness filled her room. She dreamed she was on the bank of a river. Wilfrid was holding her hand, pointing to the far side, and saying: "'One more river, one more river to cross!'" Hand in hand they went down the bank. In the water all became dark! She lost touch of his hand and cried out in terror. Losing her foothold, she drifted, reaching her hands this way and that, and his voice, further and further away, "'One more river — one more river,'" died to a sigh. She awoke agonised. Through the window opposite was the dark sky, the elm tree brushing at the stars — no sound, no scent, no colour. And she lay quite still, drawing deep breaths to get the better of her anguish. It was long since she had felt Wilfrid so close to her, or been so poignantly bereaved once more.

She got up, and, having bathed her face in cold water, stood at her window looking into the starry dark, still shuddering a little from the vivid misery of her dream. 'One more river!'

Someone tapped on the door.

"Yes?"

"It's old Mrs. Purdy, Miss Dinny. They say she's going fast. The doctor's there, but —"

"Betty! Does Mother know?"

“Yes, miss, she’s going over.”

“No! I’ll go. Stop her, Annie!”

“Yes, miss. It’s a seizure — nurse sent over to say they can’t do nothing. Will you have the light on, miss?”

“Yes, turn it up.”

Thank God they had managed to put the electric light in, at last!

“Get me this little flask filled with brandy, and put my rubber boots in the hall. I shan’t be two minutes coming down.”

“Yes, miss.”

Slipping on a jersey and cap, and catching up her mole-skin fur coat, she ran downstairs, stopping for a second at her mother’s door to say she was going. Putting on her rubber boots in the hall, and taking the filled flask, she went out. It was groping dark, but not cold for January. The lane was slithery under foot, and, since she had no torch, the half mile took her nearly a quarter of an hour. The doctor’s car, with its lights on, stood outside the cottage. Unlatching the door, Dinny went into the ground-floor room. There was a fire burning, and one candle alight, but the crowded homely space was deserted by all but the goldfinch in its large cage. She opened the thin door that shut the stairs off, and went up. Pushing the feeble top door gently, she stood looking. A lamp was burning on the window-sill opposite, and the low, sagging-ceilinged room had a shadowy radiance. At the foot of the double bed were the doctor and village nurse, talking in low tones. In the window corner Dinny could see the little old husband crouched on a chair, with his hands on his knees and his crumpled, cherry-cheeked face trembling and jerking slightly. The old cottage woman lay humped in the old bed; her face was waxen, and seemed to Dinny to have lost already almost all its wrinkles. A faint stertorous breathing came from her lips. The eyes were not quite closed, but surely were not seeing.

The doctor crossed to the door.

“Opiate,” he said. “I don’t think she’ll recover consciousness. Just as well for the poor old soul! If she does, nurse has another to give her at once. There’s nothing to be done but ease the end.”

“I shall stay,” said Dinny.

The doctor took her hand.

“Happy release. Don’t fret, my dear.”

“Poor old Benjy!” whispered Dinny.

The doctor pressed her hand, and went down the stairs.

Dinny entered the room; the air was close, and she left the door ajar.

“I’ll watch, nurse, if you want to get anything.”

The nurse nodded. In her neat dark blue dress and bonnet she looked, but for a little frown, almost inhumanly impassive. They stood side by side gazing at the old woman’s waxen face.

“Not many like her,” whispered the nurse suddenly. “I’m going to get some things I’ll want — back under the half-hour. Sit down, Miss Cherrell, don’t tire yourself.”

When she had gone Dinny turned and went up to the old husband in the corner.

“Benjy.”

He wobbled his pippin head, rubbing his hands on his knees. Words of comfort refused to come to Dinny. Just touching his shoulder, she went back to the bed and drew up the one hard wooden chair. She sat, silently watching old Betty’s lips, whence issued that faintly stertorous breathing. It seemed to her as if the spirit of a far-off age were dying. There might be other people as old still alive in the village, but they weren’t like old Betty, with her simple sense and thrifty order, her Bible-reading and love of gentry, her pride in her eighty-three years, in the teeth that she ought long since to have parted from, and in her record; with her shrewdness and her way of treating her old husband as if he were her rather difficult son. Poor old Benjy — he was not her equal by any manner of means, but what he would do alone one couldn’t think. Perhaps one of his granddaughters would find room for him. Those two had brought up seven children in the old days when a shilling fortunately went as far as three now, and the village was full of their progeny; but how would they like little old Benjy, still argumentative and fond of a grumble and a glass, ensconced by their more modern hearths? Well, a nook would turn up for him somewhere. He could never live on here, alone. Two old age pensions for two old people made just the difference as against one for one.

‘How I wish I had money!’ she thought. He would not want the goldfinch, anyway. She would take that, and free and feed it in the old greenhouse till it got used to its wings, and then let it go.

The old man cleared his throat in his dim corner. Dinny started and leaned forward. Absorbed in her thoughts, she had not noticed how faint the breathing had become. The pale lips of the old woman were nearly closed now, the wrinkled lids almost fast over the unseeing eyes. No noise was coming from the bed. For a few minutes she sat looking, listening; then passed round to the side and leaned over.

Gone? As if in answer the eyelids flickered; the faintest imaginable smile appeared on the lips, and then, suddenly as a blown-out flame is dark, all was lifeless. Dinny held her breath. It was the first human death she had seen. Her eyes, glued to the old waxen face, saw it settle into its mask of release, watched it being embalmed in that still dignity which marks death off from life. With her finger she smoothed the eyelids.

Death! At its quietest and least harrowing, but yet — death! The old, the universal anodyne; the common lot! In this bed where she had lain nightly for over fifty years under the low, sagged ceiling, a great little old lady had passed. Of what was called ‘birth,’ of position, wealth, and power, she had none. No plumbing had come her way, no learning, and no fashion. She had borne children, nursed, fed, and washed them, sewn, cooked, and swept, eaten little, travelled not at all in all her years, suffered much pain, never known the ease of superfluity; but her back had been straight, her ways straight, her eyes quiet, and her manners gentle. If she were not the ‘great lady,’ who was?

Dinny stood, with her head bowed, feeling this to the very marrow of her soul. Old Benjy in that dim corner cleared his throat again. She started, and, trembling a little, went over to him.

“Go and look at her, Benjy; she’s asleep.”

She put her hand under his elbow to help the action of his stiffened knees. At his full height he was only up to her shoulder, a little dried-up pippin of a man. She kept at his side, moving across the room.

Together they looked down at the forehead and cheeks, slowly uncreasing in the queer beauty of death. The little old husband’s face went crimson and puffy, like that of a child who had lost its doll; he said in a sort of angered squeak:

“Eh! She’m not asleep. She’m gone. She won’t never speak agen. Look! She an’t Mother no more! Where’s that nurse? She didn’ ought to ‘ave left ‘er —”

“H’ssh! Benjy!”

“But she’m dead. What’ll I do?”

He turned his withered apple face up to Dinny, and there came from him an unwashed odour, as of grief and snuff and old potatoes.

“Can’t stop ’ere,” he said, “with Mother like that. ‘Tain’t nateral.”

“No; go downstairs and smoke your pipe, and tell nurse when she comes.”

“Tell ‘er; I’ll tell ‘er — shoulden never ‘ave left ‘er. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!”

Putting her hand on his shoulders, Dinny guided him to the stairway, and watched him stumbling and groping and grieving his way down. Then she went back to the bed. The smoothed-out face had an uncanny attraction for her. With every minute that passed it seemed the more to proclaim superiority. Almost triumphant it was, as she gazed, in its slow, sweet relaxation after age and pain; character revealed in the mould of that brief interval between torturing life and corrupting death. ‘Good as gold!’ Those were the words they should grave on the humble stone they would put over her. Wherever she was now, or whether, indeed, she was anywhere, did not matter. She had done her bit. Betty!

She was still standing there gazing when the nurse came back.

❦

Chapter 16

Since her husband's departure Clare had met young Croom constantly, but always at the stipulated arm's-length. Love had made him unsociable, and to be conspicuously in his company was unwise, so she did not make him known to her friends; they met where they could eat cheaply, see films, or simply walk. To her rooms she had not invited him again, nor had he asked to come. His behaviour, indeed, was exemplary, except when he fell into tense and painful silences, or gazed at her till her hands itched to shake him. He seemed to have paid several visits to Jack Muskham's stud farm, and to be spending hours over books which debated whether the excellence of 'Eclipse' was due to the Lister Turk, rather than to the Darley Arabian, and whether it were preferable to breed-in to Blacklock with St. Simon on Speculum or with Speculum on St. Simon.

When she returned from Condaford after the New Year, she had not heard from him for five consecutive days, so that he was bulking more largely in her thoughts.

"DEAR TONY," she wrote to him at the Coffee House:

"Where and how are you? I am back. Very happy New Year!

"Yours always,

"CLARE."

The answer did not come for three days, during which she felt at first huffy, then anxious, and finally a little scared. It was indited from the inn at Bablock Hythe:

"DARLING CLARE —

"I was ever so relieved to get your note, because I'd determined not to write until I heard from you. Nothing's further from my thoughts than to bore you with myself, and sometimes I don't know whether I am or not. So far as a person can be who is not seeing you, I'm all right; I'm overlooking the fitting up of the boxes for those mares. They (the boxes) will be prime. The difficulty is going to be acclimatisation; it's supposed to be mild here, and the pasture looks as if it would be tip-top. This part of the world is quite pretty, especially the river. Thank God the inn's cheap, and I can live indefinitely on eggs and bacon. Jack Muskham has been brick enough to start my salary from the New Year, so I'm thinking of laying out my remaining sixty-odd pounds on Stapylton's old two-seater. He's just off back to India. Once I'm down here it'll be vital to have a car if I'm to see anything of you, without which life won't be worth living. I hope you had a splendid time at Condaford. Do you know I haven't seen you for sixteen days, and am absolutely starving. I'll be up on Saturday afternoon. Where can I meet you?

"Your ever devoted

"TONY."

Clare read this letter on the sofa in her room, frowning a little as she opened, smiling a little as she finished it.

Poor dear Tony! Grabbing a telegraph form, she wrote:

"Come to tea Melton Mews. — C."

and despatched it on her way to the Temple.

The importance attaching to the meeting of two young people depends on the importance which others attach to their not meeting. Tony Croom approached Melton Mews without thinking of anyone but Clare, and failed to observe a shortish man in horn-rimmed spectacles, black boots, and a claret-coloured tie, who looked like the secretary of a learned society. Unobtrusive and unobserved, this individual had already travelled with him from Bablock Hythe to Paddington, from Paddington to the 'Coffee House,' from the 'Coffee House' to the corner of Melton Mews; had watched him enter No. 2, made an entry in a pocket-book, and with an evening paper in his hand was now waiting for him to come out again. With touching fidelity he read no news, keeping his prominent glance on that peacock-blue door, prepared at any moment to close himself like an umbrella and vanish into the street-scape. And while he waited (which was his normal occupation) he thought, like other citizens, of the price of living, of the cup of tea which he would like, of his small daughter and her collection of foreign stamps, and of whether he would now have to pay income tax. His imagination dwelled, also, on the curves of a young woman at the tobacconist's where he obtained his 'gaspers.'

His name was Chayne, and he made his living out of a remarkable memory for faces, inexhaustible patience, careful entries in his pocket-book, the faculty of self-obliteration, and that fortunate resemblance to the secretaries of learned societies. He was, indeed, employed by the Polteed Agency, who made their living by knowing more than was good for those about whom they knew it. Having received his instruction on the day Clare returned to London, he had already been five days ‘on the job,’ and no one knew it except his employer and himself. Spying on other people being, according to the books he read, the chief occupation of the people of these islands, it had never occurred to him to look down on a profession conscientiously pursued for seventeen years. He took a pride in his work, and knew himself for a capable ‘sleuth.’ Though somewhat increasingly troubled in the bronchial regions owing to the draughts he had so often to stand in, he could not by now imagine any other way of passing his time, or any, on the whole, more knowing method of gaining a livelihood. Young Croom’s address he had obtained by the simple expedient of waiting behind Clare while she sent her telegram; but, having just failed to read the message itself, he had started at once for Bablock Hythe, since when until now he had experienced no difficulty. Shifting his position from time to time at the end of the street, he entered the Mews itself when it became dark. At half-past five the peacock door was opened and the two young people emerged. They walked, and Mr. Chayne walked behind them. They walked fast, and Mr. Chayne, with an acquired sense of rhythm, at exactly the same pace. He soon perceived that they were merely going to where he had twice followed Lady Corven already — the Temple. And this gave him a sense of comfort, because of the cup of tea he pined for. Picking his way in and out among the backs of people large enough to screen him, he watched them enter Middle Temple Lane, and part at Harcourt Buildings. Having noted that Lady Corven went in, and that the young man began parading slowly between the entrance and the Embankment, he looked at his watch, doubled back into the Strand, and bolted into an A.B.C. with the words “Cup of tea and Bath bun, miss, please.” While waiting for these he made a prolonged entry in his pocket-book. Then, blowing on his tea, he drank it from the saucer, ate half the bun, concealed the other half in his hand, paid, and re-entered the Strand. He had just finished the bun when he regained the entrance to the Lane. The young man was still parading slowly. Mr. Chayne waited for his back view, and, assuming the air of a belated solicitor’s clerk, bolted down past the entrance to Harcourt Buildings into the Inner Temple. There, in a doorway, he scrutinised names until Clare came out. Rejoined by young Croom, she walked up towards the Strand, and Mr. Chayne walked too. When, shortly, they took tickets for a cinema, he also took a ticket and entered the row behind. Accustomed to the shadowing of people on their guard, the open innocence they were displaying excited in him a slightly amused if not contemptuous compassion. ‘Regular babes in the wood’ they seemed to him. He could not tell whether their feet were touching, and passed behind to note the position of their hands. It seemed satisfactory, and he took an empty seat nearer to the gangway. Sure of them now for a couple of hours, he settled down to smoke, feel warm, and enjoy the film. It was one of sport and travel in Africa, where the two principals were always in positions of danger, recorded by the camera of someone who must surely have been in a position of still greater danger. Mr. Chayne listened to their manly American voices saying to each other: “Gee! He’s on us!” with an interest which never prevented his knowing that his two young people were listening too. When the lights went up he could see their profiles. ‘We’re all young at times,’ he thought, and his imagination dwelled more intensively on the young lady at his tobacconist’s. They looked so settled-in that he took the opportunity to slip out for a moment. It might not occur again for a long time. In his opinion one of the chief defects in detective stories — for he was given to busmen’s holidays — was that authors made their ‘sleuths’ like unto the angels, watching for days without, so to speak, taking their eye off the ball. It was not so in real life.

He returned to a seat almost behind his young couple on the other side just before the lights went down. One of his favourite stars was now to be featured, and, sure that she would be placed in situations which would enable him to enjoy her to the full, he put a peppermint lozenge in his mouth and leaned back with a sigh. He had not had an evening watch so pleasant for a long time. It was not always ‘beer and skittles’ at this season of the year; a ‘proper chilly job sometimes — no error.’

After ten minutes, during which his star had barely got into her evening clothes, his couple rose.

“Can’t stand any more of her voice,” he heard Lady Corven say; and the young man answering: “Ghastly!”

Wounded and surprised, Mr. Chayne waited for them to pass through the curtains before, with a profound sigh, he followed. In the Strand they stood debating, then walked again, but only into a restaurant across the street. Here, buying himself another paper at the door, he saw them going up the stairs. Would it be a private room? He ascended the stairs cautiously. No, it was the gallery! There they were, nicely screened by the pillars, four tables in!

Descending to the lavatory, Mr. Chayne changed his horn spectacles to pince-nez and his claret-coloured tie to a rather floppy bow of black and white. This was a device which had often served him in good stead. You put on a tie of conspicuous colour, then changed it to a quieter one of a different shape. A conspicuous tie had the special faculty of distracting attention from a face. You became 'that man with the awful tie!' and when you no longer wore the tie, you were to all intents someone else. Going up again to a table which commanded a view, he ordered himself a mixed grill and pint of stout. They were likely to be some two hours over their meal, so he assumed a literary air, taking out a pouch to roll himself a cigarette and inviting the waiter to give him a light for it. Having in this way established a claim to a life of his own, he read his paper like any gentleman at large and examined the mural paintings. They were warm and glowing; large landscapes with blue skies, seas, palms, and villas, suggestive of pleasure in a way that appealed to him strongly. He had never been further than Boulogne, and, so far as he could see, never would. Five hundred pounds, a lady, a suite in the sun, and gaming tables handy, was not unnaturally his idea of heaven; but, alas, as unattainable. He made no song about it, but, when confronted with allurements like these on the wall, he could not help hankering. It had often struck him as ironical that the people he watched into the Divorce Court so often went to Paradise and stayed there until their cases had blown over and they could marry and come to earth again. Living in Finchley, with the sun once a fortnight and an income averaging perhaps five hundred a year, the vein of poetry in him was damned almost at source; and it was in some sort a relief to let his imagination play around the lives of those whom he watched. That young couple over there, 'good-lookers' both of them, would go back together in a taxi as likely as not he'd have to wait hours for the young man to come away. The mixed grill was put before him, and he added a little red pepper in view of his probable future. This bit of watching, however, and perhaps another one or two, ought to do the trick; and on the whole 'easy money.' Slowly savouring each mouthful so that it might nourish him, and blowing the froth off his stout with the skill of a connoisseur, he watched them bending forward to talk across the table. What they were eating he could not see. To have followed their meal in detail would have given him some indication of their states of mind. Food and love! After this grill he would have cheese and coffee, and put them down to 'expenses.'

He had eaten every crumb, extracted all the information from his paper, exhausted his imagination on the mural paintings, 'placed' the scattered diners, paid his bill, and smoked three 'gaspers' before his quarry rose. He was into his overcoat and outside the entrance before they had even reached the stairs. Noting three taxis within hail, he bent his attention on the hoardings of an adjoining theatre; till he saw the porter beckon one of them, then, walking into the middle of the Strand, he took the one behind it.

"Wait till that cab starts and follow it," he said to the driver, "not too close when it stops."

Taking his seat, he looked at his watch and made an entry in his pocket-book. Having before now followed a wrong cab at some expense, he kept his eyes glued on the taxi's number, which he had noted in his book. The traffic was but thin at this hour before the theatres rose, and the procession simplicity itself. The followed cab stopped at the corner of the Mews. Mr. Chayne tapped the glass and fell back on the seat. Through the window he saw them get out and the young man paying. They walked down the Mews. Mr. Chayne also paid and followed to the corner. They had reached the peacock door and stood there, talking. Then Lady Corven put her key into the lock and opened the door; the young man, glancing this way and that, followed her in. Mr. Chayne experienced a sensation as mixed as his grill. It was, of course, exactly what he had hoped for and expected. At the same time it meant loitering about in the cold for goodness knew how long. He turned up his coat collar and looked for a convenient doorway. A thousand pities that he could not wait, say half an hour, and just walk in. The Courts were very particular nowadays about conclusive evidence. He had something of the feeling that a 'sportsman' has, seeing a fox go to ground and not a spade within five miles. He stood for a few minutes, reading over the entries in his pocket-book under the lamp, and making a final note; then walked to the doorway he had selected and stood there. In half an hour or so the cars would be coming back from the theatre, and he would have to be on the move to escape attention. There was a light in the upstairs window, but in itself, of course, that was not evidence. Too bad! Twelve shillings the return ticket, ten and six the night down there, cabs seven and six; cinema three and six, dinner six bob — he wouldn't charge the tea — thirty-nine and six — say two pounds! Mr. Chayne shook his head, put a peppermint lozenge in his mouth, and changed his feet. That corn of his was beginning to shoot a bit. He thought of pleasant things: Broadstairs, his small daughter's back hair, oyster patties, his favourite 'star' in little but a corset belt, and his own nightcap of hot whisky and lemon. All to small purpose; for he was waiting and waiting on feet that ached, and without any confidence that he was collecting anything of real value. The Courts, indeed, had got into such a habit of expecting the parties to be 'called with a cup of tea' that anything short of it was looked upon as suspect. He took out his watch again. He had been here over half an hour. And here came the first car! He must get out of the Mews! He withdrew to its far end. And then almost before he had time to turn his back there came the young man with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his shoulders hunched, hurrying away. Heaving a sigh of relief, Mr. Chayne noted in his pocket-book: "Mr. C. left at 11.40 p.m."; and walked towards his Finchley bus.

❦

CHAPTER 17

Though Dinny had no expert knowledge of pictures, she had, with Wilfrid, made an intensive examination of such as were on permanent show in London. She had also enjoyed extremely the Italian Exhibition of 1930. It was, therefore, natural to accept her Uncle Adrian's invitation to accompany him to the French Exhibition of 1932. After a syncopated lunch in Piccadilly they passed through the turnstile at one o'clock on January the 22nd, and took stand before the Primitives. Quite a number of people were emulating their attempt to avoid the crowd, so that their progress was slow, and it was an hour before they had reached the Watteaus.

"'Gilles,'" said Adrian, resting one leg; "that strikes me as about the best picture yet, Dinny. It's queer — when a genre painter of the decorative school gets hold of a subject or a type that grips him, how thoroughly he'll stir you up. Look at the pierrot's face — what a brooding, fateful, hiding-up expression! There's the public performer, with the private life, incarnate!"

Dinny remained silent.

"Well, young woman?"

"I was wondering whether art was so conscious. Don't you think he just wanted to paint that white dress, and his model did the rest? It's a marvellous expression, but perhaps he had it. People do."

Adrian noted her face with the tail of his eye. Yes! People did. Paint her in repose, render her when she wasn't aware of how she was looking, of keeping her end up, or whatever you might call it, and wouldn't you have a face that stirred you with all that lay behind it? Art was unsatisfactory. When it gave you the spirit, distilled the essence, it didn't seem real; and when it gave you the gross, cross-currented, contradictory surface, it didn't seem worth while. Attitudes, fleeting expressions, tricks of light — all by way of being 'real,' and nothing revealed! He said suddenly:

"Great books and portraits are so dashed rare, because artists won't high-light the essential, or if they do, they overdo it."

"I don't see how that applies to this picture, Uncle. It's not a portrait, it's a dramatic moment and a white dress."

"Perhaps! All the same, if I could paint you, Dinny, as you truly are, people would say you weren't real."

"How fortunate!"

"Most people can't even imagine you."

"Forgive imperence, Uncle, but — can YOU?"

Adrian wrinkled up his goatee.

"I like to think so."

"Oh, look! There's the Boucher Pompadour!"

After two minutes in front of its expanse Adrian continued:

"Well, for a man who preferred it nude, he could paint what covers the female body pretty well, couldn't he?"

"Maintenon and Pompadour. I always get them mixed."

"The Maintenon wore blue stockings, and ministered to Louis the XIVth."

"Oh, yes! Let's go straight from here to the Manets, Uncle."

"Why?"

"I don't think I shall last much longer."

Adrian, glancing round, suddenly saw why. In front of the Gilles were standing Clare and a young man whom he did not know. He put his arm through Dinny's and they passed into the next room but one.

"I noticed your discretion," he murmured, in front of the 'Boy Blowing Bubbles.' "Is that young man a snake in the grass, or a worm in the bud, or —?"

"A very nice boy."

"What's his name?"

"Tony Croom."

"Oh! the young man on the ship? Does Clare see much of him?"

"I don't ask her, Uncle. She is guaranteed to behave for a year"; and, at the cock of Adrian's eyebrow, added: "She promised Aunt Em."

"And after the year?"

"I don't know, nor does she. Aren't these Manets good?"

They passed slowly through the room and came to the last.

"To think that Gauguin struck me as the cream of eccentricity in 1910," murmured Adrian; "it shows how things move. I went to that post-impressionist exhibition straight from looking at the Chinese pictures in the B. M. Cézanne, Matisse, Gauguin, Van Gogh — the last word then, hoary now. Gauguin certainly IS a colourist. But give me the Chinese still. I fear I'm fundamentally of the old order, Dinny."

"I can see these are good — most of them; but I couldn't live with them."

"The French have their uses; no other country can show you the transitions of art so dearly. From the Primitives to Clouet, from Clouet to Poussin and Claude, from them to Watteau and his school, thence to Boucher and Greuze, on to Ingres and Delacroix, to the Barbizon lot, to the Impressionists, to the Post-Impressionists; and always some bloke — Chardin, Lépicié, Fragonard, Manet, Degas, Monet, Cezanne — breaking away or breaking through towards the next."

"Has there ever before been such a violent break as just lately?"

"There's never before been such a violent break in the way people look at life; nor such complete confusion in the minds of artists as to what they exist for."

"And what DO they exist for, Uncle?"

"To give pleasure or reveal truth, or both."

"I can't imagine myself enjoying what they enjoy, and — what is truth?"

Adrian turned up his thumbs.

"Dinny, I'm tired as a dog. Let's slip out."

Dinny saw her sister and young Croom passing through the archway. She was not sure whether Clare had noticed them, and young Croom was clearly noticing nothing but Clare. She followed Adrian out, in her turn admiring his discretion. But neither of them would admit uneasiness. With whom one went about was now so entirely one's own business.

They had walked up the Burlington Arcade, when Adrian was suddenly startled by the pallor of her face.

"What's the matter, Dinny? You look like a ghost!"

"If you don't mind, Uncle, I'd like a cup of coffee."

"There's a place in Bond Street." Scared by the bloodlessness of her smiling lips, he held her arm firmly till they were seated at a little table round the corner.

"Two coffees — extra strong," said Adrian, and with that instinctive consideration which caused women and children to confide in him, he made no attempt to gain her confidence.

"Nothing so tiring as picture-gazing. I'm sorry to emulate Em and suspect you of not eating enough, my dear. That sort of sparrow-pecking we did before going in doesn't really count." But colour had come back to her lips.

"I'm very tough, Uncle; but food IS rather a bore."

"You and I must go a little tour in France. Their grub can move one's senses if their pictures can't move one's spirit."

"Did you feel THAT?"

"Compared with the Italian — emphatically. It's all so beautifully thought out. They make their pictures like watches. Perfectly art-conscious and thorough workmen. Unreasonable to ask for more, and yet — perhaps fundamentally unpoetic. And that reminds me, Dinny, I do hope Clare can be kept out of the Divorce Court, for of all unpoetic places that is IT."

Dinny shook her head.

"I'd rather she got it over. I even think she was wrong to promise. She's not going to change her mind about Jerry. She'll be like a bird with one leg. Besides, who thinks the worse of you nowadays!"

Adrian moved uncomfortably.

“I dislike the thought of those hard-boiled fellows playing battledore with my kith and kin. If they were like Dornford — but they aren’t. Seen anything more of him?”

“He was down with us for one night when he had to speak.”

He noticed that she spoke without ‘batting an eyelid,’ as the young men called it nowadays. And, soon after, they parted, Dinny assuring him that she had “come over quite well again.”

He had said that she looked like a ghost; he might better have said she looked as if she had seen one. For, coming out of that Arcade, all her past in Cork Street had come fluttering like some lonely magpie towards her, beaten wings in her face and swerved away. And now, alone, she turned and walked back there. Resolutely she went to the door, climbed the stairs to Wilfrid’s rooms, and rang the bell. Leaning against the window-sill on the landing, she waited with elapsed hands, thinking: ‘I wish I had a muff!” Her hands felt so cold. In old pictures they stood with veils down and their hands in muffs; but ‘the old order changeth,’ and she had none. She was just going away when the door was opened. Stack! In slippers! His glance, dark and prominent as ever, fell to those slippers and his demeanour seemed to stammer.

“Pardon me, miss, I was just going to change ’em.”

Dinny held out her hand, and he took it with his old air, as if about to ‘confess’ her.

“I was passing, and thought I’d like to ask how you were.”

“Fine, thank you, miss! Hope you’ve been keeping well, and the dog?”

“Quite well, both of us. Foch likes the country.”

“Ah! Mr. Desert always thought he was a country dog.”

“Have you any news?”

“Not to say news, miss. I understand from his bank that he’s still in Siam. They forward his letters to their branch in Bangkok. His lordship was here not long ago, and I understood him to say that Mr. Desert was up a river somewhere.”

“A river!”

“The name escapes me, something with a ‘Yi’ in it, and a ‘sang’— was it? I believe it’s very ‘ot there. If I may say so, miss, you haven’t much colour considering the country. I was down home in Barnstaple at Christmas, and it did me a power of good.”

Dinny took his hand again.

“I’m very glad to have seen you, Stack.”

“Come in, miss. You’ll see I keep the room just as it was.”

Dinny followed to the doorway of the sitting-room.

“Exactly the same, Stack; he might almost be there.”

“I like to think so, miss.”

“Perhaps he is,” said Dinny. “They say we have astral bodies. Thank you.” She touched his arm, passed him, and went down the stairs. Her face quivered and was still, and she walked rapidly away.

A river! Her dream! ‘One more river!’

In Bond Street a voice said: “Dinny!” and she turned to see Fleur.

“Whither away, my dear? Haven’t seen you for an age. I’ve just been to the French pictures. Aren’t they divine? I saw Clare there with a young man in tow. Who is he?”

“A shipmate — Tony Croom.”

“More to come?”

Dinny shrugged, and, looking at her trim companion, thought: ‘I wish Fleur didn’t always go so straight to the point.’

“Any money?”

“No. He’s got a job, but it’s very slender — Mr. Muskham’s Arab mares.”

“Oh! Three hundred a year — five at the outside. That’s no good at all. You know, really, she’s making a great mistake. Jerry Corven will go far.”

Dinny said drily: “Further than Clare, anyway.”

"You mean it's a complete breach?"

Dinny nodded. She had never been so near disliking Fleur.

"Well, Clare's not like you. She belongs to the new order, or disorder. That's why it's a mistake. She'd have a much better time if she stuck to Jerry, nominally at least. I can't see her poor."

"She doesn't care about money," said Dinny coldly.

"Oh, nonsense! Money's only being able to do what you want to do. Clare certainly cares about that."

Dinny, who knew that this was true, said, still more coldly:

"It's no good to try and explain."

"My dear, there's nothing to explain. He's hurt her in some way, as, of course, he would. That's no reason in the long run. That perfectly lovely Renoir — the man and woman in the box! Those people lived lives of their own — together. Why shouldn't Clare?"

"Would you?"

Fleur gave a little shrug of her beautifully fitted shoulders.

"If Michael wasn't such a dear. Besides — children." Again she gave that little shrug.

Dinny thawed. "You're a fraud, Fleur. You don't practise what you preach."

"My dear, my case is exceptional."

"So is everybody's."

"Well, don't let's squabble. Michael says your new Member, Dornford, is after his own heart. They're working together on pigs, poultry, and potatoes. A great stunt, and the right end of the stick, for once."

"Yes, we're going all out for pigs at Condaford. Is Uncle Lawrence doing anything at Lippinghall?"

"No. He invented the plan, so he thinks he's done his bit. Michael will make him do more when he's got time. Em is screamingly funny about it. How do you like Dornford?"

Asked this question twice in one morning, Dinny looked her cousin by marriage full in the face.

"He seems to me almost a paragon."

She felt Fleur's hand slip suddenly under her arm.

"I wish you'd marry him, Dinny dear. One doesn't marry paragons, but I fancy one could 'fault' him if one tried."

It was Dinny's turn to give a little shrug, looking straight before her.

❦

CHAPTER 18

The third of February was a day so bland and of such spring-like texture that the quickened blood demanded adventure.

This was why Tony Croom sent an early wire and set out at noon from Bablock Hythe in his old but newly-acquired two-seater. The car was not his 'dream,' but it could do fifty at the pinch he liked to give it. He took the nearest bridge, ran for Abingdon, and on past Benson to Henley. There he stopped to snatch a sandwich and 'fill up,' and again on the bridge for a glimpse at the sunlit river softly naked below the bare woods. From there on he travelled by the dock, timing himself to reach Melton Mews at two o'clock.

Clare was not ready, having only just come in. He sat in the downstairs room, now furnished with three chairs, a small table, of quaint design, cheap owing to the slump in antiques, and an amethyst-coloured chased decanter containing sloe gin. Nearly half an hour he sat there before she came down the spiral stairs in fawn-coloured tweeds and hat, with a calfskin fur coat over her arm.

"Well, my dear! Sorry to have kept you. Where are we going?"

"I thought you might care to have a look at Bablock Hythe. Then we might come back through Oxford, have high tea there, wander about a bit among the colleges, and be back here before eleven. That do?"

"Perfect. And where will you sleep?"

"I? Oh! tool along home again. I'd be there by one."

"Poor Tony! A hard day!"

"Oh! Not two hundred and fifty miles. You won't want your fur on yet, the car doesn't open — worse luck."

They passed out at the westward mouth of the mews, narrowly missing a motor cyclist, and slid on towards the Park.

"She goes well, Tony."

"Yes, she's an easy old thing, but I always feel she might bust at any moment. Stapylton gave her a terrible doing. And I don't like a light-coloured car."

Clare leaned back, by the smile on her lips she was enjoying herself.

There was little conversation on that, the first long drive they had taken together. Both had the youthful love of speed, and young Croom got every ounce out of the car that the traffic would permit. They reached the last crossing of the river under two hours.

"Here's the inn where I dig," he said presently. "Would you like tea?"

"Not wise, my dear. When I've seen the boxes and paddocks, we'll get out of here to where you're not known."

"I must just show you the river."

Through its poplars and willow trees the white way of the river gleamed, faintly goldened by the sunken sun. They got out to look. The lamb's tails on the hazels were very forward.

Clare twisted off a spray.

"False spring. There's a lot to come before the real spring yet."

A current of chilly air came stealing down the river, and mist could be seen rising on the meadows beyond.

"Only a ferry here, then, Tony?"

"Yes, and a short cut into Oxford the other side, about five miles. I've walked it once or twice: rather nice."

"When the blossom and meadow flowers come, it'll be jolly. Come along! Just show me where the paddocks lie, and we'll get on to Oxford."

They got back into the car.

"Won't you see the boxes?"

She shook her head.

"I'll wait till the mares are here. There's a subtle distinction between your bringing me to look at boxes and my coming to look at mares. Are they really from Nejd?"

“So Muskham swears. I shall believe or not when I’ve seen the syces in charge of them.”

“What colour?”

“Two bays and a chestnut.”

The three paddocks sloped slightly towards the river and were sheltered by a long spinney.

“Ideal drainage and all the sun there is. The boxes are round that corner under the spinney. There’s a good deal to do still; we’re putting in a heater.”

“It’s very quiet here.”

“Practically no cars on this road; motor cycles now and then — there’s one now.”

A cycle came sputtering towards them, stopped, wrenched round, and went sputtering back.

“Noisy brutes!” murmured young Croom. “However, the mares will have had their baptism by the time they get here.”

“What a change for them, poor dears!”

“They’re all to be golden something: Golden Sand, Golden Houri, and Golden Hind, these three.”

“I didn’t know Jack Muskham was a poet.”

“It stops at horses, I think.”

“Really marvellous, the stillness, Tony!”

“Past five. The men have stopped work on my cottages — they’re converting.”

“How many rooms?”

“Four. Bedroom, sitting-room, kitchen, bathroom. But one could build on.”

He looked at her intently. But her face was averted.

“Well,” he said abruptly, “all aboard. We’ll get to Oxford before dark.”

Oxford — between lights, like all towns, at its worst — seemed to say: “Doomed to villadom, cars, and modernity, I am beyond your aid.”

To those two, hungry and connected with Cambridge, it offered little attraction till they were seated in the Mitre before anchovy sandwiches, boiled eggs, toast, muffins, scones, jam, and a large pot of tea. With every mouthful the romance of Oxford became apparent. This old inn, where they alone were eating, the shining fire, red curtains being drawn, the unexpected cosy solitude, prepared them to find it ‘marvellous’ when they should set forth. A motor cyclist in leather overalls looked in and went away. Three undergraduates chirped in the doorway, selected a table for dinner, and passed on. Now and again a waitress renewed their toast or fiddled at some table. They were deliciously alone. Not till past seven did they rise.

“Let’s scout,” said Clare. “We’ve lots of time.”

The Oxford world was dining, and the streets were almost empty. They wandered at random, choosing the narrower ways and coming suddenly on colleges and long old walls. Nothing seemed modern now. The Past had them by the throat. Dark towers, and old half-lit stone-work; winding, built in, glimpsy passages; the sudden spacious half-lighted gloom of a chanced-on quadrangle; chiming of clocks, and the feeling of a dark and old and empty town that was yet brimming with hidden modern life and light, kept them almost speechless; and, since they had never known their way, they were at once lost.

Young Croom had entwined her arm in his, and kept his step in time to hers. Neither of them was romantic, but both just then had a feeling as if they had wandered into the maze of history.

“I rather wish,” said Clare, “that I’d been up here or at Cambridge.”

“One never got a nooky feeling like this at Cambridge. In the dark this is much more mediæval. There the colleges are together in a line. The ‘backs’ lay over anything they’ve got here, but the old atmosphere here is far stronger.”

“I believe I could have enjoyed the past. Palfreys and buff jerkins. You’d have looked divine, Tony, in a buff jerkin, and one of those caps with a long green feather.”

“The present with you is good enough for me. This is the longest time we’ve ever spent together without a break.”

“Don’t get soppy. We’re here to look at Oxford. Which way shall we go now?”

“All the same to me,” said his remote voice.

"Hurt? That's a big college! Let's go in."

"They'll be coming out of hall. Past eight; we'd better stick to the streets."

They wandered up the Cornmarket to the Broad, stood before the statues on the right, then turned into a dim square with a circular building in the centre, a church at the end, and colleges for its side walls.

"This must be the heart," said Clare. "Oxford certainly has its points. Whatever they do to the outside, I don't see how they can spoil all this."

With mysterious suddenness the town had come to life; youths were passing with short gowns over their arms, flapping free, or wound round their necks. Of one of them young Croom asked where they were.

"That's the Radcliffe. This is Brasenose, and the High's down there."

"And the Mitre?"

"To your right."

"Thanks."

"Not at all."

He bent his uncapped head towards Clare and flapped on.

"Well, Tony?"

"Let's go in and have cocktails."

A motorist, well capped and leathered, standing by his cycle, looked after them intently as they went into the hotel.

After cocktails and biscuits, they came out feeling, as young Croom said: "Bright and early. We'll go back over Magdalen Bridge, through Benson, Dorchester, and Henley."

"Stop on the bridge, Tony. I want to see my name-sake."

The bridge lights threw splashes on the Cherwell's inky stream, the loom of Magdalen lay solid on the dark, and away towards the Christchurch meadows, a few lamps shone. Whence they had come the broad, half-lighted strip of street ran between glimpsed grey frontages and doorways. And the little river over which they were at a standstill seemed to flow with secrecy.

"The 'Char' they call it, don't they?"

"In the summer I shall have a punt, Clare. The upper river's even better than this."

"Will you teach me to punt?"

"Won't I!"

"Nearly ten! Well, I've enjoyed that, Tony."

He gave her a long side-glance and started the engine. It seemed as if he must always be 'moving on' with her. Would there never be a long and perfect stop?

"Sleepy, Clare?"

"Not really. That was a mighty strong cocktail. If you're tired I could drive."

"Tired? Gracious, no! I was only thinking that every mile takes me that much away from you."

In the dark a road seems longer than by day, and so different. A hundred unremembered things appear — hedges, stacks, trees, houses, turnings. Even the villages seem different. In Dorchester they stopped to make sure of the right turning; a motor cyclist passed them, and young Croom called out: "To Henley?"

"Straight on!"

They came to another village.

"This," said young Croom, "must be Nettlebed. Nothing till Henley now, and then it's thirty-five miles. We shall be up by twelve."

"Poor dear, and you've got to do all this back again."

"I shall drive like Jehu. It's a good anodyne."

Clare touched his coat cuff, and there was another silence.

They had reached a wood when he slackened suddenly. "My lights have gone!"

A motor cyclist skidded past, calling: “Your lights are out, sir!”

Young Croom stopped the engine.

“That’s torn it. The battery must be used up.”

Clare laughed. He got out and moved round, examining the car. “I remember this wood. It’s a good five miles to Henley. We must creep on and trust to luck.”

“Shall I get out and walk ahead?”

“No, it’s so pitch dark. I might run over you.”

After a hundred yards or so he stopped again.

“I’m off the road. I’ve never driven in darkness like this.”

Clare laughed again.

“An adventure, my dear.”

“I’ve got no torch. This wood goes on for a mile or two, if I remember.”

“Let’s try again.”

A car whizzed past, and the driver shouted at them.

“Follow his lights, Tony!” But before he could start the engine the car had dipped or turned and was gone. They crept on slowly.

“Damn!” said young Croom, suddenly, “off the road again!”

“Pull her right in off the road then, and let’s think. Isn’t there anything at all before Henley?”

“Not a thing. Besides, recharging a battery can’t be done just anywhere; but I expect it’s a wire gone.”

“Shall we leave the car and walk in? She’ll be all right here in the wood.”

“And then?” muttered young Croom. “I must be back with her by daylight. I’ll tell you what; I’ll walk you in to the hotel, borrow a torch and come back to her. With a torch I could get her down, or stay with her till daylight, and then come down and pick you up at the Bridge.”

“Ten miles walking for you! Why not both stay with her and see the sun rise? I’ve always wanted to spend a night in a car.”

In young Croom a struggle took place. A whole night with her — alone!

“D’you mean you’d trust me?”

“Don’t be old-fashioned, Tony. It’s much the best thing to do, and rather a lark. If a car came into us, or we were run in for driving without lights, that would be awkward if you like.”

“There’s never a moon when you want one,” muttered young Croom. “You really mean it?”

Clare touched his arm.

“Pull her further in, among the trees. Very slow. Look out! Stop!”

There was a slight bump. Clare said:

“We’re up against a tree, and our tail’s to the road. I’ll get out and see if anyone can see us.”

Young Croom waited, arranging the cushions and rug for her. He was thinking: ‘She can’t really love me, or she’d never take it so coolly!’ Quivering at the thought of this long dark night with her, he yet knew it was going to be torture. Her voice said:

“All right. I should say no one could see the car. You go and have a look. I’ll get in.”

He had to feel his way with his feet. The quality of the ground showed him when he had reached the road. It was less densely dark, but he could see no stars. The car was completely invisible. He waited, then turned to feel his way back. So lost was the car that he had to whistle and wait for her answering whistle to find it. Dark, indeed! He got in.

“Window down or up?”

“Half-way down, I should say. I’m very comfy, Tony.”

“Thank God for that! D’you mind my pipe?”

“Of course not. Give me a cigarette. This is almost perfect.”

“Almost,” he said in a small voice.

“I should like to see Aunt Em’s face. Are you warm?”

“Nothing goes through leather. Are you?”

“Lovely!” There was a silence; then she said: “Tony! Forgive me, won’t you? I did promise.”

“It’s quite all right,” said young Croom.

“I can just see your nose by your pipe’s glow.”

By the light of her cigarette he, in turn, could see her teeth, her smiling lips, her face lasting just to the eyes, and fading out.

“Take off your hat, Clare. And any time you like, here’s my shoulder.”

“Don’t let me snore.”

“YOU snore!”

“Everyone snores on occasion. This will be it.”

They talked for a little. But all seemed unreal, except just being beside her in the dark. He could hear now and again a car passing; other noises of the night there were none; too dark even for the owls. His pipe went out, and he put it away. She lay back beside him so close that he could feel her arm against his. He held his breath. Had she dropped off? Oh! He was in for a sleepless night, with this faint perfume from her egging on his senses and the warmth of her arm tingling into his. Even if this were all, it would be sheer waste to sleep. Drowsily she said:

“If you really don’t mind, I WILL put my head on your shoulder, Tony.”

“Mind!”

Her head snuggled down on to his scarf; and the faint perfume, which carried with it reminder of a sunny pine wood, increased. Was it credible that she was there against his shoulder, and would be for another six or seven hours? And he shuddered. So still and matter-of-fact! No sign in her of passion or disturbance; he might have been her brother. With the force of revelation he perceived that this night would be a test that he must pass; for if he did not she would recoil and drop away from him. She WAS asleep. Oh! yes. You couldn’t counterfeit that little regular cluck, as of the tiniest chicken — a perfect little sound, faintly comic, infinitely precious! Whatever happened to him now, he would have passed a night with her! He sat — still as a mouse, if mice are still. Her head grew heavier and more confiding with the deepening of her slumber. And, while he sat and listened, his feeling for her deepened too, became almost a passion of protection and of service. And the night, cold, dark, still — no cars were passing now — kept him company; like some huge, dark, enveloping, just breathing creature, it was awake. The night did not sleep! For the first time in his life he realised that. Night was wakeful as the day. Unlighted and withdrawn, it had its sentience — neither spoke nor moved, just watched, and breathed. With stars and moon, or, as to-night, lampless and shuttered, it was a great companion.

His arm grew stiff, and, as if that reached her consciousness, she withdrew her head but did not wake. He rubbed his shoulder just in time, for almost at once her head lolled back again. Screwing round till his lips just touched her hair, he heard again, chicklike and bland, that faint rhythmic cluck. It ceased and became the deeper breathing of far-down slumber. Then drowsiness crept on him too; he slept.

❦

CHAPTER 19

Young Croom awoke, stiff and unconscious of where he was. A voice said:

"It's just getting light, Tony, but I can't see to read the hymn."

He sat up. "Heavens! Have I been asleep?"

"Yes, poor dear. I've had a perfect night, just a little achy in the legs. What's the time?"

Young Croom looked at his watch's illumined hands.

"Nearly half-past six. Pins and needles. Wow!"

"Let's get out and stretch."

His voice, far away, even from himself, answered: "And so it's over."

"Was it so terrible?"

He put his hands to his head, and did not answer. The thought that next night and all the nights to come he would be apart from her again was like a blow over the heart.

She opened the door.

"I'm going to stamp my feet a bit. Then we might have a stroll to warm ourselves. We shan't get breakfast anywhere till eight."

He started the engine to warm the car. Light was creeping into the wood; he could see the beech-tree against whose trunk they had passed the night. Then he, too, got out and walked towards the road. Still grey-dark and misty, the wood on either side of its dim open streak looked mournful and mysterious. No wind, no sound! He felt as Adam might have felt, dragging towards the Park Gates of Eden without having earned the right to be expelled. Adam! That quaint, amiable, white, bearded creature. Man before he 'fell,' a nonconformist preacher in a state of nature, with a pet snake, a prize apple, and a female secretary coy and unshingled as Lady Godiva! His blood began to flow again, and he returned to the car.

Clare was kneeling and attending to her hair with a pocket comb and mirror.

"How are you feeling, Tony?"

"Pretty rotten. I think we'll shove along and have breakfast at Maidenhead or Slough."

"Why not at home? We could be there by eight. I make very good coffee."

"Fine!" said young Croom. "I'll do fifty all the way."

On that very fast drive they spoke little. Both were too hungry.

"While I'm getting breakfast, Tony, you can shave and have a bath. You'll save time and feel comfy driving back. I'll have mine later."

"I think," said young Croom, at the Marble Arch, "I'd better park the car. You go on in alone; it's too conspicuous driving up at this time in the morning; the chauffeurs are sure to be working. I'll slip along in ten minutes."

When, at eight o'clock, he reached the Mews, she was in a blue wrapper, the little table in the downstair room was set for breakfast, and there was already a scent of coffee.

"I've turned the bath on, Tony, and you'll find a razor."

"Darling!" said young Croom. "Shan't be ten minutes."

He was back again in twelve, and sat down opposite to her. There were boiled eggs, toast, quince jam from Condaford, and real coffee. It was the most delicious meal he had ever eaten, because it was so exactly as if they were married.

"Aren't you tired, darling?"

"Not a bit. I feel thoroughly chirped up. All the same, I don't think we must do it again — too near the hambone altogether."

"Well, we didn't mean to."

"No, and you were an angel. Still, it's not exactly what I promised Aunt Em. To the pure all things are not pure."

"No — blast them! God! How shall I live till I see you again!"

Clare stretched her hand across the little table and gave his a squeeze.

"Now I think you'd better slip off. Just let me look out and see that the coast's clear."

When she had done this he kissed her hand, got back to his car, and by eleven o'clock was standing alongside a plumber in a horse box at Bablock Hythe . . . .

Clare lay in a very hot bath. It was of the geyser type and not long enough, but it provided a good soak. She felt as when, a little girl, she had done something unpleasing to her governess, without discovery. But poor dear Tony! A pity men were so impatient. They had as little liking for cool philandering as for shopping. They rushed into shops, said: 'Have you such and such? No?' and rushed out again. They hated trying on, being patted here and there, turning their heads to look at their back views. To savour what was fitting was to them anathema. Tony was a child. She felt herself much older by nature and experience. Though much in request before her marriage, Clare had never come into close contact with those who, centred in London and themselves, were devoid of belief in anything but mockery, motion and enough money to have from day to day a 'good' time. At country houses she had met them, of course, but withdrawn from their proper atmosphere into the air of sport. Essentially an open-air person, of the quick and wiry, rather than the hefty, type, she observed unconsciously the shibboleths of sport. Transplanted to Ceylon, she had kept her tastes, and spent her time in the saddle or on the tennis ground. Reading many novels, she professed, indeed, to keep abreast of the current, with all its impatience of restraint; but, lying in her bath, she was uneasy. It had not been fair to put Tony to such strain as that of last night. The closer she allowed him to come to her, short of the contacts of love, the more she would be torturing him. Drying herself, she made good resolutions, and only with a rush did she reach the Temple by ten o'clock. She might just as well have stayed on soaking in her bath, for Dornford was busy on an important case. She finished what jobs there were, looking idly out over the Temple lawn, whence fine-weather mist was vanishing, and sunlight, brightening to winter brilliance, slanted on to her cheek. And she thought of Ceylon, where the sun was never coolly comforting. Jerry! How, in that horrible, common phrase, was he 'keeping'? And what doing about her? All very well to determine that she would not torture Tony, would keep away from him and spare his senses, but without him — she would be dull and lonely. He had become a habit. A bad habit perhaps — but bad habits were the only ones it was painful to do without.

'I'm naturally a light weight,' she thought. 'So is Tony; all the same he would never let one down!'

And the grass of the Temple lawn seemed suddenly the sea, and this window-sill the ship's bulwark, and he and she leaned there watching the flying fish spring up from the foam and flitter away above the green-blue water. Warmth and colour! Airy shining grace! And she felt melancholy.

'A good long ride is what I want,' she thought. 'I'll go down to Condaford tomorrow, and on Saturday be out all day. I'll make Dinny come out with me; she ought to ride more.'

The clerk entered and said: "Mr. Dornford's going straight from the Courts to the 'House' this afternoon."

"Ah! Do you ever feel hipped, George?"

The clerk, whose face always amused her because it so clearly should have had mutton-chop whiskers on its rosy roundness, replied in his cushiony voice:

"What I miss here is a dog. With my old Toby I never feel lonely."

"What is he, George?"

"Bull terrier. But I can't bring him here, Mrs. Calder'd miss him; besides, if he bit a solicitor —"

"But how perfect!"

George wheezed.

"Ah! you can't have high spirits in the Temple."

"I should have liked a dog, George, but when I'm out there's no one in."

"I don't fancy Mr. Dornford'll be residential here much longer."

"Why?"

"He's looking for a house. I've an idea he'd like to marry."

"Oh! Whom?"

George closed an eye.

"You mean my sister?"

"Ah!"

"Yes. But I don't see how you know."

George closed the other eye.

"A little bird, Lady Corven."

"He might do worse, certainly. Not that I'm a great believer in marriage."

"We don't see the right side of marriage in the Law. But Mr. Dornford would make a woman happy — in my opinion."

"In mine, too, George."

"He's a very quiet man, but a fund of energy, and considerate. Solicitors like him; judges like him."

"And wives will like him."

"Of course he's a Catholic."

"We all have to be something."

"Mrs. Calder and I've been Anglicans ever since my old dad died. He was a Plymouth Brother — very stiff. Express an opinion of your own, and he'd jump down your throat. Many's the time I've had him threaten me with fire and slaughter. All for my good, you understand. A fine religious old feller. And couldn't bear others not to be. Good red Zummerzet blood, and never forgot it, though he did live in Peckham."

"Well, George, if Mr. Dornford wants me again after all, would you telephone me at five o'clock? I'll look in at my rooms in case."

Clare walked. The day was even more springlike than yesterday. She went by the Embankment and St. James's Park. Alongside the water, clusters of daffodil spikes were pushing up, and tree-shoots swelling into bud. The gentle, warming sunlight fell on her back. It couldn't last! There would be a throwback to winter, for sure! She walked fast out under the chariot, whose horses, not too natural, worried but exhilarated her, passed the Artillery Memorial without a glance, and entered Hyde Park. Warmed up now, she swung out along the Row. Riding was something of a passion with her, so that it always made her restive to see someone else riding a good horse. Queer animals, horses, so fiery and alive at one moment, so dull and ruminative the next!

Two or three hats were raised to her. A long man on a good-looking mare reined up after he had passed and came back.

"I thought it was you. Lawrence told me you were over. Remember me — Jack Muskham?"

Clare — thinking: 'Lovely seat for a tall man!'— murmured: "Of course!" and was suddenly on her guard.

"An acquaintance of yours is going to look after my Arab mares."

"Oh! yes, Tony Croom."

"Nice young chap, but I don't know if he knows enough. Still, he's keen as mustard. How's your sister?"

"Very well."

"You ought to bring her racing, Lady Corven."

"I don't think Dinny cares much for horses."

"I could soon make her. I remember —" he broke off, frowning. In spite of his languid pose, his face seemed to Clare purposeful, brown, lined, ironic about the lips. She wondered how he would take the news that she had spent last night with Tony in a car.

"When do the mares come, Mr. Muskham?"

"They're in Egypt now. We'll ship them in April. I might go over for it; possibly take young Croom."

"I'd love to see them," said Clare; "I rode an Arab in Ceylon."

"We must get you down."

"Somewhere near Oxford, isn't it?"

"About six miles; nice country. I'll remember. Good-bye!" He raised his hat, touched the mare with his heel, and cantered off.

'My perfect innocence!' she thought. 'Hope I didn't overdo it. I wouldn't like to 'get wrong' with him. He looks as if he knew his mind terribly well. Lovely boots! He didn't ask after Jerry!'

Her nerves felt a little shaken, and she struck away from the Row towards the Serpentine.

The sunlit water had no boats on it, but a few ducks on the far side. Did she mind what people thought? Miller of Dee! Only, did he really care for nobody? Or was he just a philosopher? She sat down on a bench in the full sunlight, and suddenly felt sleepy. A night in a car, after all, was not quite the same as a night out of a car. Crossing her arms on her breast, she closed her eyes. Almost at once she was asleep.

Quite a number of people straggled past between her and the bright water, surprised to see one in such nice clothes asleep before lunch. Two little boys carrying toy aeroplanes stopped dead, examining her dark eyelashes resting on her cream-coloured cheeks, and the little twitchings of her just touched-up lips. Having a French governess, they were ‘well-bred’ little boys without prospect of sticking pins into her or uttering a sudden whoop. But she seemed to have no hands, her feet were crossed and tucked under her chair, and her attitude was such that she had abnormally long thighs. It was interesting; and after they had passed one of them kept turning his head to see more of her.

Thus, for a full hour of elusive spring, Clare slept the sleep of one who has spent a night in a car.

❦

Chapter 20

And three weeks passed, during which Clare saw young Croom but four times in all. She was packing for the evening train to Condaford, when the sheep bell summoned her down the spiral stairway.

Outside was a shortish man in horn spectacles, who gave her a vague impression of being connected with learning. He raised his hat.

"Lady Corven?"

"Yes."

"Pardon me, I have this for you." Producing from his blue overcoat a longish document, he put it into her hand.

Clare read the words:

> "In the High Court of Justice
>
> Probate Divorce and Admiralty Division.
>
> The Twenty-sixth day of February, 1932.
>
> In the Matter of the Petition of Sir Gerald Corven."

A weak feeling ran down the back of her legs, and she raised her eyes to the level of those behind the horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Oh!" she said.

The shortish man made her a little bow. She had a feeling that he was sorry for her, and promptly closed the door in his face. She went up the spiral stairs, sat down on the sofa, and lit a cigarette. Then she spread the document on her lap. Her first thought was: 'But it's monstrous — I've done nothing!' Her second: 'I suppose I must read the foul thing!'

She had not read more than: 'The humble petition of Gerald Corven, K.C.B.,' when she had her fourth thought: 'But this is exactly what I want. I shall be free!'

More calmly she read on till she came to the words: 'That your Petitioner claims from the said James Bernard Croom as damages in respect of his said adultery so committed the sum of two thousand pounds.'

Tony! If he had two thousand shillings, it was all! Beast! Revengeful brute! This sudden reduction of the issue to terms of hard cash not only rasped her feelings but brought her a sort of panic. Tony must not, should not be ruined through her! She must see him! Had they — but of course they had served it on him too.

She finished reading the petition, took a long draw at her cigarette and got up.

She went to the telephone, asked for a trunk call and gave the number of his inn.

"Can I speak to Mr. Croom? — Gone up to London? — In his car? — When?"

An hour ago! That could only mean that he was coming to see her!

A little soothed, she made a rapid calculation. She could not now catch the train to Condaford; and she got another trunk call through to the Grange.

"Dinny? This is Clare. I can't possibly get down to-night — tomorrow morning instead. . . . No! I'm all right; a little worried. Good-bye!"

A little worried! She sat down again, and once more read the 'foul thing' through. They seemed to know everything, except the truth. And neither she nor Tony had ever seen a sign that they were being watched. That man with the horn 'specs,' for instance, evidently knew her, but she'd never seen him before! She went into the bathroom and washed her face in cold water. Miller of Dee! The part had become extremely difficult.

'He'll have had nothing to eat,' she thought.

She set the table downstairs with what she had, made some coffee, and sat down to smoke and wait. Condaford and the faces of her people came before her; the face too, of Aunt Em; and of Jack Muskham; above all the face of her husband, with its faint, hard-bitten, cat-like smile. Was she to take this lying down? Apart from the damages, was she to let him triumph without a fight? She wished now she had taken her father's and Sir Lawrence's advice and 'clapped a detective on to him.' Too late now — he would be taking no risks till the case was over.

She was still brooding by the electric fire when she heard a car stop outside, and the bell rang.

Young Croom looked chilled and pale. He stood as if so doubtful of his welcome that she seized both his hands.

“Well, Tony, this is a pleasure!”

“Oh! darling!”

“You look frozen. Have some brandy!”

While he was drinking, she said:

“Don’t let’s talk of what we ought to have done; only of what we’re going to do.”

He groaned.

“They must have thought us terribly green. I never dreamed —”

“Nor I. But why shouldn’t we have done exactly what we have done? There’s no law against innocence.”

He sat down and leaned his forehead on his hands. “God knows this is just what I want; to get you free of him; but I had no business to let you run the risk. It would be all different if you felt for me what I feel for you.”

Clare looked down at him with a little smile.

“Now, Tony, be grown-up! It’s no good talking about our feelings. And I won’t have any nonsense about its being your fault. The point is we’re innocent. What are we going to do about it?”

“Of course I shall do whatever you want.”

“I have a feeling,” said Clare, slowly, “that I shall have to do what my people want me to.”

“God!” said young Croom, getting up: “To think that if we defend and win, you’ll still be tied to him!”

“And to think,” murmured Clare, “that if we don’t defend and win, you’ll be ruined.”

“Oh! Damn that — they can only make me bankrupt.”

“And your job?”

“I don’t see — I don’t know why —”

“I saw Jack Muskham the other day. He looks to me as if he wouldn’t like a co-respondent who hadn’t given notice of his intentions to the petitioner. You see I’ve got the jargon.”

“If we HAD been lovers, I would have, at once.”

“Would you?”

“Of course!”

“Even if I’d said ‘Don’t’?”

“You wouldn’t have.”

“I don’t know that.”

“Well, anyway, it doesn’t arise.”

“Except that if we don’t defend, you’ll feel a cad.”

“God! What a coil!”

“Sit down and let’s eat. There’s only this ham, but there’s nothing like ham when you feel sick.”

They sat down and made motions with their forks.

“Your people don’t know, Clare?”

“I only knew myself an hour ago. Did they bring you this same lovely document?”

“Yes.”

“Another slice?”

They ate in silence for a minute or two. Then young Croom got up.

“I really can’t eat any more.”

“All right. Smoke!”

She took a cigarette from him, and said:

“Listen. I’m going down to Condaford tomorrow, and I think you’d better come over. They must see you, because whatever’s done must be done with open eyes. Have you a solicitor?”

“No.”

“Nor I. I suppose we shall have to have one.”

“I’ll see to all that. If only I had money!”

Clare winced.

“I apologise for a husband capable of asking for damages.”

Young Croom seized her hand. “Darling, I was only thinking of solicitors.”

“Do you remember my answering you on the boat: ‘Often more damnable, things beginning.’”

“I’ll never admit that.”

“I was thinking of my marriage, not of you.”

“Clare, wouldn’t it be far better, really, not to defend — just let it go? Then you’d be free. And after — if you wanted me, I’d be there, and if you didn’t, I wouldn’t.”

“Sweet of you, Tony; but I must tell my people. Besides — oh! a lot of things.”

He began walking up and down.

“D’you suppose they’ll believe us if we do defend? *I* don’t.”

“We shall be telling the exact truth.”

“People never believe the exact truth. What train are you going down by?”

“Ten-fifty.”

“Shall I come too, or in the afternoon from Bablock Hythe?”

“That’s best. I’ll have broken it to them.”

“Will they mind frightfully?”

“They won’t like it.”

“Is your sister there?”

“Yes.”

“That’s something.”

“My people are not exactly old-fashioned, Tony, but they’re not modern. Very few people are when they’re personally involved. The lawyers and the judge and jury won’t be, anyway. You’d better go now; and promise me not to drive like Jehu.”

“May I kiss you?”

“It’ll mean one more piece of exact truth, and there’ve been three already. Kiss my hand — that doesn’t count.”

He kissed it, muttered: “God bless you!” and, grabbing his hat, went out.

Clare turned a chair to the unwinking warmth of the electric fire, and sat brooding. The dry heat burned her eyes till they felt as if they had no lids and no capacity for moisture; slowly and definitely she grew angrier. All the feelings she had experienced, before she made up her mind that morning in Ceylon to cut adrift, came back to her with redoubled fury. How dared he treat her as if she had been a ‘light of love’? — worse than if she had been one — a light of love would never have stood it. How dared he touch her with that whip? And now how dared he have her watched, and bring this case? She would not lie down under this!

She began methodically to wash up and put the things away. She opened the door wide and let the wind come in. A nasty night, little whirlwinds travelling up and down the narrow Mews!

‘Inside me, too,’ she thought. Slamming-to the door, she took out her little mirror. Her face seemed so natural and undefended that it gave her a shock. She powdered it and touched her lips with salve. Then, drawing deep breaths, she shrugged her shoulders, lit a cigarette, and went upstairs. A hot bath!

❦

CHAPTER 21

The atmosphere at Condaford into which she stepped next day was guarded. Her words, or the tone of her voice on the telephone, seemed to have seeped into the family consciousness, and she was aware at once that sprightliness would deceive no one. It was a horrible day, too, dank and cold, and she had to hold on to her courage with both hands.

She chose the drawing-room after lunch for disclosure. Taking the document from her bag, she handed it to her father with the words:

“I’ve had this, Dad.”

She heard his startled exclamation, and was conscious of Dinny and her mother going over to him.

At last he said: “Well? Tell us the truth.”

She took her foot off the fender and faced them.

“THAT isn’t the truth. We’ve done nothing.”

“Who is this man?”

“Tony Croom? I met him on the boat coming home. He’s twenty-six, was on a tea plantation out there, and is taking charge of Jack Muskham’s Arab mares at Bablock Hythe. He has no money. I told him to come here this afternoon.”

“Are you in love with him?”

“No. I like him.”

“Is he in love with you?”

“Yes.”

“You say there’s been nothing?”

“He’s kissed my cheek twice, I think — that’s all.”

“Then what do they mean by this — that you spent the night of the third with him?”

“I went down in his car to see his place, and coming back the lights failed in a wood about five miles from Henley — pitch dark. I suggested we should stay where we were till it was light. We just slept and went on up when it was light.”

She heard her mother give a faint gasp, and a queer noise from her father’s throat.

“And on the boat? And in your rooms? You say there was nothing, though he’s in love with you?”

“Nothing.”

“Is that absolutely the truth?”

“Yes.”

“Of course,” said Dinny, “it’s the truth.”

“Of course,” said the General. “And who’s going to believe it?”

“We didn’t know we were being watched.”

“What time will he be here?”

“Any time now.”

“You’ve seen him since you had this?”

“Yesterday evening.”

“What does he say?”

“He says he’ll do whatever I wish.”

“That, of course. Does HE think you’ll be believed?”

“No.”

The General took the document over to the window, as if the better to see into it. Lady Charwell sat down, her face very white. Dinny came over to Clare and took her arm.

“When he comes,” said the General suddenly, returning from the window, “I’ll see him alone. Nobody before me, please."

"Witnesses out of court," murmured Clare.

The General handed her the document. His face looked drawn and tired.

"I'm terribly sorry, Dad. I suppose we were fools. Virtue is NOT its own reward."

"Wisdom is," said the General. He touched her shoulder and marched off to the door, followed by Dinny.

"Does he believe me, Mother?"

"Yes, but only because you're his daughter. He feels he oughtn't to."

"Do you feel like that, Mother?"

"I believe you because I know you."

Clare bent over and kissed her cheek.

"Very pretty, Mother dear; but not cheering."

"You say you like this young man. Did you know him out there?"

"I never saw him till the boat. And, Mother, I may as well tell you that I've not been in the mood for passion. I don't know when I shall be again. Perhaps never!"

"Why not?"

Clare shook her head. "I won't go into my life with Jerry, not even now, when he's been such a cad as to ask for damages. I'm really much more upset about that than I am about myself."

"I suppose this young man would have gone away with you, at any moment?"

"Yes; but I haven't wanted to. Besides, I gave Aunt Em a promise. I sort of swore to behave for a year. And I have — so far. It's terribly tempting not to defend, and be free."

Lady Charwell was silent.

"Well, Mother?"

"Your father is bound to think of this as it affects your name and the family's."

"Six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, so far as that goes. If we don't defend, it will just go through and hardly be noticed. If we do, it will make a sensation. 'Night in a car,' and all that, even if we're believed. Can't you see the papers, Mummy? They'll be all over it."

"I think," said Lady Charwell slowly, "it will come back in the end to the feeling your father has about that whip. I've never known him so angry as he was over that. I think he will feel you must defend."

"I should never mention the whip in court. It's too easily denied, for one thing; and I have some pride, Mother . . ."

Dinny had followed to the study, or barrack-room, as it was sometimes called.

"You know this young man, Dinny?" burst out the General.

"Yes, and I like him. He IS deeply in love with Clare."

"What business has he to be?"

"Be human, dear!"

"You believe her about the car?"

"Yes. I heard her solemnly promise Aunt Em to behave for a year."

"Queer sort of thing to have to promise!"

"A mistake, if you ask me."

"What!"

"The only thing that really matters is that Clare should get free."

The General stood with head bent, as if he had found food for thought; a slow flush had coloured his cheek-bones.

"She told you," he said suddenly, "what she told me, about that fellow having used a whip on her?"

Dinny nodded.

"In old days I could and would have called him out for that. I agree that she must get free, but — not this way."

"Then you DO believe her?"

"She wouldn't tell a lie to us like that."

"Good, Dad! But who else will believe them? Would you, on a jury?"

"I don't know," said the General, glumly.

Dinny shook her head. "You wouldn't."

"Lawyers are damned clever. I suppose Dornford wouldn't take up a case like this?"

"He doesn't practise in the Divorce Court. Besides, she's his secretary."

"I must get to hear what Kingsons say. Lawrence believes in them. Fleur's father was a member there."

"Then —" Dinny had begun, when the door was opened.

"Mr. Croom, sir."

"You needn't go, Dinny."

Young Croom came in. After a glance at Dinny, he moved towards the General.

"Clare told me to come over, sir."

The General nodded. His narrowed eyes were fixed steadily on his daughter's would-be lover. The young man faced that scrutiny as if on parade, his eyes replying to the General's without defiance.

"I won't beat about the bush," said the General suddenly. "You seem to have got my daughter into a mess."

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly give me your account of it."

Young Croom put his hat down on the table, and, squaring his shoulders, said:

"Whatever she has told you is true, sir."

Dinny saw with relief her father's lips twitching as if with a smile.

"Very correct, Mr. Croom; but not what I want. She has told me her version; I should be glad to hear yours."

She saw the young man moisten his lips, making a curious jerking motion of his head.

"I'm in love with her, sir: have been ever since I first saw her on the boat. We've been going about rather in London — cinemas, theatres, picture galleries, and that; and I've been to her rooms three — no, five times altogether. On February the third I drove her down to Bablock Hythe for her to see where I'm going to have my job; and coming back — I expect she told you — my lights failed, and we were hung up in a pitch-dark wood some miles short of Henley. Well — we — we thought we'd better just stay there until it was light again, instead of risking things. I'd got off the road twice. It really was pitch-dark, and I had no torch. And so — well, we waited in the car till about half-past six, and then came up, and got to her place about eight." He paused and moistened his lips, then straightened himself again and said with a rush: "Whether you believe me or not, sir, I swear there was nothing whatever between us in the car; and — and there never has been, except — except that she's let me kiss her cheek two or three times."

The General, who had never dropped his eyes, said: "That's substantially what she told us. Anything else?"

"After I had that paper, sir, I motored up to see her at once — that was yesterday. Of course I'll do anything she wants."

"You didn't put your heads together as to what you would say to us?"

Dinny saw the young man stiffen.

"Of course not, sir!"

"Then I may take it that you're ready to swear there's been nothing, and defend the action?"

"Certainly, if you think there's any chance of our being believed."

The General shrugged. "What's your financial position?"

"Four hundred a year from my job." A faint smile curled his lips: "Otherwise none, sir."

"Do you know my daughter's husband?"

"No."

"Never met him?"

"No, sir."

"When did you first meet Clare?"

"On the second day of the voyage home."

"What were you doing out there?"

"Tea-planting; but they amalgamated my plantation with some others, for economy."

"I see. Where were you at school?"

"Wellington, and then at Cambridge."

"You've got a job with Jack Muskham?"

"Yes, sir, his Arab mares. They're due in the spring."

"You know about horses, then?"

"Yes. I'm terribly fond of them."

Dinny saw the narrowed gaze withdraw from the young man's face, and come to rest on hers.

"You know my daughter Dinny, I think?"

"Yes."

"I'll leave you to her now. I want to think this over."

The young man bowed slightly, turned to Dinny, and then, turning back, said with a certain dignity:

"I'm awfully sorry, sir, about this; but I can't say I'm sorry that I'm in love with Clare. It wouldn't be true. I love her terribly."

He was moving towards the door, when the General said:

"One moment. What do you mean by love?"

Involuntarily Dinny clasped her hands: An appalling question! Young Croom turned round. His face was motionless.

"I know what you mean, sir," he said huskily: "Desire and that, or more? Well! More, or I couldn't have stood that night in the car." He turned again to the door.

Dinny moved and held it open for him. She followed him into the hall, where he was frowning and taking deep breaths. She slipped her hand through his arm and moved him across to the wood fire. They stood, looking down into the flames, till she said:

"I'm afraid that was rather dreadful. But soldiers like to have things straight out, you know. Anyway — I know my father — you made what's called a good impression."

"I felt a ghastly kind of wooden idiot. Where is Clare? Here?"

"Yes."

"Can I see her, Miss Cherrell?"

"Try calling me Dinny. You can see her; but I think you'd better see my mother too. Let's go to the drawing-room."

He gave her hand a squeeze.

"I've always felt you were a brick."

Dinny grimaced. "Even bricks yield to a certain pressure."

"Oh! sorry! I'm always forgetting my ghastly grip. Clare dreads it. How is she?"

With a faint shrug and smile, Dinny said:

"Doing as well as can be expected."

Tony Croom clutched his head.

"Yes, I feel exactly like that, only worse; in those cases there's something to look forward to and — here? D'you think she'll ever really love me?"

"I hope so."

"Your people don't think that I pursued her — I mean, you know what I mean, just to have a good time?"

"They won't after today. You are what *I* was once called — transparent."

"You? I never quite know what you're thinking."

"That was a long time ago. Come!"

Chapter 22

When young Croom had withdrawn into the sleet and wind of that discomforting day, he left behind him a marked gloom. Clare went to her room saying her head was bad and she was going to lie down. The other three sat among the tea-things, speaking only to the dogs, sure sign of mental disturbance.

At last Dinny got up: “Well, my dears, gloom doesn’t help. Let’s look on the bright side. They might have been scarlet instead of white as snow.”

The General said, more to himself than in reply:

“They must defend. That fellow can’t have it all his own way.”

“But, Dad, to have Clare free, with a perfectly clear conscience, would be nice and ironic, and ever so much less fuss!”

“Lie down under an accusation of that sort?”

“Her name will go even if she wins. No one can spend a night in a car with a young man with impunity. Can they, Mother?”

Lady Charwell smiled faintly.

“I agree with your father, Dinny. It seems to me revolting that Clare should be divorced when she’s done nothing except been a little foolish. Besides, it would be cheating the law, wouldn’t it?”

“I shouldn’t think the law would care, dear. However —!” And Dinny was silent, scrutinising their rueful faces, aware that they set some mysterious store by marriage and divorce which she did not, and that nothing she could say would alter it.

“The young man,” said the General, “seemed a decent fellow, I thought. He’ll have to come up and see the lawyers when we do.”

“I’d better go up with Clare tomorrow evening, Dad, and get Uncle Lawrence to arrange you a meeting with the lawyers for after lunch on Monday. I’ll telephone you and Tony Croom from Mount Street in the morning.”

The General nodded and got up. “Beast of a day!” he said, and put his hand on his wife’s shoulder: “Don’t let this worry you, Liz. They can but tell the truth. I’ll go to the study and have another shot at that new pigsty. You might look in later, Dinny . . .”

At all critical times Dinny felt more at home in Mount Street than she did at Condaford. Sir Lawrence’s mind was so much more lively than her father’s; Aunt Em’s inconsequence at once more bracing and more soothing than her mother’s quiet and sensible sympathy. When a crisis was over, or if it had not begun, Condaford was perfect, but it was too quiet for nerve storms or crucial action. As country houses went, it was, indeed, old-fashioned, inhabited by the only county family who had been in the district for more than three or four generations. The Grange had an almost institutional repute. “Condaford Grange” and “the Cherrells of Condaford” were spoken of as curiosities. The week-ending or purely sporting existence of the big ‘places’ was felt to be alien to them. The many families in the smaller ‘places’ round seemed to make country life into a sort of cult, organising tennis and bridge parties, village entertainments, and the looking of each other up; getting their day’s shooting here and there, supporting the nearest golf course, attending meets, hunting a bit, and so forth. The Charwells, with their much deeper roots, yet seemed to be less in evidence than almost anyone. They would have been curiously missed, but, except to the villagers, they hardly seemed real.

In spite of her always active life at Condaford Dinny often felt there, as one does waking in the still hours of the night, nervous from the very quietude; and in such troubles as Hubert’s, three years before, her own crisis of two years ago, or this of Clare’s, she craved at once to be more in the swim of life.

Having dropped Clare at her Mews, she went on in the taxi, and arrived at Mount Street before dinner.

Michael and Fleur were there, and the conversation turned and turned from literature to politics. Michael was of opinion that the papers were beginning to pat the country’s back too soon, and that the Government might go to sleep. Sir Lawrence was glad to hear that they were still awake.

Lady Mont said suddenly: “The baby, Dinny?”

“Frightfully well, thank you, Aunt Em. He walks.”

"I was countin' up the pedigree, and he makes the twenty-fourth Cherrell of Condaford; and before that they were French. Is Jean havin' any more?"

"You bet," said Fleur. "I never saw a young woman more like it."

"There'll be nothin' for them."

"Oh, she'll wangle their futures all right."

"Such a singular word," said Lady Mont.

"Dinny, how's Clare?"

"All right."

"Any developments?" And Fleur's clear eyes seemed to slide into her brain.

"Yes, but —"

Michael's voice broke the silence.

"Dornford has a very neat idea, Dad; he thinks —"

The neat idea of Dornford was lost on Dinny, wondering whether or not to take Fleur into her confidence. She knew no one of quicker brain, or of a judgment on social matters more cynically sound. Further, she could keep a secret. But it was Clare's secret, and she decided to speak to Sir Lawrence first.

Late that night she did so. He received the news with his eyebrows.

"All night in a car, Dinny? That's a bit steep. I'll get on to the lawyers at ten o'clock tomorrow. 'Very young' Roger Forsyte, Fleur's cousin, is there now; I'll get hold of him, he's likely to have more credulity than the hoarier members. You and I will go along too, to prove our faith."

"I've never been in the City."

"Curious place; built upon the ends of the earth. Romance and the bank rate. Prepare for a mild shock."

"Do you think they ought to defend?"

Sir Lawrence's lively eyes came to rest on her face.

"If you ask me whether I think they'll be believed — no. But at least we can divide opinion on the question."

"You DO believe them yourself, don't you?"

"I plank on you there, Dinny. Clare wouldn't try to take YOU in."

Thinking back to her sister's face, and to young Croom's, Dinny had a revulsion of feeling. "They ARE telling the truth, and they look like it. It would be wicked not to believe them."

"No end to that sort of wickedness in this wicked world. You look tired, my dear; better go to bed."

In that bedroom, where she had spent so many nights at the time of her own trouble, Dinny had again that half-waking nightmare, the sense of being close to Wilfrid and unable to reach him, and the refrain: 'One more river, one more river to cross,' kept running in her tired head . . . .

In that quiet and yellow backwater, the Old Jewry, the offices of Kingson Cuthcott and Forsyte were tribally invaded at four o'clock next day.

"What's become of old Gradman, Mr. Forsyte?" Dinny heard her uncle say. "Still here?"

'Very young' Roger Forsyte, who was forty-two, answered, in a voice which seemed to contradict his jaw: "I believe he's still living at Pinner, or Highgate, or wherever it was."

"I should be glad to think so," murmured Sir Lawrence. "Old For — er, your cousin thought a lot of him. A regular Victorian piece."

'Very young' Roger smiled. "Won't you all sit down?"

Dinny, who had never yet been in a lawyer's office, looked at the law books along the walls, the bundles of papers, the yellowish blind, the repellent black fireplace with its little coal fire that seemed to warm nothing, the map of an estate hanging unrolled behind the door, the low wicker basket on the table, the pens and sealing-wax, and 'very young' Roger, and thought of an album of seaweed, compiled by her first governess. She saw her father rise and place a document in the solicitor's hands.

"We've come about this."

'Very young' Roger glanced at the heading of the paper and over it at Clare.

'How does he know which of us it is?' thought Dinny.

"There's no truth in the allegations," said the General.

'Very young' Roger caressed his jaw and began reading.

Dinny, from the side, could see that a sharp and rather bird-like look had come on his face.

Noticing that Dinny could see him, he lowered the paper and said: "They seem in a hurry. The petitioner signed the affidavit in Egypt, I see. He must have come over there to save time. Mr. Croom?"

"Yes."

"You wish us to represent you as well?"

"Yes."

"Then Lady Corven and you. Later, perhaps, Sir Conway, you'd come in again."

"Do you mind if my sister stays?" said Clare.

Dinny met the solicitor's eyes. "Not at all." She did not know if he meant it.

The General and Sir Lawrence went out, and there was silence. 'Very young' Roger leaned against the fireplace, and most unexpectedly took a pinch of snuff. Dinny saw that he was lean and rather tall, and that his jaw jutted. There was a faintly sandy tinge in his hair, and in the ruddiness of his hollowed cheeks.

"Your father, Lady Corven, said there was no truth in these — er — allegations."

"The facts are as stated, the inferences are wrong. There's been nothing between Mr. Croom and myself, except three kisses on my cheek."

"I see. About this night in the car, now?"

"Nothing," said Clare: "Not even one of those kisses."

"Nothing," repeated young Croom; "absolutely nothing."

'Very young' Roger passed his tongue over his lips.

"If you don't mind, I think I should like to understand your feelings for each other — if any."

"We are speaking," said Clare, in a clear voice, "the absolute truth, as we've told it to my people; that's why I asked my sister to stay. Tony?"

'Very young' Roger's mouth twitched. To Dinny he did not seem to be taking it quite as a lawyer should; something in his dress, indeed, was a little unexpected — his waistcoat was it, or his tie? That snuff, too — as if a dash of the artist had been suppressed in him. He said:

"Yes, Mr. Croom?"

Young Croom, who had gone very red, looked at Clare almost angrily.

"I'm in love with her."

"Quite!" said 'very young' Roger, reopening the snuff-box. "And you, Lady Corven, regard him as a friend?"

Clare nodded — a faint surprise on her face.

Dinny felt a sudden gratitude towards the questioner, who was applying a bandana to his nose.

"The car was an accident," added Clare quickly; "it was pitch dark in the wood, our lights had failed, and we didn't want to run any risk of people seeing us together so late at night."

"Exactly! Excuse my asking, but you're both prepared to go into Court and swear there was absolutely nothing that night or on the other occasions, except — did you say — three kisses?"

"On my cheek," said Clare; "one out of doors, when I was in a car and he wasn't, and the others — when were the others, Tony?"

Young Croom said between his clenched teeth: "In your rooms when I hadn't seen you for over a fortnight."

"You neither of you knew you were being — er — shadowed?"

"I knew my husband had threatened it, but we'd neither of us noticed anything."

"About leaving your husband, Lady Corven; any reason you'd care to give me?"

Clare shook her head.

"I'm not going into my life with him, either here or anywhere. And I'm not going back to him."

"Incompatibility, or worse?"

"I think worse."

"But no definite charge. You realise the importance?"

"Yes. But I'm not going into it, even privately."

Young Croom burst out: "He was a brute to her, of course."

"You knew him, Mr. Croom?"

"Never seen him in my life."

"Then —"

"He just thinks it because I left Jerry suddenly. He knows nothing."

Dinny saw 'very young' Roger's eyes rest on herself. "But you do," they seemed to say; and she thought: 'He's no fool!'

He had returned from the fireplace, walking with a slight limp; sitting down again, he took up the document, narrowed his eyes, and said:

"This isn't the sort of evidence the Court likes; in fact I'm not sure it's evidence at all. All the same it's not a very bright prospect. If you could show strong cause for leaving your husband, and we could get over that night in the car —" He looked, bird-like, first at Clare and then at young Croom. "Still, you can't let damages and costs like that go by default, when — er — you've done nothing." His eyes fell; and Dinny thought:

'Not conspicuous — his credulity!'

'Very young' Roger lifted a paper-knife.

"We might possibly get the damages agreed at a comparatively nominal sum, if you put in a defence and then didn't appear. May I ask your monetary position, Mr. Croom?"

"I haven't a bean, but that doesn't matter."

"What exactly will 'defending' mean?" asked Clare.

"You'd both go into the box and deny the charges. You'd be cross-examined, and we should cross-examine the petitioner and the enquiry agents. Candidly, unless you can give good reason for having left your husband, you're almost bound to have the judge against you. And," he added, in a somewhat human manner, "a night is a night, especially to the divorce court, even in a car; though, as I say, it's not the sort of evidence generally required."

"My Uncle thinks," said Dinny quietly, "that some of the jury, at all events, might believe them, and that the damages, in any case, would be reduced."

'Very young' Roger nodded.

"We'll see what Mr. Kingson says. I should like to see your father and Sir Lawrence again."

Dinny went to the door and held it open for her sister and young Croom. Glancing back she saw 'very young' Roger's face. It was as if someone had asked him not to be a realist. He caught her eye, gave a funny little cock of his head, and took out his snuff-box. She shut the door and went up to him.

"You'll make a mistake if you don't believe them. They're speaking the absolute truth."

"Why did she leave her husband, Miss Cherrell?"

"If she won't tell you, I can't. But I'm sure she was right."

He considered her for a moment with that sharp glance.

"Somehow," he said suddenly, "I wish it were you." And, taking snuff, he turned to the General and Sir Lawrence.

"Well?" said the General.

'Very young' Roger looked suddenly more sandy.

"If she had good reason for leaving her husband —"

"She had."

"Father!"

“It appears she isn’t prepared to speak of it.”

“Nor should I be,” said Dinny quietly.

‘Very young’ Roger murmured: “It might make all the difference, though.”

“Serious thing for young Croom, Mr. Forsyte,” put in Sir Lawrence.

“Serious, whether they defend or not, Sir Lawrence. I’d better see them both separately. Then I’ll get Mr. Kingson’s view, and let you know tomorrow. Will that do, General?”

“It revolts me,” said the General, “to think of that fellow Corven!”

“Quite!” said ‘very young’ Roger, and Dinny thought she had never heard a more doubtful sound.

❦

CHAPTER 23

Dinny sat in the little bare waiting-room turning over The Times. Young Croom stood at the window.

“Dinny,” he said, turning, “can you think of any way in which I can make this less beastly for her? It’s all my fault in a sense, but I have tried to keep myself in hand.”

Dinny looked at his troubled face. “I can’t; except by sticking to the exact truth.”

“Do you believe in that chap in there?”

“I rather do. I like his taking snuff.”

“I don’t believe in defending. Why should she be ragged in the witness-box for nothing? What does it matter if they bankrupt me?”

“We must prevent that somehow.”

“D’you think I’d let —”

“We won’t discuss it, Tony. Sufficient unto the day! Isn’t this a dingy place? Dentists try much harder — Marcus Stone on the walls, all the old Bystanders, and you can bring a dog.”

“Could we smoke?”

“Surely.”

“These are only stinkers.”

Dinny took one, and they puffed for a minute in silence.

“It’s too foul!” he said, suddenly. “That fellow will have to come over, won’t he? He never can really have cared a scrap for her.”

“Oh! yes, he did. ‘Souvent homme varie, folle est qui s’y fie!’”

“Well,” said young Croom grimly, “I’d better be kept from him.” He went back to the window and stood looking out. Dinny sat thinking of that scene, when two men had not been kept apart, so pitifully like a dog fight and rending to her in its sequel.

Then Clare came in. There were spots of red in her pale cheeks. “Your turn, Tony.”

Young Croom came from the window, looked hard into her face, and passed into the lawyer’s room. Dinny felt very sorry for him.

“Ugh!” said Clare: “Let’s get out of this!”

On the pavement, she went on:

“I wish now we had been lovers, Dinny, instead of in this mock-pretty state that no one believes in.”

“We DO believe.”

“Oh! you and Dad. But that snuffy rabbit doesn’t, and no one else will. Still, I shall go through with it. I won’t let Tony down, and I won’t give Jerry an inch that I can help giving.”

“Let’s have tea,” said Dinny. “There must be tea somewhere in the City.”

In a crowded thoroughfare they soon saw an A.B.C.

“Then you didn’t like ‘very young’ Roger?” asked Dinny from across the small round table.

“Oh! he’s all right — rather decent, really. I suppose lawyers simply can’t believe. But nothing will shake me, Dinny, about not going into my married life. I will not, and that’s flat.”

“I see his point. You start with the battle half won against you.”

“I won’t allow the lawyers to work it in. We employ them, and they must do what we want. I’m going straight from here to the Temple, by the bye, and perhaps on to the House.”

“Excuse my reverting for a moment; but what are you going to do about Tony Croom till this comes on?”

“Go on just as we were, except for nights in cars. Though what the difference between day and night — in a car, or anywhere else — is, I don’t know.”

"I suppose they go by human nature as a whole." And Dinny leaned back. So many girls, so many young men, snatching their teas and rolls and buns and cocoa; chatter and silence and a stale effluvium, little tables, and the attendant spirits. What WAS human nature as a whole? Didn't they say that it had to be changed? The stuffy past wiped out! And yet this A.B.C. was just like the A.B.C. she went into with her mother before the war, and thought so thrilling because the bread was aerated. And the Divorce Court — into which she had never been yet — was that any different?

"Have you finished, old thing?" said Clare.

"Yes. I'll come with you as far as the Temple."

As they paused to part at Middle Temple Lane, a rather high and pleasant voice said:

"What luck!" and a light momentary grip was laid on her arm.

"If you're going straight to the House," said Clare, "I'll run on and get my things and join you here."

"Tactful," said Dornford. "Let's stand against this 'portal.' When I don't see you for so long, Dinny, I feel lost. Jacob served for Rachel fourteen years — longevity is not what it was, so every month I serve is equal to one of his years."

"Rachel and he were walking out."

"I know. Well, I must just wait and hope. I just HAVE to wait."

Leaning against the yellow 'portal' she looked at him. His face was quivering. Suddenly sorry, she said:

"Some day, perhaps, I shall come to life again. I won't wait any more now. Good-bye, and thank you! . . ."

This sudden intrusion of herself was no comfort to her in her homing bus. The sight of his quivering face made her restless and uneasy. She did not want to cause him unhappiness — a nice man, considerate to Clare, a pleasant voice, an attractive face; and in range of interest nearer to her than Wilfrid had ever been. Only, where was that wild, sweet yearning, transmuting every value, turning the world into a single being, the one longed-for, dreamed-of mate? She sat very still in the bus, looking over the head of the woman on the opposite side, who, with fingers crisped on the satchel in her lap, wore the expression of a sportsman about to try a new field or spinney. The lights were coming up in Regent Street of a cold, just not snowy evening. There used to be the low curving roof-line, the rather nice, bilious yellow of the Quadrant. She remembered how on the top of a bus she had differed from the girl Millicent Pole about old Regent Street. Changing, changing, everything changing! And before her suddenly closed eyes came Wilfrid's face, with its lips drawn back, as she had seen it last passing her in the Green Park.

Someone trod on her toe. She opened her eyes, and said: "I beg your pardon."

"Granted, I'm sure."

Very polite! People were more polite every year!

The bus had stopped. Dinny hurried from it. She went down Conduit Street, passing her father's tailors. Poor darling, he never went there now. Clothes were so dear; and, of course, he loathed new clothes! She came to Bond Street.

The traffic staggered to a standstill, the whole street seemed one long line of held-up cars. And England ruined! She crossed into Bruton Street. And then, in front of her, she saw a familiar figure, walking slowly with his head down! She came up with him.

"Stack!"

He raised his head; tears were trickling down his cheeks. He blinked his large dark prominent eyes, and passed his hand over his face.

"You miss? I was just coming to you." And he held out a telegram.

Holding it up in the dim light, she read:

"Henry Stack, 50a Cork Street, London. Very sorry to inform you Honourable Wilfrid Desert drowned on expedition up-country some weeks ago. Body recovered and buried on spot. Report only just come in. No possible doubt. Condolences. British Consulate, Bangkok."

Stonily she stood, seeing nothing. Stack's fingers came up and detached the telegram.

"Yes," she said. "Thank you. Show it to Mr. Mont, Stack. Don't grieve."

"Oh, miss!"

Dinny laid her fingers on his sleeve, gave it a little pull, and walked swiftly on.

Don't grieve! Sleet was falling now. She raised her face to feel the tingling touch of those small flakes. No more dead to her than he had already been. But — DEAD! Away over there — utterly far! Lying in the earth by the river that had drowned him, in forest silence, where no one would ever see his grave. Every memory she had of him came to life with an intensity that seemed to take all strength from her limbs, so that she nearly collapsed in the snowy street. She stood for a minute with her gloved hand on the railing of a house. An evening postman stopped and looked round at her. Perhaps some tiny flame of hope — that some day he would come back — had flickered deep down within her; perhaps only the snowy cold was creeping into her bones; but she felt deadly cold and numb.

She reached Mount Street at last and let herself in. And there a sudden horror of betraying that anything had happened to awaken pity for her, interest in her, any sort of feeling, beset her, and she fled to her room. What was it to anyone but her? And pride so moved within her that even her heart felt cold as stone.

A hot bath revived her a little. She dressed for dinner early and went down.

The evening was one of silences more tolerable than the spasmodic spurts of conversation. Dinny felt ill. When she went up to bed her Aunt came to her room.

"Dinny, you look like a ghost."

"I got chilled, Auntie."

"Lawyers! — they do. I've brought you a posset."

"Ah! I've always longed to know what a posset is."

"Well, drink it."

Dinny drank, and gasped.

"Frightfully strong."

"Yes. Your Uncle made it. Michael rang up." And taking the glass, Lady Mont bent forward and kissed her cheek. "That's all," she said. "Now go to bed, or you'll be ill."

Dinny smiled. "I'm not going to be ill, Aunt Em."

In pursuance of that resolve she went down to breakfast next morning.

The oracle, it seemed, had spoken in a typewritten letter signed Kingson, Cuthcott and Forsyte. It recommended putting in a defence, and had so advised Lady Corven and Mr. Croom. When it had taken the necessary proceedings it would advise further.

And that coldness in the pit of the stomach which follows the receipt of lawyers' letters was felt even by Dinny, the pit of whose stomach was already deadly cold.

She went back to Condaford with her father by the morning train, repeating to her Aunt the formula: "I'm not going to be ill."

❦

Chapter 24

But she WAS ill, and for a month in her conventual room at Condaford often wished she were dead and done with. She might, indeed, quite easily have died if such belief as she had in a future life had grown instead of declining as her strength ebbed. To rejoin Wilfrid, where this world's pain and judgments were not, had a fatal attraction. To fade out into the sleep of nothingness was not hard, but had no active enticement; and, as the tide of health turned back within her, seemed less and less natural. The solicitude of people had a subtle, pervasive healing influence. The village required a daily bulletin, her mother had been writing or 'phoning almost daily to a dozen people. Clare had been down every week-end, bringing flowers from Dornford. Aunt Em had been sending twice a week the products of Boswell and Johnson; Fleur bombarding her with the products of Piccadilly. Adrian had come down three times without warning. Hilary began sending funny little notes the moment she had turned the corner.

On March the thirtieth, spring visited her room with southwest airs, a small bowl of the first spring flowers, some pussy willows and a sprig of gorse. She was picking up rapidly now, and three days later was out of doors. For everything in nature she felt a zest such as she had not known for a long time. Crocuses, daffodil clumps, swelling buds, sun on the fantails' wings, shapes and colour of the clouds, scent of the wind, all affected her with an almost painful emotion. Yet she had no desire to do anything or see anybody. In this queer apathy she accepted an invitation from Adrian to go abroad with him on his short holiday.

The memorable things about their fortnight's stay at Argelès in the Pyrenees, were the walks they took, the flowers they picked, the Pyrenean sheep-dogs, the almond blossom they saw, the conversations they held. They were out all day, taking lunch with them, and the opportunities for talk were unlimited. Adrian became eloquent on mountains. He had never got over his climbing days. Dinny suspected him of trying to rouse her from the lethargy in which she was sunk.

"When I went up 'the little Sinner' in the Dolomites with Hilary before the war," he said one day, "I got as near to God as I ever shall. Nineteen years ago — dash it! What's the nearest to God you ever got, Dinny?"

She did not answer.

"Look here, my dear, what are you now — twenty-seven?"

"Nearly twenty-eight."

"On the threshold still. I suppose talking it out wouldn't help?"

"You ought to know, Uncle, that talking one's heart out is not in the family."

"True! The more we're hurt the silenter we get. But one mustn't inbreed to sorrow, Dinny."

Dinny said suddenly: "I understand perfectly how women go into convents, or give themselves up to good works. I always used to think it showed a lack of humour."

"It can show a lack of courage, or too much courage, of the sort fanatical."

"Or broken springs."

Adrian looked at her.

"Yours are not broken, Dinny — badly bent, not broken."

"Let's hope so, Uncle; but they ought to be straightening by now."

"You're beginning to look fine."

"Yes, I'm eating enough even for Aunt Em. It's taking interest in oneself that's the trouble."

"I agree. I wonder if —"

"Not iron, darling. It sews me up inside."

Adrian smiled. "I was thinking more of children."

"They're not synthetic, yet. I'm all right, and very lucky, as things go. Did I tell you old Betty died?"

"Good old soul! She used to give me bulls'-eyes."

"SHE was the real thing. We read too many books, Uncle."

"Indubitably. Walk more, read less! Let's have our lunch."

On the way back to England they stayed two nights in Paris at a little hotel over a restaurant near the Gare St. Lazare. They had wood fires, and their beds were comfortable.

"Only the French know what a bed should be," said Adrian.

The cooking down below was intended for racing men and such as go where they can appreciate food. The waiters, who wore aprons, looked, as Adrian expressed it, "like monks doing a spot of work," pouring the wine and mixing the salads with reverence. He and Dinny were the only foreigners in either hotel or restaurant, not far from being the only foreigners in Paris.

"Marvellous town, Dinny. Except for cars in place of fiacres and the Eiffel Tower, I don't see any real change by daylight since I was first here in '88, when your grandfather was Minister at Copenhagen. There's the same tang of coffee and wood smoke in the air; people have the same breadth of back, the same red buttons in their coats; there are the same tables outside the same cafés, the same affiches, the same funny little stalls for selling books, the same violently miraculous driving, the same pervading French grey, even in the sky; and the same rather ill-tempered look of not giving a damn for anything outside Paris. Paris leads fashion, and yet it's the most conservative place in the world. They say the advanced literary crowd here regard the world as having begun in 1914 at earliest, have scrapped everything that came before the war, despise anything that lasts, are mostly Jews, Poles and Irishmen, and yet have chosen this changeless town to function in. The same with the painters and musicians, and every other extremist. Here they gather and chatter and experiment themselves to death. And good old Paris laughs and carries on, as concerned with reality and flavours and the past as it ever was. Paris produces anarchy exactly as stout produces froth."

Dinny pressed his arm.

"That was a good effort, Uncle. I must say I feel more alive here than I have for ages."

"Ah! Paris pets the senses. Let's go in here — too cold to sit out. What'll you have, tea or — absinthe?"

"Absinthe."

"You won't like it."

"All right — tea with lemon."

Waiting for her tea in the quiet hurly-burly of the Café de la Paix, Dinny watched her Uncle's thin, bearded form, and thought that he looked quite 'in his plate,' but with a queer, interested contentment that identified him with the life around.

To be interested in life and not pet oneself! And she looked about her. Her neighbours were neither remarkable nor demonstrative, but they gave an impression of doing what they liked, not of being on the way to somewhere else.

"They dig into the moment, don't they?" said Adrian suddenly.

"Yes, I was thinking that."

"The French make an art of living. We hope for the future or regret the past. Precious little 'present' about the English!"

"Why are these so different?"

"Less northern blood, more wine and oil; their heads are rounder than ours, their bodies more stocky, and their eyes are mainly brown."

"Those are things we can't alter, anyway."

"The French are essentially the medium people. They've brought equilibrium to a high point. Their senses and intellects balance."

"But they get fat, Uncle."

"Yes, but all over; they don't jut, and they hold themselves up. I'd rather be English, of course; but if I weren't, I'd rather be French."

"Isn't there anything in having an itch for something better than you've got?"

"Ah! Ever noticed, Dinny, that when we say 'Be good!' they say 'Soyez sage!'? There's a lot in that. I've heard Frenchmen put our unease down to the Puritan tradition. But that's to mistake effect for cause, symptoms for roots. I admit we've got an urge towards the promised land, but Puritanism was part of that urge, so's our wanderlust and colonising quality; so's our Protestantism, Scandinavian blood, the sea and the climate. None of that helps us in the art of living. Look at our industrialism, our old maids, cranks, humanitarianisms, poetry! We jut in every direction. We've got one or two highly mediumising institutions — the public schools, 'cricket' in its various forms — but as a people we're chock-full of extremism. The average Briton is naturally exceptional, and underneath his dread of being conspicuous, he's really proud of it. Where, on earth, will you see more diverse bone formation than in England, and all of it peculiar? We do our level best to be average, but, by George, we jut!"

"You're inspired, Uncle."

"Well, you look about you when you get home."

"I will," said Dinny.

They had a good crossing the next day, and Adrian dropped her at Mount Street.

In kissing him good-bye, she squeezed his little finger.

"You've done me a tremendous amount of good, Uncle."

During those six weeks she had scarcely thought at all about Clare's troubles, and she asked at once for the latest news. A defence had been delivered and issue joined; the case would probably be on in a few weeks.

"I've not seen either Clare or young Croom," said Sir Lawrence, "but I gathered from Dornford that they go about as before. 'Very young' Roger still harps on the need for getting her to speak about her life out there. Lawyers seem to regard the Courts as confessional boxes in which to confess the sins of your opponent."

"Well, aren't they?"

"Judging by the papers, yes."

"Well, Clare can't and won't. They'll make a great mistake if they try to force her. Has anything been heard of Jerry?"

"He must have started, if he's to be here in time."

"Suppose they lose, what is to be done about Tony Croom?"

"Put yourself in his place, Dinny. Whatever happens, he'll probably come in for a slating from the judge. He won't be in a mood to accept favours. If he can't pay up I don't quite know what they can do to him; something unpleasant, no doubt. And there's the question of Jack Muskham's attitude — he's queer."

"Yes," said Dinny under her breath.

Sir Lawrence dropped his monocle.

"Your Aunt suggests that young Croom should go gold-digging, come back rich, and marry Clare."

"But Clare?"

"Isn't she in love with him?"

Dinny shook her head. "She might be if he's ruined."

"H'm! And how are YOU, my dear? Really yourself again?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Michael would like to see you some time."

"I'll go round tomorrow."

And that, meaning much, was all that was said about the news that had caused her illness.

❦

Chapter 25

Dinny made the effort needed to go round to South Square next morning. Except with Clare on her arrival from Ceylon, she had not been there since the day of Wilfrid's departure to Siam.

"Up in his workroom, miss."

"Thank you, Coaker, I'll go up."

Michael did not hear her come in, and she stood for a moment looking at the caricature-covered walls. It always seemed to her so odd that Michael, inclined to over-estimate human virtues, should surround himself with the efforts of those who live by exaggerating human defects.

"Am I interrupting, Michael?"

"Dinny! You're looking a treat! You gave us a bad turn, old thing. Sit down! I was only looking into potatoes — their figures are so puzzling."

They talked for some time, and then, the knowledge of what she had come for invading both, fell silent.

"You've something to give or tell me, Michael."

He went to a drawer, and took out a little packet. Dinny unwrapped it in her lap. There was a letter, a little photograph, a badge.

"It's his passport photo, and D.S.O. ribbon. In the letter there's something for you; in fact, the whole letter is really for you. They're all for you. Excuse me, I have to see Fleur before she goes out."

Dinny sat motionless, looking at the photograph. Yellowed with damp and heat, it had the uncompromising reality that characterises passport photographs. "Wilfrid Desert" was written across it, and he looked straight at her out of the pasteboard. She turned it face down on her lap, and smoothed the ribbon, which was stained and crushed. Then, nerving herself, she opened the letter. From it dropped a folded sheet, which she set apart. The letter was to Michael.

"New Year's Day.

"DEAR OLD M. M. —

"Greetings to you and Fleur, and many good years! I'm far up north in a very wild part of this country with an objective that I may reach or not — the habitation of a tribe quite definitely pre-Siamese and non-Mongolian. Adrian Charwell would be interested. I've often meant to let you know my news, but, when it came to writing, didn't — partly because if you don't know this part of the world description's no use, and partly because it's difficult for me to believe that anybody can be interested. I'm writing now really to ask you to tell Dinny that I am at peace with myself at last. I don't know whether it's the strength and remoteness of the atmosphere out here, or whether I've gained some of the Eastern conviction that the world of other men does not matter; one's alone from birth to death, except for that fine old companion, the Universe — of which one is the microcosm. It's a kind of queer peace, and I often wonder how I could have been so torn and tortured. Dinny, I think, will be glad to know this; just as I would be truly glad to know that she, too, is at peace.

"I've written a little, and, if I come back from this business, shall try and produce some account of it. In three days from now we reach the river, cross it, and follow up a western tributary towards the Himalayas.

"Faint echoes of the crisis you've been having trickle out here. Poor old England! I don't suppose I shall ever see her again; but she's a game old bird when put to it, and I can't see her being beaten; in fact, properly moulted, I expect her to fly better than ever.

"Good-bye, old man, my love to you both; and to Dinny my special love.

"WILFRID."

Peace! And she? She rewrapped the ribbon, photograph, and letter and thrust them into her bag. Making no noise, she opened the door, went down the stairs, and out into the sunshine.

Alone by the river, she unfolded the sheet she had taken from the letter, and, under a plane tree as yet bare of leaves, read these verses:

"Lie Still!

"The sun, who brings all earth to bloom,

Corrupts and makes corruption flower,
Is just a flame that thro' the gloom
Of heaven burns a little hour;

And, figured on the chart of night —
A somewhat negligible star —
Is but a pinpricked point of light
As million-million others are;

And, though it be the all in all
Of my existence and decay,
It has as simple rise and fall
As I have, and as short a day.

But that no unction to my heart
Will lay; the smallest germ in me
Plays just as passionate a part
As I do, in eternity.

The germ and I and sun, we rise,
Fulfil our little lives, and die;
And to all question God replies:
'Lie still! I cannot tell you why!'"

Lie still! The Embankment was nearly empty of people and of traffic. She walked on, crossing the main lines of the traffic, and came to Kensington Gardens. There on the Round Pond were many small boats, and many children interested in their vagaries. A bright-haired little boy, something like Kit Mont, was guiding his boat with a stick to a fresh attempt to cross the pond. What blissful unconsciousness of all else! Was that the secret of happiness? To be lost in the moment — to be out of oneself, like a child! He said suddenly:

"It's going! Look!"

The sails filled, the little boat floated away. The small boy stood with arms akimbo, and, quickly looking up at her, said:

"Ha! I must run!"

Dinny watched him stop now and again with a jerk to calculate the landing of his boat.

So one ran through life, watching each venture coming to shore, and at the end lay still! Like birds who uttered their songs, hunted for worms, preened their feathers, flew without seeming cause, unless for joy; mated, built nests and fed their young, and when all was over became little stiffened bundles of feathers, and passed into corruption, and dust.

She followed slowly round the pond, saw him again guiding the boat with his stick, and said: "What do you call your boat?"

"A cutter. I had a schooner, but our dog ate the rigging."

"Yes," said Dinny, "dogs like rigging — very succulent."

"Very what?"

"Like asparagus."

"I'm not allowed asparagus, it's too expensive."

"But you've tasted it?"

"Yes. See, the wind's catching it again!"

Off went the boat, and off went the small bright-haired boy.

Adrian's words came into her head. "I was thinking more of children."

She walked into what in old days would have been called a glade. The ground was covered with crocuses, yellow, violet, white, and with daffodils; the trees had eagerness in every twig, stretching their buds upward to the sun's warmth; the blackbirds were in song. And as she walked she thought: 'Peace! There is no peace. There is life, and there is death!'

And those who saw her thought: 'Nice-looking girl!' 'These little hats!' 'Where's she goin', I wonder, with her head in the air?' or, again, just: 'Coo!' She crossed the road and came to the Hudson Memorial. It was supposed to be a home for birds; but beyond a sparrow or two and a fat pigeon, there were none; nor were more than three people looking at it. She, who had seen it with Wilfrid, glanced at it for a moment and walked on.

"Poor Hudson! Poor Rima!" he had said.

She went down to the Serpentine and walked along it; the sun was bright on the water, and beyond it the grass was springy and dry. The papers were already talking of drought! The sound currents from north and south and west joined in a mild continuous roaring. Where he was lying it would be silent; strange birds and little creatures would be the only visitors, and odd-shaped leaves would drop on his grave. There came into her mind the pastoral scenes in some film pictures of the Normandy home of Briand, that she had seen at Argelès. “A pity we have to leave all this!” she had said.

An aeroplane droned its way over to the north, a high, silvery, small, noisy shape. HE had hated them ever since the war. “Disturbers of whatever Gods there be!”

Brave new world! God no longer in His heaven!

She turned a little north to avoid the place where she used to meet him. The roofless tabernacle of oratory close to the Marble Arch was deserted. She left the Park and went towards Melton Mews. It was over! With a queer little smile on her lips she turned into the Mews and stopped at her sister’s door.

❦

Chapter 26

She found Clare in. For the first few minutes they avoided each other's troubles, then Dinny said: "Well?"

"Not at all well. I've split with Tony — my nerves are in rags and his in tatters."

"But do you mean that he —?"

"No. Only I've told him I can't go on seeing him till this is over. We meet meaning not to talk about the thing; then it crops up, and we get all anyhow."

"He must be awfully unhappy."

"He is. But it's only for another three or four weeks."

"And then?"

Clare laughed — no joyful sound.

"But seriously, Clare?"

"We shan't win, and then nothing will matter. If Tony wants me I suppose I shall let him. He'll be ruined, so I shall owe him that."

"I think," said Dinny slowly, "that I wouldn't let the result affect me."

Clare stared up at her from the sofa.

"That sounds almost too sensible."

"It wasn't worth while to plead innocence unless you meant to carry it through, however the case goes. If you win, wait till you can divorce Jerry. If you don't win, wait till you're divorced. It won't do Tony any real harm to wait; and it'll certainly do you no harm to know for certain how you feel."

"Jerry is quite clever enough to prevent my ever getting evidence against him, if he sets his mind to it."

"Then we must hope you'll lose. Your friends will still believe in you."

Clare shrugged. "Will they?"

"I'll see to that," said Dinny.

"Dornford has advised telling Jack Muskham before the case comes on. What do you say?"

"I should like to see Tony Croom first."

"Well, if you come round again this evening, you'll see him. He comes and stares up at me at seven o'clock on Saturday and Sunday evenings. Quaint!"

"No. Very natural. What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Riding with Dornford in Richmond Park. I ride with him in the Row early every morning now. I wish you'd come, Dinny."

"No things, and no muscles."

"Darling," said Clare, springing up, "it really was awful while you were ill. We felt ever so bad. Dornford was quite potty. You look better now than you did before."

"Yes, I'm more pneumatic."

"Oh! you've read that book?"

Dinny nodded. "I'll come round this evening. Good-bye; bless you!" . . .

It was almost seven when she slipped out of Mount Street and walked rapidly towards the Mews. A full moon was up with the evening star in a not yet darkened sky. Coming to the west corner of the deserted Mews, she at once saw young Croom standing below No. 2. Waiting till he began to move away, she ran down the Mews and round the far corner to catch him.

"Dinny! How wonderful!"

"I was told I should catch you looking at the Queen."

"Yes, that's what the cat has come to."

“It might be worse.”

“Are you all right again? You must have got a chill in the City that foul day.”

“Let’s walk as far as the Park. I wanted to ask you about Jack Muskham.”

“I funk telling him.”

“Shall I do it for you?”

“But why?”

Dinny took his arm.

“He’s a connection, through Uncle Lawrence. Besides, I’ve had occasion to know him. Mr. Dornford is perfectly right; it will depend very much on when and what he’s told. Let me!”

“I don’t know really — I really don’t know.”

“I want to see him again, anyway.”

Young Croom looked at her.

“Somehow I don’t believe that.”

“Honest Injun.”

“It’s terribly sweet of you; of course you can do it much better than I, but —”

“That’s enough then.”

They had reached the Park, and were walking along the rails towards Mount Street.

“Have you been seeing the lawyers much?”

“Yes, our evidence is all taped out. It’s the cross-examination.”

“I think I might enjoy that, if I were going to tell the truth.”

“They twist and turn what you say so, and their tones of voice —! I went into that court and listened one day. Dornford told Clare he wouldn’t practice in that court for all the gold in France. He’s a sound fellow, Dinny.”

“Yes,” said Dinny, looking round at his ingenuous face.

“I don’t think our lawyers care about the job either. It’s not in their line. ‘Very young’ Roger is a bit of a sportsman. He believes we’re telling the truth, because he realises I’m sorry we are. That’s your turning. I shall go and bat round the Park, or I shan’t sleep. Wonderful moon!”

Dinny pressed his hand.

When she reached her door, he was still standing there, and raised his hat to her — or to the moon, she could not be quite sure which . . .

According to Sir Lawrence, Jack Muskham would be up in Town over the week-end; he now had rooms in Ryder Street. She had not thought twice about going all the way to Royston to see him concerning Wilfrid; but he might well think twice about her going to see him in Ryder Street concerning young Croom. She telephoned, therefore, to Burton’s Club at lunch-time the next day.

His voice brought back the shock of the last time she had heard it, close to the York Column.

“Dinny Cherrell. Could I see you some time today?”

The answer came slowly.

“Er — of course. When?”

“Any time that suits you.”

“Are you at Mount Street?”

“Yes, but I would rather come to you.”

“Well — er — would —? How about tea at my rooms in Ryder Street? You know the number?”

“Yes, thank you. Five o’clock?”

Approaching those rooms she needed all her pluck. She had last seen him reeling in the thick of that fight with Wilfrid. Besides, he symbolised to her the rock on which her love for Wilfrid had gone aground. She only did not hate him, because she could not help remembering that his bitterness towards Wilfrid had been due to his queer appreciation of herself. Only by fast walking, and slow thinking, did she arrive.

The door was opened to her by one who obviously bettered his declining days by letting rooms to such as he had valeted in the past. He took her up to the second floor.

“Miss — er — Cherwell, sir.”

Tall, lean, languid, neatly dressed as ever, Jack Muskham was standing by the open window of a not unpleasant room. “Tea, please, Rodney.” He came towards her, holding out his hand.

‘Like a slow-motion picture,’ thought Dinny. However surprised at her wanting to see him, he was showing no sign of it.

“Been racing at all since I saw you at Blenheim’s Derby?”

“No.”

“You backed him, I remember. Clearest case of beginner’s luck I ever knew.” His smile brought out all the wrinkles on his brown face, and Dinny perceived that there were plenty of them.

“Do sit down. Here’s tea. Will you make it?”

She gave him his cup, took her own and said:

“Are the Arab mares over yet, Mr. Muskham?”

“I expect them the end of next month.”

“You have young Tony Croom to look after them.”

“Oh! Do you know him?”

“Through my sister.”

“Nice boy.”

“He is,” said Dinny. “It’s about him I’ve come.”

“Oh!”

The thought ‘He owes me too much,’ darted through her. He could not refuse her this! Leaning back and crossing her knees, she looked him full in the face.

“I wanted to tell you, in confidence, that Jerry Corven is bringing a divorce suit against my sister, and Tony Croom is cited as the co-respondent.”

Jack Muskham moved the hand that held his cup.

“He IS in love with her, and they HAVE been going about together, but there is no truth in the charges.”

“I see,” said Muskham.

“The case is coming on quite soon. I persuaded Tony Croom to let me tell you of it; it would be so awkward for him to talk about himself.”

Muskham was looking at her with unmoved face.

“But,” he said, “I know Jerry Corven. I didn’t realise your sister had left him.”

“We keep it to ourselves.”

“Was her leaving him young Croom’s doing?”

“No. They only met on the boat coming over. Clare left Jerry for quite another reason. She and Tony Croom have been indiscreet, of course; they’ve been watched and seen together in what are known, I believe, as ‘compromising circumstances.’”

“How do you mean exactly?”

“Driving back from Oxford late one evening their lights failed and they spent the rest of the night in the car together.”

Jack Muskham raised his shoulders slightly. Dinny leaned forward with her eyes on his.

“I told you there was no truth in the charges; there is NONE.”

“But, my dear Miss Cherrell, a man never admits —”

“That is why *I* came to you instead of Tony. My sister would not tell me a lie.”

Again Muskham made the slight movement of his shoulders.

"I don't quite see —" he began.

"What it has to do with you? This: I don't suppose they'll be believed."

"You mean if I just read the case it would put me off young Croom?"

"Yes, I think you would feel he had not 'played the game.'" She could not quite keep irony out of her voice.

"Well," he said, "has he?"

"I think so. He's deeply in love with my sister, and yet he's kept himself in hand. One can't help falling in love, you know." With those words all the feelings of the past rose up within her, and she looked down so as not to see that impassive face and the provocative set of its lips. Suddenly, by a sort of inspiration, she said:

"My brother-inlaw has asked for damages."

"Oh!" said Jack Muskham, "I didn't know that was done now."

"Two thousand, and Tony Croom has nothing. He professes not to care, but if they lose, of course, it's ruin."

After that there was silence. Jack Muskham went back to the window. He sat on the sill and said:

"Well, I don't know what I can do?"

"You needn't take his job from him — that's all."

"The man was in Ceylon and his wife here. It's not —"

Dinny rose, took two steps towards him and stood very still.

"Has it ever struck you, Mr. Muskham, that you owe me anything? Do you ever remember that you took my lover from me? Do you know that he is dead out there, where he went because of you?"

"Of me?"

"You and what you stand for made him give me up. I ask you now, however this case goes, not to sack Tony Croom! Goodbye!" And before he could answer she was gone.

She almost ran towards the Green Park. How far from what she had intended! How fatal — perhaps! But her feelings had been too strong — the old revolt against the dead wall of form and those impalpable inexorable forces of tradition which had wrecked her love life! It could not have been otherwise. The sight of his long, dandified figure, the sound of his voice, had brought it all back too strongly. Ah, well! It was a relief; an escape of old bitterness pent within her spirit! The next morning she received this note:

"Ryder Street.

"Sunday.

"DEAR MISS CHARWELL —

"You may rely on me in that matter. With sincere regard,

"Yours very faithfully,

"JOHN MUSKHAM."

❦

Chapter 27

With that promise to her credit she went back to Condaford the following day and gave herself to mitigation of the atmosphere she found there. Her father and mother, living their ordinary lives, were obviously haunted and harassed. Her mother, sensitive and secluded, was just shrinking from publicity discreditable to Clare. Her father seemed to feel that, however the case went, most people would think his daughter a light women and a liar; young Croom would be excused more or less, but a woman who allowed circumstance to take such turns would find no one to excuse her. He was clearly feeling, too, a vindictive anger against Jerry Corven, and a determination that the fellow should not be successful if he could help it. Faintly amused at an attitude so male, Dinny felt a sort of admiration at the painful integrity with which he was grasping the shadow and letting the substance go. To her father's generation divorce still seemed the outward and visible sign of inner and spiritual disgrace. To herself love was love and, when it became aversion, ceased to justify sexual relationship. She had, in fact, been more shocked by Clare's yielding to Jerry Corven in her rooms than by her leaving him in Ceylon. The divorce suits she had occasionally followed in the papers had done nothing to help her believe that marriages were made in heaven. But she recognised the feelings of those brought up in an older atmosphere, and avoided adding to the confusion and trouble in her people's minds. The line she took was more practical: The thing would soon be over one way or the other, and probably the other! People paid very little attention to other people's affairs nowadays!

"What!" said the General sardonically. "'Night in a car'— it's the perfect headline. Sets everybody thinking at once how they themselves would have behaved."

She had no answer, but: "They'll make a symposium of it, darling: The Home Secretary, the Dean of St. Paul's, the Princess Elizabeth."

She was disturbed when told that Dornford had been asked to Condaford for Easter.

"I hope you don't mind, Dinny; we didn't know whether you'd be here or not."

"I can't use the expression 'I'm agreeable' even to you, Mother."

"Well, darling, one of these days you must go down into the battle again."

Dinny bit her lip and did not answer. It was true, and the more disquieting. Coming from her gentle and unmanaging mother, the words stung.

Battle! Life, then, was like the war. It struck you down into hospital, turned you out therefrom into the ranks again. Her mother and father would hate 'to lose her,' but they clearly wanted her 'to go.' And this with Clare's failure written on the wall!

Easter came with a wind 'fresh to strong.' Clare arrived by train on the Saturday morning, Dornford by car in the afternoon. He greeted Dinny as if doubtful of his welcome.

He had found himself a house. It was on Campden Hill. He had been terribly anxious to know Clare's opinion of it, and she had spent a Sunday afternoon going over it with him.

"'Eminently desirable,' Dinny. 'South aspect; garage and stabling for two horses; good garden; all the usual offices, centrally heated,' and otherwise well-bred. He thinks of going in towards the end of May. It has an old tiled roof, so I put him on to French grey for shutters. Really, it's rather nice, and roomy."

"It sounds 'marvellous.' I suppose you'll be going there instead of to the Temple?"

"Yes, he's moving into Pump Court, or Brick Buildings — I can't remember. When you think of it, Dinny, why shouldn't he have been made co-respondent instead of Tony? I see much more of him."

Otherwise allusion to 'the case' was foregone. It would be one of the first after the undefended suits were disposed of, and calm before the storm was reigning.

Dornford, indeed, referred to it after lunch on Sunday.

"Shall you be in court during your sister's case, Dinny?"

"I must."

"I'm afraid it may make you very wild. They've briefed Brough, and he's particularly exasperating when he likes with a simple denial like this; that's what they'll rely on. Clare must try and keep cool."

Dinny remembered 'very young' Roger's wishing it had been herself and not Clare.

"I hope you'll tell her that."

"I'll take her through her evidence, and cross-examine her on it. But one can't tell the line Brough will take."

"Shall you be in court yourself?"

"If I can, but the odds are I shan't be free."

"How long will it last?"

"More than a day, I'm afraid."

Dinny sighed.

"Poor Dad! Has Clare got a good man?"

"Yes — Instone, very much hampered by her refusal to talk about Ceylon."

"That's definite, you know. She won't."

"I like her for it, but I'm afraid it's fatal."

"So be it!" said Dinny: "I want her free. The person most to be pitied is Tony Croom."

"Why?"

"He's the only one of the three in love."

"I see," said Dornford, and was silent. Dinny felt sorry.

"Would you care for a walk?"

"Simply love it!"

"We'll go up through the woods, and I'll show you where the Cherrell killed the boar and won the de Campfort — our heraldic myth. Had you any family legend in Shropshire?"

"Yes, but the place has gone — sold when my father died; six of us and no money."

"Oh!" said Dinny, "horrible when families are uprooted."

Dornford smiled.

"Live donkeys are better than dead lions."

While they were going up through the coverts he talked about his new house, subtly 'pumping' her for expressions of her taste.

They came out into a sunken roadway leading on to a thorn-bush-covered down.

"Here's the place. Virgin forest then, no doubt. We used to picnic here as children."

Dornford took a deep breath. "Real English view — nothing spectacular, but no end good."

"Lovable."

"That's the word."

He spread his raincoat on the bank. "Sit down and let's have a smoke."

Dinny sat down.

"Come on part of it yourself, the ground's not too dry."

While he sat there, with his hands hugging his knees and his pipe fuming gently, she thought: 'The most self-controlled man I ever came across, and the gentlest, except Uncle Adrian.'

"If only a boar would come along," he said, "it would be prime!"

"Member of Parliament kills boar on spur of Chilterns," murmured Dinny, but did not add: "Wins lady."

"Wind's off the gorse. Another three weeks and it'll be green down there. Pick of the year — this, or the Indian summer, I never know. And yours, Dinny?"

"Blossom time."

"Um; and harvest. This ought to be glorious then — quite a lot of cornland."

"It was just ripe when the war broke out. We came up picnicking two days before, and stayed till the moon rose. How much do you think people really fought for England, Mr. Dornford?”

“Practically all — for some nook or other of it; many just for the streets, and buses, and smell of fried fish. I fought mainly, I think, for Shrewsbury and Oxford. But Eustace is my name.”

“I’ll remember. We’d better go down now, or we shall be late for tea.”

And, all the way home, they contended with birds’ songs and the names of plants.

“Thanks for my treat,” he said.

“I’ve enjoyed it, too.”

That walk had, indeed, a curiously soothing effect on Dinny. So, she could talk with him without question of love-making.

Bank holiday was sou’-westerly. Dornford spent a quiet hour with Clare over her evidence, and then went riding with her in the rain. Dinny’s morning went in arranging for spring cleaning and the chintzing of the furniture while the family were up in town. Her mother and father were to stay at Mount Street, she and Clare with Fleur. In the afternoon she pottered with the General round the new pigsties, progressing as slowly as a local builder, anxious to keep his men in work, could make them. She was not alone again with Dornford until after tea.

“Well,” he said, “I think your sister will do, if she keeps her temper.”

“Clare can be very cutting.”

“Yes, and there’s an underlying sentiment among lawyers against being cut up by outsiders in each other’s presence; even judges have it.”

“They won’t find her a ‘butterfly on the wheel.’”

“It’s no good getting up against institutions, you know; they carry too many guns.”

“Oh! well,” said Dinny, with a sigh, “it’s on the knees of the gods.”

“Which are deuced slippery. Could I have a photograph of you, preferably as a little girl?”

“I’ll see what we’ve got — I’m afraid only snaps; but I think there’s one where my nose doesn’t turn up too much.”

She went to a cabinet, took a drawer out bodily, and put it on the covered billiard table.

“The family snap-hoard — choose!”

He stood at her side and they turned them over.

“I took most of them, so there aren’t many of me.”

“Is that your brother?”

“Yes, and this — just before he went to the war. This is Clare the week before she was married. Here’s one of me, with some hair. Dad took that when he came home, the spring after the war.”

“When you were thirteen?”

“Fourteen nearly. It’s supposed to be like Joan of Arc being taken in by voices.”

“It’s lovely. I shall get it enlarged.”

He held it to the light. The figure was turned three quarters, and the face lifted to the branches of a fruit tree in blossom. The whole of the little picture was very much alive; the sun having fallen on the blossom and on Dinny’s hair, which hung to her waist.

“Mark the rapt look,” she said; “there must have been a cat up the tree.”

He put it into his pocket and returned to the table.

“And this?” he said: “Could I have this too?”

The snap was one of her a little older, but still with her hair uncut, full face, hands clasped in front, head a little down and eyes looking up.

“No, I’m sorry. I didn’t know it was there.” It was the counterpart of one she had sent to Wilfrid.

Dornford nodded; and she realised that in some uncanny way he knew why. Seized with compunction, she said:

“Oh! yes, you can. It doesn’t matter, now.” And she put it into his hand . . . .

After Dornford and Clare had left on Tuesday morning, Dinny studied a map, took the car and set out for Bablock

Hythe. She did not care for driving, but she was moved by the thought of Tony Croom deprived of his week-end glimpse of Clare. The twenty-five miles took her well over an hour. At the inn she was told that he would be at his cottage, and, leaving the car, she walked over. He was in shirt-sleeves distempering the walls of the low, timbered sitting-room. From the doorway she could see the pipe wobble in his mouth.

"Anything wrong with Clare?" he said at once.

"Nothing whatever. I just thought I'd like to have a look at your habitat."

"How terribly nice of you! I'm doing a job of work."

"Clearly."

"Clare likes duck's-egg green; this is the nearest I can get to it."

"It goes splendidly with the beams."

Young Croom said, looking straight before him, "I can't believe I'll ever get her here, but I can't help pretending; otherwise the sand would be clean out of my dolly."

Dinny put her hand on his sleeve.

"You're not going to lose your job. I've seen Jack Muskham."

"Already? You're marvellous. I'll just wash off and get my coat on, and show you round."

Dinny waited in the doorway where a streak of sunlight fell. The two cottages, knocked into one, still had their ramblers, wistaria, and thatched roof. It would be very pretty.

"Now," said young Croom. "The boxes are all finished, and the paddocks have got their water. In fact, we only want the animals; but they're not to be here till May. Taking no risks. Well, I'd rather have this case over first. You've come from Condaford?"

"Yes. Clare went back this morning. She would have sent her love, but she didn't know I was coming."

"Why DID you come?" said young Croom bluntly.

"Fellow feeling."

He thrust his arm within hers.

"Yes. So sorry! Do you find," he added suddenly, "that thinking of other people suffering helps?"

"Not much."

"No. Wanting someone is like tooth or ear ache. You can't get away from it."

Dinny nodded.

"This time of year, too," said young Croom, with a laugh. "The difference between being 'fond of' and 'loving'! I'm getting desperate, Dinny. I don't see how Clare can ever change. If she were ever going to love me, she would by now. If she's not going to love me, I couldn't stick it here. I'd have to get away to Kenya or somewhere."

Looking at his eyes, ingenuously hanging on her answer, her nerve went. It was her own sister; but what did she know of her, when it came to the depths?

"You never know. I wouldn't give up."

Young Croom pressed her arm.

"Sorry to be talking of my mania. Only, when one longs day and night —"

"I know."

"I must buy a goat or two. Horses don't like donkeys; and as a rule they shy at goats; but I want to make these paddocks feel homy. I've got two cats for the boxes. What do you think?"

"I only know about dogs, and — pigs theoretically."

"Come and have lunch. They've got a rather good ham."

He did not again speak of Clare; and, after partaking together of the rather good ham, he put Dinny into her car and drove her the first five miles of the way home, saying that he wanted a walk.

"I think no end of you for coming," he said, squeezing her hand hard: "It was most frightfully sporting. Give my love to Clare," and he went off, waving his hand, as he turned into a field-path.

She was absent-minded during the rest of the drive. The day, though still south-westerly, had gleams of sunlight, and sharp showers of hail. Putting the car away she got the spaniel Foch and went out to the new pigsties. Her father was there, brooding over their construction like the Lieutenant-General he was, very neat, resourceful, faddy. Doubtful whether they would ever contain pigs, Dinny slipped her arm through his.

"How's the battle of Pigsville?"

"One of the bricklayers was run down yesterday, and that carpenter there has cut his thumb. I've been talking to old Bellows, but — dash it! — you can't blame him for wanting to keep his men in work. I sympathise with a chap who sticks by his own men, and won't have union labour. He says he'll be finished by the end of next month, but he won't."

"No," said Dinny, "he's already said that twice."

"Where have you been?"

"Over to see Tony Croom."

"Any development?"

"No. I just wanted to tell him that I've seen Mr. Muskham, and he won't lose his job."

"Glad of that. He's got grit, that boy. Pity he didn't go into the army."

"I'm very sorry for him, Dad; he really is in love."

"Still a common complaint," said the General drily: "Did you see they've more than balanced the Budget? It's an hysterical age, with these European crises for breakfast every other morning."

"That's the papers. The French papers, where the print is so much smaller, don't excite one half so much. I couldn't get the wind up at all when I was reading them."

"Papers, and wireless; everything known before it happens; and headlines twice the size of the events. You'd think, to judge from the speeches and the 'leaders,' that the world had never been in a hole before. The world's always in a hole, only in old days people didn't make a song about it."

"But without the song would they have balanced the Budget, dear?"

"No, it's the way we do things nowadays. But it's not English."

"Do we know what's English and what isn't, Dad?"

The General wrinkled up his weathered face, and a smile crept about the wrinkles. He pointed at the pigsties.

"Those are. Done in the end, but not before they must be."

"Do you like that?"

"No; but I like this hysterical way of trying to cure it even less. You'd think we'd never been short of money before. Why, Edward the Third owed money all over Europe. The Stuarts were always bankrupt. And after Napoleon we had years to which these last years have been nothing, but they didn't have it for breakfast every morning."

"When ignorance was bliss!"

"Well, I dislike the mixture of hysteria and bluff we've got now."

"Would you suppress the voice that breathes o'er Eden?"

"Wireless? 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new. And God fulfils himself in many ways,'" quoted the General, "'lest one good custom should corrupt the world.' I remember a sermon of old Butler's at Harrow on that text — one of his best, too. I'm not hidebound, Dinny, at least I hope not. Only I think everything's talked out too much. It's talked out so much that it's not felt."

"I believe in the Age, Dad. It's dropped its superfluous clothes. Look at those old pictures in The Times lately. You smelt dogma and flannel petticoat."

"Not flannel," said the General, "in my day."

"You should know, dear."

"As a matter of fact, Dinny, I believe MINE was the really revolutionary generation. You saw that play about Browning? There you had it; but that was all gone before I went to Sandhurst. We thought as we liked, and we acted as we thought, but we still didn't talk. Now they talk before they think, and when it comes to action, they act much as we did, if they act at all. In fact, the chief difference between now and fifty years ago is the freedom of expression; it's so free now, that it takes the salt out of things.”

“That’s profound, Dad.”

“But not new; I’ve read it a dozen times.”

“‘You don’t think the war had any great influence, then, sir?’ They always ask that in interviews.”

“The war? It’s influence is pretty well over by now. Besides, the people of my generation were already too set. The next generation was wiped or knocked out —”

“Not the females.”

“No, they ran riot a bit, but they weren’t really in the thing. As for your generation, the war’s a word.”

“Well, thank you, dear,” said Dinny. “It’s been very instructive, but it’s going to hail. Come along, Foch!”

The General turned up the collar of his coat and crossed over to the carpenter who had cut his thumb. Dinny saw him examining the bandage. She saw the carpenter smile, and her father pat him on the shoulder.

‘His men must have liked him,’ she thought. ‘He may be an old buffer, but he’s a nice one.’

❦

Chapter 28

If Art is long, Law is longer. The words Corven v. Corven and Croom rewarded no eye scanning the Cause List in The Times newspaper. Undefended suits in vast numbers occupied the attention of Mr. Justice Covell. At Dornford's invitation Dinny and Clare came to the entrance of his court, and stood for five minutes just inside, as members of a cricket team will go and inspect a pitch before playing in a match. The judge sat so low that little but his face could be seen; but Dinny noticed that above Clare's head in the witness-box would be a sort of canopy, or protection from rain.

"If," said Dornford, as they came out, "you stand well back, Clare, your face will be hardly visible. But your voice you should pitch so that it always carries to the judge. He gets grumpy if he can't hear."

It was on the day after this that Dinny received a note delivered by hand at South Square.

"Burton's Club: 13.iv.32.

"DEAR DINNY—

"I should be very glad if I could see you for a few minutes. Name your own time and place and I will be there. Needless to say it concerns Clare.

"Sincerely yours,

"GERALD CORVEN."

Michael was out, but she consulted Fleur.

"I should certainly see him, Dinny. It may be a death-bed repentance. Let him come here when you know Clare will be out."

"I don't think I'll risk his seeing her. I'd rather meet him somewhere in the open."

"Well, there's the Achilles, or the Rima."

"The Rima," said Dinny. "We can walk away from it."

She appointed the following afternoon at three o'clock, and continued to wonder what he wanted.

The day was an oasis of warmth in that bleak April. Arriving at the Rima, she saw him at once, leaning against the railing with his back to that work of art. He was smoking a cigarette through a short well-coloured holder in meerschaum, and looked so exactly as when she had seen him last that, for no reason, she received a sort of shock.

He did not offer to take her hand.

"Very good of you to come, Dinny. Shall we stroll and talk as we go?"

They walked towards the Serpentine.

"About this case," said Corven, suddenly, "I don't want to bring it a bit, you know."

She stole a look at him.

"Why DO you, then? The charges are not true."

"I'm advised that they are."

"The premises may be; the conclusions, no."

"If I withdraw the thing, will Clare come back to me, on her own terms?"

"I can ask her, but I don't think so. I shouldn't myself."

"What an implacable family!"

Dinny did not answer.

"Is she in love with this young Croom?"

"I can't discuss their feelings, if they have any."

"Can't we speak frankly, Dinny? There's no one to hear us except those ducks."

"Claiming damages has not improved our feelings towards you."

"Oh! that! I'm willing to withdraw everything, and risk her having kicked over, if she'll come back."

"In other words," said Dinny, gazing straight before her, "the case you have framed — I believe that is the word — is a sort of blackmailing device."

He looked at her through narrowed eyes.

"Ingenious notion. It didn't occur to me. No, the fact is, knowing Clare better than my solicitors and the enquiry agents, I'm not too convinced that the evidence means what it seems to."

"Thank you."

"Yes, but I told you before, or Clare anyway, that I can't and won't go on with nothing settled, one way or the other. If she'll come back I'll wipe the whole thing out. If she won't, it must take its chance. That's not wholly unreasonable, and it's not blackmail."

"And suppose she wins, will you be any further on?"

"No."

"You could free yourself and her at any time, if you liked."

"At a price I don't choose to pay. Besides, that sounds extremely like collusion — another awkward word, Dinny."

Dinny stood still.

"Well, I know what you want, and I'll ask Clare. And now I'll say good-bye. I don't see that talking further will do any good."

He stood looking at her, and she was moved by the expression on his face. Pain and puzzlement were peering through its hardwood browned mask.

"I'm sorry things are as they are," she said, impulsively.

"One's nature is a hell of a thing, Dinny, and one's never free from it. Well, good-bye and good luck!"

She put out her hand. He gave it a squeeze, turned and walked off.

Dinny stood for some unhappy moments beside a little birch tree whose budding leaves seemed to tremble up towards the sunshine. Queer! To be sorry for him, for Clare, for young Croom, and be able to do nothing to help!

She walked back to South Square as fast as she could.

Fleur met her with: "Well?"

"I'm afraid I can only talk to Clare about it."

"I suppose it's an offer to drop it if Clare will go back. If she's wise she will."

Dinny closed her lips resolutely.

She waited till bed-time, and then went to Clare's room. Her sister had just got into bed, on the foot of which Dinny sat down, and began at once:

"Jerry asked me to see him. We met in Hyde Park. He says he'll drop the case if you'll go back — on your own terms."

Clare raised her knees and clasped them with her hands.

"Oh! And what did you say?"

"That I'd ask you."

"Did you gather why?"

"Partly, I think he really wants you; partly, he doesn't much believe in the evidence."

"Ah!" said Clare, drily: "Nor do I. But I'm not going back."

"I told him I didn't think you would. He said we were 'implacable.'"

Clare uttered a little laugh.

"No, Dinny. I've been through all the horrors of this case. I feel quite stony, don't care whether we lose or win. In fact, I believe I'd rather we lost."

Dinny grasped one of her sister's feet through the bedclothes. She was in two minds whether to speak of the feeling Corven's face had roused in her.

Clare said uncannily:

"I'm always amused when people think they know how husbands and wives ought to behave towards each other. Fleur was telling me about her father and his first wife; she seemed to think the woman made a great fuss for nothing much. All I can say is that to think you can judge anybody else's case is just self-righteous idiocy. There's never any evidence to judge from, and until cine-cameras are installed in bedrooms," she added, "there never will be. You might let him know, Dinny, that there's nothing doing."

Dinny got up.

"I will. If only the thing were over!"

"Yes," said Clare, tossing back her hair, "if only —! But whether we shall be any further on, when it is, I don't know. God bless the Courts of Law."

That bitter invocation went up daily from Dinny, too, during the next fortnight, while the undefended causes, of which her sister's might have been one, were softly and almost silently vanishing away. Her note to Corven said simply that her sister had answered: 'No.' No reply came to it.

At Dornford's request she went with Clare to see his new house on Campden Hill. To know that he had taken it with the view of having a home for her, if she would consent to share it, kept her expressionless, except to say that it was all very nice, and to recommend a bird shelter in the garden. It was roomy, secluded, airy, and the garden sloped towards the south. Distressed at being so colourless, she was glad to come away; but the dashed and baffled look on his face when she said: 'Good-bye' hurt her. In their bus, going home, Clare said:

"The more I see of Dornford, Dinny, the more I believe you could put up with him. He's got very light hands; he lets your mouth alone. He really is a bit of an angel."

"I'm sure he is." And through Dinny's mind, in the jaunting bus, passed and passed four lines of verse:

> 'The bank is steep and wide the river flows —
> Are there fair pastures on the farther shore?
> And shall the halting kine adventure those
> Or wander barren pastures evermore?'

But on her face was that withdrawn expression which Clare knew better than to try and penetrate.

Waiting for an event, even when it primarily concerns others, is a process little desirable. For Dinny it had the advantage of taking her thoughts off her own existence and concentrating them on her people's. The family name, for the first time in her experience, was confronted with a really besmirching publicity, and she the chief recipient of her clan's reaction. She felt thankful that Hubert was not in England. He would have been so impatient and upset. In the publicity attendant on his own trouble, four years ago, there had been much more danger of disaster, but much less danger of disgrace. For however one might say that divorce was nothing in these days, a traditional stigma still clung to it in a country far from being as modern as it supposed itself to be. The Charwells of Condaford, at all events, had their pride and their prejudices, above all they loathed publicity.

When Dinny, for instance, went to lunch at St. Augustine's-inthe-Meads, she found a very peculiar atmosphere. It was as if her Uncle and Aunt had said to each other: 'This thing has to be, we suppose, but we can't pretend either to understand or to approve of it.' With no bluff matter-of-fact condemnation, nor anything churchy or shocked about their attitude, they conveyed to Dinny the thought that Clare might have been better occupied than in getting into such a position.

Walking away with Hilary to see a party of youths off to Canada from Euston Station, Dinny was ill at ease, for she had true affection and regard for her overworked unparsonical Uncle. Of all the members of her duty-bound family, he most embodied the principle of uncomplaining service, and however she might doubt whether the people he worked for were not happier than he was himself, she instinctively believed that he lived a real life in a world where not very much was 'real.' Alone with her he voiced his feelings more precisely.

"What I don't like, Dinny, about this business of Clare's is the way it will reduce her in the public eye to the level of the idle young woman who has nothing better to do than to get into matrimonial scrapes. Honestly, I'd prefer her passionately in love and flinging her cap over the windmill."

"Cheer up, Uncle," murmured Dinny, "and give her time. That may yet come."

Hilary smiled.

"Well! Well! But you see what I mean. The public eye is a mean, cold, parroty thing; it loves to see the worst of everything. Where there's real love I can accept most things; but I don't like messing about with sex. It's unpleasant."

“I don’t think you’re being just to Clare,” said Dinny with a sigh; “she cut loose for real reasons; and YOU ought to know, Uncle, that attractive young women can’t remain entirely unfollowed.”

“Well,” said Hilary shrewdly, “I perceive that you’re sitting on a tale you could unfold. Here we are. If you knew the bother I’ve had to get these youths to consent to go, and the authorities to consent to take them, you’d realise why I wish I were a mushroom, springing up over-night and being eaten fresh for breakfast.”

Whereon, they entered the station, and proceeded towards the Liverpool train. A little party of seven youths in cloth caps, half in and half out of a third-class carriage, were keeping up their spirits in truly English fashion, by passing remarks on each other’s appearance and saying at intervals: “Are we daown-‘earted? Naoo!”

They greeted Hilary with the words:

“‘Ello, Padre! . . . Zero hour! Over the top! . . . ‘Ave a fag, sir?”

Hilary took the ‘fag.’ And Dinny, who stood a little apart, admired the way in which he became at once an integral part of the group.

“Wish you was comin’ too, sir!”

“Wish I were, Jack.”

“Leavin’ old England for ever!”

“Good old England!”

“Sir?”

“Yes, Tommy?”

She lost the next remarks, slightly embarrassed by the obvious interest she was arousing.

“Dinny!”

She moved up to the carriage.

“Shake hands with these young men. My niece.”

In the midst of a queer hush she shook the seven hands of the seven capless youths, and seven times said: “Good luck!”

There was a rush to get into the carriage, a burst of noise from uncouth mouths, a ragged cheer, and the train moved. She stood by Hilary’s side, with a slight choke in her throat, waving her hand to the caps and faces stretched through the window.

“They’ll all be seasick to-night,” muttered Hilary, “that’s one comfort. Nothing like it to prevent you from thinking of the future or the past.”

She went into Adrian’s after leaving him, and was rather disconcerted to find her Uncle Lionel there. They stopped dead in their discussion. Then the Judge said:

“Perhaps you can tell us, Dinny: Is there any chance at all of mediating between those two before this unpleasant business comes on?”

“None, Uncle.”

“Oh! Then seeing as I do rather much of the law, I should suggest Clare’s not appearing and letting the thing go undefended. If there’s no chance of their coming together again, what is the use of prolonging a state of stalemate?”

“That’s what I think, Uncle Lionel; but, of course, you know the charges aren’t true.”

The Judge grimaced.

“I’m speaking as a man, Dinny. The publicity will be lamentable for Clare, win or lose; whereas, if she and this young man didn’t defend, there’d be very little. Adrian says she would refuse any support from Corven, so that element doesn’t come in. What IS all the trouble about? You know, of course.”

“Very vaguely, and in confidence.”

“Great pity!” said the Judge: “If they knew as much as I do, people would never fight these things.”

“There IS that claim for damages.”

“Yes, Adrian was telling me — pretty medieval, that.”

“Is revenge medieval, Uncle Lionel?”

"Not altogether," said the Judge, with his wry smile; "but I shouldn't have thought a man in Corven's position could afford such luxuries. To put his wife into the scales! Thoroughly unpleasant."

Adrian put his arm round Dinny's shoulders.

"Nobody feels that more than Dinny."

"I suppose," murmured the Judge, "Corven will at least have them settled on her."

"Clare wouldn't take them. But, why shouldn't they win? I thought the law existed to administer justice, Uncle Lionel."

"I don't like juries," said the Judge abruptly.

Dinny looked at him with curiosity — surprisingly frank! He added:

"Tell Clare to keep her voice up and her answers short. And don't let her try to be clever. Any laughter in court should be raised by the judge."

So saying, he again smiled wryly, shook her hand, and took himself away.

"Is Uncle Lionel a good judge?"

"Impartial and polite, they say. I've never seen him in court, but from what I know of him as a brother, he'd be conscientious and thorough; a bit sarcastic at times. He's quite right about this case, Dinny."

"I've felt that all along. It's Father, and that claim for damages."

"I expect they regret that claim now. His lawyers must be bunglers. Angling for position!"

"Isn't that what lawyers are for?"

Adrian laughed.

"Here's tea! Let's drown our sorrows, and go and see a film. There's a German thing they say is really magnanimous. REAL magnanimity on the screen, Dinny, think of it!"

❦

CHAPTER 29

Over was the shuffling of seats and papers, which marks the succession of one human drama by another, and 'very young' Roger said:

"We'll go into the well of the court."

There, with her sister and her father, Dinny sat down, bastioned from Jerry Corven by 'very young' Roger and his rival in the law.

"Is this," she whispered, "the well at the bottom of which truth lies, or LIES?"

Unable to see the rising 'body' of the court behind her, she knew by instinct and the sense of hearing that it was filling up. The public's unerring sense of value had scented out a fight, if not a title. The Judge, too, seemed to have smelt something, for he was shrouded in a large bandana handkerchief. Dinny gazed upward. Impressively high, and vaguely Gothic, the court seemed. Above where the Judge sat red curtains were drawn across, surprisingly beyond the reach of man. Her eyes fell to the jury filing into their two-ranked 'box.' The foreman fascinated her at once by his egg-shaped face and head, little hair of any sort, red cheeks, light eyes, and an expression so subtly blended between that of a codfish and a sheep that it reminded her of neither. His face recalled rather one of the two gentlemen of South Molton Street, and she felt almost sure that he was a jeweller. Three women sat at the end of the front row, no one of whom, surely, could ever have spent a night in a car. The first was stout and had the pleasant flattish face of a superior housekeeper. The second, thin, dark, and rather gaunt, was perhaps a writer. The third's bird-like look was disguised in an obvious cold. The other eight male members of the jury tired her eyes, so diverse and difficult to place. A voice said:

"Corven versus Corven and Croom — husband's petition," and she gave Clare's arm a convulsive squeeze.

"If your Lordship pleases —"

Out of the tail of her eye she could see a handsome, small-whiskered visage, winy under it's wig.

The Judge's face, folded and far away, as of a priest or of a tortoise, was poked forward suddenly. His gaze, knowing and impersonal, seemed taking her in, and she felt curiously small. He drew his head back, as suddenly.

The slow rich voice behind her began retailing the names and positions of the 'parties,' the places of their marriage and cohabitation; it paused a moment and then went on:

"In the middle of September of last year, while the petitioner was up-country in discharge of official duty, the respondent, without a word of warning, left her home and sailed for England. On board the ship was the co-respondent. It is said by the defence, I believe, that these two had not met before. I shall suggest that they had met, or at all events had had every opportunity of so meeting."

Dinny saw her sister's little disdainful shrug. "However that may be," proceeded the slow voice, "there is no question that they were always together on the ship, and I shall show that towards the end of the voyage the co-respondent was seen coming out of the respondent's stateroom." On and on the voice drooled till it reached the words: "I will not dwell, members of the jury, on the details of the watch kept on the respondent's and co-respondent's movements; you will have these from the mouths of expert and reputable witnesses. Sir Gerald Corven."

When Dinny raised her eyes he was already in the box, his face carved out of an even harder wood than she had thought. She was conscious of the resentment on her father's face, of the Judge taking up his pen, of Clare clenching her hands on her lap; of 'very young' Roger's narrowed eyes; of the foreman's slightly opening mouth, and the third jurywoman's smothered sneeze; conscious of the brownness in this place — it oozed brownness as if designed to dinge all that was rose, blue, silver, gold, or even green in human life.

The slow voice began its questioning, ceased its questioning; the personable owner of it closed, as it were, black wings; and a different voice behind her said:

"You thought it your duty, sir, to institute these proceedings?"

"Yes."

"No animus?"

"None."

“This claim for damages — not very usual, is it, nowadays among men of honour?”

“They will be settled on my wife.”

“Has your wife indicated in any way that she wishes you to support her?”

“No.”

“Would it surprise you to hear that she would not take a penny from you, whether it came from the co-respondent or not?”

Dinny saw the cat-like smile beneath the cut moustache.

“Nothing would surprise me.”

“It did not even surprise you that she left you?”

She looked round at the questioner. So this was Instone, whom Dornford had said was “very handicapped”! He seemed to her to have one of those faces, with dominant noses, that nothing could handicap.

“Yes, that did surprise me.”

“Now, why? . . . Perhaps you would translate that movement into words, sir?”

“Do wives generally leave their husbands without reason given?”

“Not unless the reason is too obvious to require statement. Was that the case?”

“No.”

“What should you say, then, was the reason? You are the person best able to form an opinion.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Who then?”

“My wife herself.”

“Still you must have some suspicion. Would you mind saying what it was?”

“I should.”

“Now, sir, you are on your oath. Did you or did you not ill-treat your wife in anyway?”

“I admit one incident which I regret and for which I have apologised.”

“What was that incident?”

Dinny, sitting taut between her father and her sister, feeling in her whole being the vibration of their pride and her own, heard the slow rich voice strike in behind her.

“My Lord, I submit that my friend is not entitled to ask that question.”

“My Lord —”

“I must stop you, Mr. Instone.”

“I bow to your Lordship’s ruling. . . . Are you a hot-tempered man, sir?”

“No.”

“There would be a certain deliberation about your actions, at all times?”

“I hope so.”

“Even when those actions were not — shall we say — benevolent?”

“Yes.”

“I see; and I am sure the jury also does. Now, sir, let me take you to another point. You suggest that your wife and Mr. Croom had met in Ceylon?”

“I have no idea whether they had or not.”

“Have you any personal knowledge that they did?”

“No.”

“We have been told by my friend that he will bring evidence to show that they had met —”

The slow rich voice interposed:

“That they had had opportunity of meeting.”

“We will take it at that. Were you aware, sir, that they had enjoyed such opportunity?”

“I was not.”

“Had you ever seen or heard of Mr. Croom in Ceylon?”

“No.”

“When did you first know of the existence of this gentleman?”

“I saw him in London in November last, coming out of a house where my wife was staying, and I asked her his name.”

“Did she make any concealment of it?”

“None.”

“Is that the only time you have seen this gentleman?”

“Yes.”

“What made you pitch on him as a possible means of securing a divorce from your wife?”

“I object to that way of putting it.”

“Very well. What drew your attention to this gentleman as a possible co-respondent?”

“What I heard on the ship by which I returned from Port Said to Ceylon in November. It was the same ship as that in which my wife and the co-respondent came to England.”

“And what DID you hear?”

“That they were always together.”

“Not unusual on board ship, is it?”

“In reason — no.”

“Even in your own experience?”

“Perhaps not.”

“What else, if anything, did you hear to make you so suspicious?”

“A stewardess told me that she had seen him coming out of my wife’s stateroom.”

“At what time of day or night was that?”

“Shortly before dinner.”

“You have travelled by sea a good deal, I suppose, in the course of your professional duties?”

“A great deal.”

“And have you noticed that people frequently go to each other’s staterooms?”

“Yes, quite a lot.”

“Does it always arouse your suspicions?”

“No.”

“May I go further and suggest that it never did before?”

“You may not.”

“Are you naturally a suspicious man?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Not what would be called jealous?”

“I should say not.”

“Your wife is a good deal younger than yourself?”

“Seventeen years.”

“Still, you are not so old as to be unable to appreciate the fact that young men and women in these days treat each other with very little ceremony and consciousness of sex?”

“If you want my age, I am forty-one.”

“Practically post-war.”

“I was through the war.”

“Then you know that much which before the war might have been regarded as suspicious has long lost that character?”

“I know that things are all very free and easy.”

“Thank you. Had you ever, before she left you, had occasion to be suspicious of your wife?”

Dinny looked up.

“Never.”

“But this little incident of his coming out of her cabin was enough to cause you to have her watched?”

“That, and the fact that they were always together on the ship, and my having seen him coming out of the house in London.”

“When you were in London you told her that she must come back to you or take the consequences?”

“I don’t think I used those words.”

“What words did you use?”

“I think I said she had the misfortune to be my wife, and that she couldn’t be a perpetual grass widow.”

“Not a very elegant expression, was it?”

“Perhaps not.”

“You were, in fact, eager to seize on anybody or anything to free yourself?”

“No, I was eager for her to come back.”

“In spite of your suspicions?”

“I had no suspicions in London.”

“I suggest that you had ill-treated her, and wished to be free of an association that hurt your pride.”

The slow rich voice said:

“My Lord, I object.”

“My Lord, the petitioner having admitted —”

“Yes, but most husbands, Mr. Instone, have done something for which they have been glad to apologise.”

“As your Lordship pleases. . . . In any case, you gave instructions to have your wife watched. When exactly did you do that?”

“When I got back to Ceylon.”

“Immediately?”

“Almost.”

“That did not show great eagerness to have her back, did it?”

“My view was entirely changed by what I was told on the ship.”

“On the ship. Not very nice, was it, listening to gossip about your wife?”

“No, but she had refused to come back, and I had to make up my mind.”

“Within two months of her leaving your house?”

“More than two months.”

“Well, not three. I suggest, you know, that you practically forced her to leave you; and then took the earliest opportunity open to you to ensure that she shouldn’t come back?”

“No.”

“So you say. Very well! These enquiry agents you employed — had you seen them before you left England to return to Ceylon?”

“No.”

“Will you swear that?”

“Yes.”

“How did you come to hit upon them?”

“I left it to my solicitors.”

“Oh! then you had seen your solicitors before you left?”

“Yes.”

“In spite of your having no suspicions?”

“A man going so far away naturally sees his solicitors before he starts.”

“You saw them in relation to your wife?”

“And other matters.”

“What did you say to them about your wife?”

Again Dinny looked up. In her was growing the distaste of one seeing even an opponent badgered.

“I think I simply said that she was staying behind with her people.”

“Only that?”

“I probably said that things were difficult.”

“Only that?”

“I remember saying: ‘I don’t quite know what’s going to happen.’”

“Will you swear you did not say: ‘I may be wanting you to have her watched’?”

“I will.”

“Will you swear that you said nothing which conveyed to them the idea that you had a divorce in your mind?”

“I can’t tell you what was conveyed to them by what I said.”

“Don’t quibble, sir. Was the word divorce mentioned?”

“I don’t remember it.”

“You don’t remember it? Did you or did you not leave them with the impression that you might be wanting to take proceedings?”

“I don’t know. I told them that things were difficult.”

“So you have said before. That is not an answer to my question.”

Dinny saw the Judge’s head poked forward.

“The petitioner has said, Mr. Instone, that he does not know the impression left on his lawyers’ minds. What are you driving at?”

“My Lord, the essence of my case — and I am glad to have this opportunity of stating it succinctly — is that from the moment the petitioner had acted in such a way — whatever it was — as caused his wife to leave him, he was determined to divorce her, and ready to snatch at anything that came along to secure that divorce.”

“Well, you can call his solicitor.”

“My Lord!”

Those simple words were like a shrug of the shoulders put into sound.

“Well, go on!”

With a sigh of relief Dinny caught the sound of finality in the voice of the ‘handicapped’ Instone.

“You wish to suggest to the jury that although you instituted these proceedings on the first and only gossip you heard, and although you added a claim for damages against a man you have never spoken to — that in spite of all this you are a forbearing and judicious husband, whose only desire was that his wife should come back to him?”

Her eyes went for the last time to the face up there, more hidden by its mask than ever.

“I wish to suggest nothing to the jury.”

“Very well!”

There was a rustling of silk behind her.

“My Lord,” the slow, rich voice intoned, “since my friend has made so much of the point, I will call the petitioner’s solicitor.”

‘Very young’ Roger, leaning across, said:

“Dornford wants you all to lunch with him . . .”

Dinny could eat practically nothing, afflicted by a sort of nausea. Though more alarmed and distraught during Hubert's case, and at the inquest on Ferse, she had not felt like this. It was her first experience of the virulence inherent in the conduct of actions between private individuals. The continual suggestion that the opponent was mean, malicious and untruthful, which underlay every cross-examining question, had affected her nerves.

On their way back to the court, Dornford said:

"I know what you're feeling. But remember, it's a sort of game; both sides play according to the same rules, and the Judge is there to discount exaggeration. When I try to see how it could be worked otherwise, I can't."

"It makes one feel nothing's ever quite clean."

"I wonder if anything ever is."

"The Cheshire cat's grin did fade at last," she murmured.

"It never does in the Law Courts, Dinny. They should have it graven over the doors."

Whether owing to that short conversation, or because she was getting used to it, she did not feel so sick during the afternoon session, devoted to examination and cross-examination of the stewardess and enquiry agents. At four o'clock the petitioner's case was closed, and 'very young' Roger cocked his eye at her, as who should say: "The Court will now rise, and I shall be able to take snuff."

❦

Chapter 30

In the taxi, on the way back to South Square, Clare was silent, till, opposite Big Ben, she said suddenly:

"Imagine his peering in at us in the car when we were asleep! Or did he just invent that, Dinny?"

"If he'd invented it, he would surely have made it more convincing still."

"Of course, my head WAS on Tony's shoulder. And why not? You try sleeping in a two-seater."

"I wonder the man's torch didn't wake you."

"I daresay it did; I woke a lot of times with cramp. No; the stupidest thing I did, Dinny, was asking Tony in for a drink that night after we went to the film and dined. We were extraordinarily green not to realise we were being shadowed. Were there a frightful lot of people in Court?"

"Yes, and there'll be more tomorrow."

"Did you see Tony?"

"Just a glimpse."

"I wish I'd taken your advice and let it go. If only I were really in love with him!"

Dinny did not answer.

Aunt Em was in Fleur's 'parlour.' She came towards Clare, opened her mouth, seemed to remember that she shouldn't, scrutinised her niece, and said suddenly:

"Not so good! I do dislike that expression; who taught it me? Tell me about the Judge, Dinny; was his nose long?"

"No; but he sits very low and shoots his neck out."

"Why?"

"I didn't ask him, dear."

Lady Mont turned to Fleur.

"Can Clare have her dinner in bed? Go and have a long bath, my dear, and don't get up till tomorrow. Then you'll be fresh for that Judge. Fleur, you go with her, I want to talk to Dinny." When they had gone, she moved across to where the wood fire burned.

"Dinny, comfort me. Why do we have these things in our family? So unlike — except your great-grandfather; and he was older than Queen Victoria when he was born."

"You mean he was naturally rakish?"

"Yes, gamblin', and enjoyin' himself and others. His wife was long-sufferin'. Scottish. So odd!"

"That, I suppose," murmured Dinny, "is why we've all been so good ever since."

"What is why?"

"The combination."

"It's more the money," said Lady Mont; "he spent it all."

"Was there much?"

"Yes. The price of corn."

"Ill-gotten."

"His father couldn't help Napoleon. There were six thousand acres then, and your great-grandfather only left eleven hundred."

"Mostly woods."

"That was the woodcock shootin'. Will the case be in the evenin' papers?"

"Certain to be. Jerry's a public man."

"Not her dress, I hope. Did you like the jury?"

Dinny shrugged. "I can't ever tell what people are really thinking."

"Like dogs' noses, when they feel hot and aren't. What about that young man?"

“He’s the one I’m truly sorry for.”

“Yes,” said Lady Mont. “Every man commits adultery in his heart, but not in cars.”

“It’s not truth but appearances that matter, Aunt Em.”

“Circumstantial, Lawrence says — provin’ they did when they didn’t. More reliable that way, he thinks; otherwise, he says, when they didn’t you could prove they did. Is that right, Dinny?”

“No, dear.”

“Well, I must go home to your mother. She doesn’t eat a thing — sits and reads and looks pale. And Con won’t go near his Club. Fleur wants us and them to go to Monte Carlo in her car when it’s over. She says we shall be in our element, and that Riggs CAN drive on the right-hand side of the road when he remembers.”

Dinny shook her head.

“Nothing like one’s own hole, Auntie.”

“I don’t like creepin’,” said Lady Mont. “Kiss me. And get married soon.”

When she had swayed out of the room, Dinny stood looking out into the Square.

How incorrigible was that prepossession! Aunt Em and Uncle Adrian, her father and her mother, Fleur, yes and even Clare herself — all anxious that she should marry Dornford and be done with it!

And what good would it do any of them? Whence came this instinct for pressing people into each other’s arms? If she had any use in the world, would that increase it? ‘For the procreation of children,’ went the words of the old order. The world had to be carried on! Why had the world to be carried on? Everybody used the word ‘hell’ in connection with it nowadays. Nothing to look forward to but brave new world!

‘Or the Catholic church,’ she thought, ‘and I don’t believe in either.’

She opened the window, and leaned against its frame. A fly buzzed at her; she blew it away, and it instantly came back. Flies! They fulfilled a purpose. What purpose? While they were alive they were alive; when they were dead they were dead. ‘But not half-alive,’ she thought. She blew again, and this time the fly did not come back.

Fleur’s voice behind her said:

“Isn’t it cold enough for you in here, my dear? Did you ever know such a year? I say that every May. Come and have tea. Clare’s in her bath, and very nice she looks, with a cup of tea in one hand and a cigarette in the other. I suppose they’ll get to the end tomorrow?”

“Your cousin says so.”

“He’s coming to dinner. Luckily his wife’s at Droitwich.”

“Why ‘luckily’?”

“Oh! well, she’s a wife. If there’s anything he wants to say to Clare, I shall send him up to her; she’ll be out of her bath by then. But he can say it to you just as well. How do you think Clare will do in the box?”

“Can anyone do well in the box?”

“My father said I did, but he was partial; and the Coroner complimented you, didn’t he, at the Ferse inquest?”

“There was no cross-examination. Clare’s not patient, Fleur.”

“Tell her to count five before she answers, and lift her eyebrows. The thing is to get Brough rattled.”

“His voice would madden me,” said Dinny, “and he has a way of pausing as if he had all day before him.”

“Yes, quite a common trick. The whole thing’s extraordinarily like the Inquisition. What do you think of Clare’s counsel?”

“I should hate him if I were on the other side.”

“Then he’s good. Well, Dinny, what’s the moral of all this?”

“Don’t marry.”

“Bit sweeping, till we can grow babies in bottles. Hasn’t it ever struck you that civilisation’s built on the maternal instinct?”

“I thought it was built on agriculture.”

“By ‘civilisation’ I meant everything that isn’t just force.”

Dinny looked at her cynical and often flippant cousin, who stood so poised and trim and well-manicured before her, and she felt ashamed. Fleur said, unexpectedly:

“You’re rather a darling.”

Dinner, Clare having it in bed and the only guest being ‘very young’ Roger, was decidedly vocal. Starting with an account of how his family felt about taxation, ‘very young’ Roger waxed amusing. His Uncle Thomas Forsyte, it appeared, had gone to live in Jersey, and returned indignantly when Jersey began to talk about taxation of its own. He had then written to The Times under the nom de guerre of ‘Individualist,’ sold all his investments, and reinvested them in tax-free securities, which brought him in slightly less revenue than he had been receiving nett from his taxed securities. He had voted for the Nationalists at the last election, and, since this new budget, was looking out for a party that he could conscientiously vote for at the next election. He was living at Bournemouth.

“Extremely well-preserved,” concluded ‘very young’ Roger. “Do you know anything about bees, Fleur?”

“I once sat on one.”

“Do you, Miss Cherrell?”

“We keep them.”

“If you were me, would you go in for them?”

“Where do you live?”

“A little beyond Hatfield. There are some quite nice clover crops round. Bees appeal to me in theory. They feed on other people’s flowers and clover; and if you find a swarm you can stick to it. What are the drawbacks?”

“Well, if they swarm on other people’s ground, ten to one you lose them; and you have to feed them all the winter. Otherwise it’s only a question of the time, trouble, and stings.”

“I don’t know that I should mind that,” murmured ‘very young’ Roger; “my wife would take them on.” He cocked his eye slightly: “She has rheumatism. Apic acid, they say, is the best cure.”

“Better make sure first,” murmured Dinny, “that they’ll sting her. You can’t get bees to sting people they like.”

“You can always sit on them,” murmured Fleur.

“Seriously,” said ‘very young’ Roger, “half-a-dozen stings would be well worth it, poor thing.”

“What made you take up law, Forsyte?” struck in Michael.

“Well, I got a ‘blighty’ one in the war, and had to get something sedentary. I rather like it, you know, in a way, and in a way I think it’s —”

“Quite!” said Michael: “Hadn’t you an Uncle George?”

“Old George! Rather! Always gave me ten bob at school, and tipped me the name of a horse to put it on.”

“Did it ever win?”

“No.”

“Well, tell us, frankly: What’s going to win tomorrow?”

“Frankly,” said the solicitor, looking at Dinny, “it depends on your sister, Miss Cherrell. Corven’s witnesses have done well. They didn’t claim too much, and they weren’t shaken; but if Lady Corven keeps her head and her temper, we may pull through. If her veracity is whittled away at any point, then —!” he shrugged, and looked — Dinny thought — older. “There are one or two birds on the jury I don’t like the look of. The foreman’s one. The average man, you know, is dead against wives leaving without notice. I’d feel much happier if your sister would open up on her married life. It’s not too late.”

Dinny shook her head.

“Well, then, it’s very much a case of the personal appeal. But there’s a prejudice against mice playing when the cat’s away.”

Dinny went to bed with the sick feeling of one who knows she has again to watch some form of torture.

❦

CHAPTER 31

Day by day the Courts of Law are stony and unchanged. The same gestures are made, the same seats taken; the same effluvium prevails, not too strong, but just strong enough.

Clare was in black on this second day, with a slim green feather in a close-fitting black hat. Pale, her lips barely touched with salve, she sat so still that one could not speak to her. The words "Society Divorce Suit," and the 'perfect' headline, "Night in a Car," had produced their effect; there was hardly standing room. Dinny noticed young Croom seated just behind his counsel. She noticed, too, that the birdlike jurywoman's cold was better, and the foreman's parroty eyes fixed on Clare. The Judge seemed to be sitting lower than ever. He raised himself slightly at the sound of Instone's voice.

"If it please your Lordship, and members of the jury — the answer to the allegation of misconduct between the respondent and co-respondent will be a simple and complete denial. I call the respondent."

With a sensation of seeing her sister for the first time, Dinny looked up. Clare, as Dornford had recommended, stood rather far back in the box, and the shade from the canopy gave her a withdrawn and mysterious air. Her voice, however, was clear, and perhaps only Dinny could have told that it was more clipped than usual.

"Is it true, Lady Corven, that you have been unfaithful to your husband?"

"It is not."

"You swear that?"

"I do."

"There have been no love passages between you and Mr. Croom?"

"None."

"You swear that?"

"I do."

"Now it is said —"

To question on question on question Dinny sat listening, her eyes not moving from her sister, marvelling at the even distinctness of her speech and the motionless calm of her face and figure. Instone's voice today was so different that she hardly recognised it.

"Now, Lady Corven, I have one more question to ask, and, before you answer it, I beg you to consider that very much depends on that answer. Why did you leave your husband?"

Dinny saw her sister's head tilt slightly backwards.

"I left because I did not feel I could remain and keep my self-respect."

"Quite! But can you not tell us why that was? You had done nothing that you were ashamed of?"

"No."

"Your husband has admitted that he had, and that he had apologised?"

"Yes."

"What had he done?"

"Forgive me. It's instinct with me not to talk about my married life."

Dinny caught her father's whisper: "By Gad! she's right!" She saw the Judge's neck poked forward, his face turned towards the box, his lips open.

"I understood you to say you felt you could not remain with your husband and keep your self-respect?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Did you feel you could leave him like that and keep your self-respect?"

"Yes, my Lord."

Dinny saw the Judge's body raise itself slightly, and his face moving from side to side, as if carefully avoiding any recipient of his words: "Well, there it is, Mr. Instone. I don't think you can usefully pursue the point. The respondent has evidently made up her mind on it." His eyes under drooped lids continued to survey what was unseen.

"If your Lordship pleases. Once more, Lady Corven, there is no truth in these allegations of misconduct with Mr. Croom?"

"No truth whatever."

"Thank you."

Dinny drew a long breath and braced herself against the pause and the slow rich voice to the right behind her.

"You, a married woman, would not call inviting a young man to your cabin, entertaining him alone in your room at half-past eleven at night, spending a night with him in a car, and going about with him continually in the absence of your husband, misconduct?"

"Not in itself."

"Very well. You have said that until you saw him on the ship you had never seen the co-respondent. Could you explain how it was that from, I think, the second day at sea you were so thick with him?"

"I was not thick with him at first."

"Oh, come! Always together, weren't you?"

"Often, not always."

"Often, not always — from the second day?"

"Yes, a ship is a ship."

"Quite true, Lady Corven. And you had never seen him before?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Ceylon is not a large place, is it, from a society point of view?"

"It is not."

"Lots of polo matches, cricket matches, other functions where you are constantly meeting the same people."

"Yes."

"And yet you never met Mr. Croom? Odd, wasn't it?"

"Not at all. Mr. Croom was on a plantation."

"But he played polo, I think?"

"Yes."

"And you are a horsewoman, very interested in all that sort of thing?"

"Yes."

"And yet you never met Mr. Croom?"

"I have said I never did. If you ask me till tomorrow I shall say the same."

Dinny drew in her breath. Before her sprang up a mental snapshot of Clare as a little girl being questioned about Oliver Cromwell.

The slow rich voice went on:

"You never missed a polo match at Kandy, did you?"

"Never, if I could help it."

"And on one occasion you entertained the players?"

Dinny could see a frown on her sister's brow.

"Yes."

"When was that?"

"I believe it was last June."

"Mr. Croom was one of the players, wasn't he?"

"If he was, I didn't see him."

"You entertained him but you did not see him?"

"I did not."

"Is that usual with hostesses in Kandy?"

"There were quite a lot of people, if I remember."

"Come now, Lady Corven, here is the programme of the match — just take a look at it to refresh your memory."

"I remember the match perfectly."

"But you don't remember Mr. Croom, either on the ground, or afterwards at your house?"

"I don't. I was interested in the play of the Kandy team, and afterwards there were too many people. If I remembered him I should say so at once."

It seemed to Dinny an immense time before the next question came.

"I am suggesting, you know, that you did not meet as strangers on the boat?"

"You may suggest what you like, but we did."

"So you say."

Catching her father's muttered: "Damn the fellow!" Dinny touched his arm with her own.

"You heard the stewardess give her evidence? Was that the only time the co-respondent came to your state-room?"

"The only time he came for more than a minute."

"Oh! He did come at other times?"

"Once or twice to borrow or return a book."

"On the occasion when he came and spent — what was it? — half an hour there —"

"Twenty minutes, I should say."

"Twenty minutes — what were you doing?"

"Showing him photographs."

"Oh! Why not on deck?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't it occur to you that it was indiscreet?"

"I didn't think about it. There were a lot of photos — snapshots and photos of my family."

"But nothing that you couldn't have shown him perfectly in the saloon or on deck?"

"I suppose not."

"I take it you imagined he wouldn't be seen?"

"I tell you I didn't think about it."

"Who proposed that he should come?"

"*I* did."

"You knew you were in a very dubious position?"

"Yes, but other people didn't."

"You could have shown him those photographs anywhere? Looking back on it, don't you think it was singular of you to do such a compromising thing for no reason at all?"

"It was less trouble to show them to him in the cabin; besides, they were private photos."

"Now, Lady Corven, do you mean to say that nothing whatever took place between you during those twenty minutes?"

"He kissed my hand before he went out."

"That is something, but not quite an answer to my question."

"Nothing else that could give you satisfaction."

"How were you dressed?"

"I regret to have to inform you that I was fully dressed."

"My Lord, may I ask to be protected from these sarcasms?"

Dinny admired the stilly way in which the Judge said:

“Answer the questions simply, please.”

“Yes, my Lord.”

Clare had moved out from under the shadow of the canopy and was standing with her hands on the rail of the box; spots of red had come into her cheeks.

“I suggest that you were lovers before you left the ship?”

“We were not, and we never have been.”

“When did you first see the co-respondent again after you left him on the dock?”

“I think about a week later.”

“Where?”

“Down near my people’s at Condaford.”

“What were you doing?”

“I was in a car.”

“Alone?”

“Yes, I had been canvassing and was going home to tea.”

“And the co-respondent?”

“He was in a car, too.”

“Sprang up in it, I suppose, quite naturally?”

“My Lord, I ask to be protected from these sarcasms.”

Dinny heard a tittering, and heard the Judge’s voice addressing nobody:

“What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, Mr. Brough.”

The tittering deepened. Dinny could not resist stealing a glance. The handsome face was inimitably wine-coloured. Beside her, ‘very young’ Roger wore an expression of enjoyment tinctured by anxiety.

“How came the co-respondent to be on this country road fifty miles from London?”

“He had come to see me.”

“You admit that?”

“He said so.”

“Perhaps you could tell us the exact words he used.”

“I could not, but I remember that he asked if he might kiss me.”

“And you let him?”

“Yes. I put my cheek out of the car, and he kissed it, and went back to his car and drove away.”

“And yet you say you were not lovers before you left the ship?”

“Not in your sense. I did not say that he was not in love with me. He was; at least he told me so.”

“Do you suggest that you were not in love with him?”

“I’m afraid I do.”

“But you let him kiss you?”

“I was sorry for him.”

“You think that is proper conduct for a married woman?”

“Perhaps not. But after I left my husband I did not regard myself as a married woman.”

“Oh!”

Dinny had a feeling as if the whole Court had said that word. ‘Very young’ Roger’s hand emerged from his side pocket; he looked at what it contained intently, and put it back. A rueful frown had come on the pleasant broad face of the jurywoman who resembled a housekeeper.

“And what did you do after you had been kissed?”

“Went home to tea.”

"Feeling none the worse?"

"No; better if anything."

Again the titter rose. The Judge's face went round towards the box.

"Are you speaking seriously?"

"Yes, my Lord. I wish to be absolutely truthful. Even when they are not in love, women are grateful for being loved."

The Judge's face came round again to gaze at the unseen above Dinny's head.

"Go on, Mr. Brough."

"When was the next occasion on which you saw the co-respondent?"

"At my aunt's house in London where I was staying."

"Did he come to see your aunt?"

"No, to see my uncle."

"Did he kiss you on that occasion?"

"No. I told him that if we were to meet, it must be platonically."

"A very convenient word."

"What other should I have used?"

"You are not standing there to ask me questions, madam. What did he say to that?"

"That he would do anything I wished."

"Did he see your uncle?"

"No."

"Was that the occasion on which your husband said he saw him leaving the house?"

"I imagine so."

"Your husband came directly he had gone?"

"Yes."

"He saw you, and asked who that young man was?"

"Yes."

"Did you tell him?"

"Yes."

"I think you called the co-respondent Tony?"

"Yes."

"Was that his name?"

"No."

"It was your pet name for him?"

"Not at all. Everybody calls him that."

"And he called you Clare, or darling, I suppose?"

"One or the other."

Dinny saw the Judge's eyes lifted to the unseen.

"Young people nowadays call each other darling on very little provocation, Mr. Brough."

"I am aware of that, my Lord. . . . Did you call HIM darling?"

"I may have, but I don't think so."

"You saw your husband alone on that occasion?"

"Yes."

"How did you receive him?"

"Coldly."

"Having just parted from the co-respondent?"

"That had nothing to do with it."

"Did your husband ask you to go back to him?"

"Yes."

"And you refused?"

"Yes."

"And that had nothing to do with the co-respondent?"

"No."

"Do you seriously tell the jury, Lady Corven, that your relations with the co-respondent, or if you like it better, your feelings for the co-respondent, played no part in your refusal to go back to your husband?"

"None."

"I'll put it at your own valuation: You had spent three weeks in the close company of this young man. You had allowed him to kiss you, and felt better for it. You had just parted from him. You knew of his feelings for you. And you tell the jury that he counted for nothing in the equation?"

Clare bowed her head.

"Answer, please."

"I don't think he did."

"Not very human, was it?"

"I don't know what you mean by that."

"I mean, Lady Corven, that it's going to be a little difficult for the jury to believe you."

"I can't help what they believe, I can only speak the truth."

"Very well! When did you next see the co-respondent?"

"On the following evening, and the evening after that he came to the unfurnished rooms I was going into and helped me to distemper the walls."

"Oh! A little unusual, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps. I had no money to spare, and he had done his own bungalow in Ceylon."

"I see. Just a friendly office on his part. And during the hours he spent with you there no passages took place between you?"

"No passages have ever taken place between us."

"At what time did he leave?"

"We left together both evenings about nine o'clock and went and had some food."

"And after that?"

"I went back to my aunt's house."

"Nowhere in between?"

"Nowhere."

"Very well! You saw your husband again before he was compelled to go back to Ceylon?"

"Yes, twice."

"Where was the first time?"

"At my rooms. I had got into them by then."

"Did you tell him that the co-respondent had helped you distemper the walls?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why should I? I told my husband nothing, except that I wasn't going back to him. I regarded my life with him as finished."

"Did he on that occasion again ask you to go back to him?"

"Yes."

"And you refused?"

"Yes."

"With contumely?"

"I beg your pardon."

"Insultingly?"

"No. Simply."

"Had your husband given you any reason to suppose that he wished to divorce you?"

"No. But I don't know what was in his mind."

"And, apparently, you gave him no chance to know what was in yours?"

"As little as possible."

"A stormy meeting?"

Dinny held her breath. The flush had died out of Clare's cheeks; her face looked pale and peaked.

"No; disturbed and unhappy. I did not want to see him."

"You heard your counsel say that from the time of your leaving him in Ceylon, your husband in his wounded pride had conceived the idea of divorcing you the moment he got the chance? Was that your impression?"

"I had and have no impression. It is possible. I don't pretend to know the workings of his mind."

"Though you lived with him for nearly eighteen months?"

"Yes."

"But, anyway, you again refused definitely to go back to him?"

"I have said so."

"Did you believe he meant it when he asked you to go back?"

"At the moment, yes."

"Did you see him again before he went?"

"Yes, for a minute or two, but not alone."

"Who was present?"

"My father."

"Did he ask you again to go back to him on that occasion?"

"Yes."

"And you refused?"

"Yes."

"And after that you had a message from your husband before he left London, asking you once more to change your mind and accompany him?"

"Yes."

"And you did not?"

"No."

"Now let me take you to the date of January the — er — third"— Dinny breathed again —"that is the day which you spent, from five in the afternoon till nearly midnight, with the co-respondent. You admit doing that?"

"Yes."

"No passages between you?"

"Only one. He hadn't seen me for nearly three weeks, and he kissed my cheek when he first came in to have tea."

"Oh! the cheek again? Only the cheek?"

"Yes. I am sorry."

"So I am sure was he."

"Possibly."

"You first spent half an hour alone, after this separation, having — tea?"

"Yes."

"Your rooms, I think, are in an old mews — a room below, a staircase, a room above — where you sleep?"

"Yes."

"And a bathroom? Besides the tea I suppose you had a chat?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the ground-floor room."

"And then did you walk together, chatting, to the Temple, and afterwards to a film and to dinner at a restaurant, during which you chatted, I suppose, and then took a cab back to your rooms, chatting?"

"Quite correct."

"And then you thought that having been with him nearly six hours, you had still a good deal to say and it was necessary that he should come in, and he came?"

"Yes."

"That would be past eleven, wouldn't it?"

"Just past, I think."

"How long did he stay on that occasion?"

"About half an hour."

"No passages?"

"None."

"Just a drink and a cigarette or two, and a little more chat?"

"Precisely."

"What had you to talk about for so many hours with this young man who was privileged to kiss your cheek?"

"What has anyone to talk about at any time?"

"I am asking you that question."

"We talked about everything and nothing."

"A little more explicit, please."

"Horses, films, my people, his people, theatres — I really don't remember."

"Carefully barring the subject of love?"

"Yes."

"Strictly platonic from beginning to end?"

"I should say so."

"Come, Lady Corven, do you mean to tell us that this young man, who on your own admission was in love with you, and who hadn't seen you for nearly three weeks, never once during all those hours yielded to his feelings?"

"I think he told me he loved me once or twice; but he always stuck splendidly to his promise."

"What promise?"

"Not to make love to me. To love a person is not a crime, it is only a misfortune."

"You speak feelingly — from your own experience?"

Clare did not answer.

"Do you seriously tell us that you have not been and are not in love with this young man?"

"I am very fond of him, but not in your sense."

In Dinny flamed up compassion for young Croom listening to all this. Her cheeks went hot, and she fixed her blue eyes on the Judge. He had just finished taking down Clare's answer; and suddenly she saw him yawn. It was an old man's yawn, and lasted so long that it seemed never going to end. It changed her mood, and filled her with a sort of pity. He, too, had to listen day after day to long-drawn-out attempts to hurt people, and make them stultify themselves.

"You have heard the enquiry agent's evidence that there was a light in the upstairs room after you returned with the co-respondent from the restaurant. What do you say to that?"

"There would be. We sat there."

"Why there, and not downstairs?"

"Because it's much warmer and more comfortable."

"That is your bedroom?"

"No, it's a sitting-room. I have no bedroom. I just sleep on the sofa."

"I see. And there you spent the time from soon after eleven to nearly midnight with the co-respondent?"

"Yes."

"And you think there was no harm in that?"

"No harm, but I think it was extremely foolish."

"You mean that you would not have done so if you had known you were being watched?"

"We certainly shouldn't."

"What made you take these particular rooms?"

"Their cheapness."

"Very inconvenient, wasn't it, having no bedroom, and nowhere for a servant, and no porter?"

"Those are luxuries for which one has to pay."

"Do you say that you did not take these particular rooms because there was no one of any kind on the premises?"

"I do. I have only just enough money to live on."

"No thought of the co-respondent, when you took them?"

"None."

"Not even just a sidelong thought of him?"

"My Lord, I have answered."

"I think she has, Mr. Brough."

"After this you saw the co-respondent constantly?"

"No. Occasionally. He was living in the country."

"I see, and came up to see you?"

"He always saw me when he did come up, perhaps twice a week."

"And when you saw him what did you do?"

"Went to a picture gallery or a film; once to a theatre, I think. We used to dine together."

"Did you know you were being watched?"

"No."

"Did he come to your rooms?"

"Not again till February the third."

"Yes, that is the day I am coming to."

"I thought so."

"You thought so. It is a day and night indelibly fixed in your mind?"

"I remember it very well."

"My friend has taken you at length through the events of that day, and except for the hours at Oxford, it seems to have been spent almost entirely in the car. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"And this car was a two-seater, with what, my Lord, is called a 'dicky.'"

The Judge stirred.

"I have never been in a 'dicky,' Mr. Brough, but I know what they are."

“Was it a roomy, comfortable little car?”

“Quite.”

“Closed, I think?”

“Yes. It didn’t open.”

“Mr. Croom drove and you were seated beside him?”

“Yes.”

“Now when you were driving back from Oxford you have said that this car’s lights went out about half-past ten, four miles or so short of Henley, in a wood?”

“Yes.”

“Was that an accident?”

“Of course.”

“Did you examine the battery?”

“No.”

“Did you know when or how it was last charged?”

“No.”

“Did you see it when it was recharged?”

“No.”

“Then why — of course?”

“If you are suggesting that Mr. Croom tampered with the battery —”

“Just answer my question, please.”

“I AM answering. Mr. Croom is incapable of any such dirty trick.”

“It was a dark night?”

“Very.”

“And a large wood?”

“Yes.”

“Just the spot one would choose on the whole of that journey from Oxford to London?”

“Choose?”

“If one had designed to spend the night in the car.”

“Yes, but the suggestion is monstrous.”

“Never mind that, Lady Corven. You regarded it as a pure coincidence?”

“Of course.”

“Just tell us what Mr. Croom said when the lights went out.”

“I think he said: ‘Hallo! My lights are gone!’ And he got out and examined the battery.”

“Had he a torch?”

“No.”

“And it was pitch dark. I wonder how he did it. Didn’t you wonder too?”

“No. He used a match.”

“And what WAS wrong?”

“I think he said a wire must have gone.”

“Then — you have told us that he tried to drive on, and twice got off the road. It must have been VERY dark?”

“It was, fearfully.”

“I think you said it was YOUR suggestion that you should spend the night in the car?”

“I did.”

“After Mr. Croom had proposed one or two alternatives?”

“Yes; he proposed that we should walk into Henley, and that he should come back to the car with a torch.”

“Did he seem keen on that?”

“Keen? Not particularly.”

“Didn’t press it?”

“N— no.”

“Do you think he ever meant it?”

“Of course I do.”

“In fact, you have the utmost confidence in Mr. Croom?”

“The utmost.”

“Quite! You have heard of the expression ‘palming the cards’?”

“Yes.”

“You know what it means?”

“It means forcing a person to take a card that you wish him to take.”

“Precisely.”

“If you are suggesting that Mr. Croom was trying to force me to propose that we should spend the night in the car, you are wholly wrong; and it’s a base suggestion.”

“What made you think I was going to make that suggestion, Lady Corven? Had the idea been present to your mind?”

“No. When I suggested that we should spend the night in the car, Mr. Croom was taken aback.”

“Oh! How did he show that?”

“He asked me if I could trust him. I had to tell him not to be old-fashioned. Of course, I could trust him.”

“Trust him to act exactly as you wished?”

“Trust him not to make love to me. I was trusting him every time I saw him.”

“You had not spent a night with him before?”

“Of course I had not.”

“You use the expression ‘of course’ rather freely, and it seems to me with very little reason. You had plenty of opportunities of passing a night with him, hadn’t you — on the ship, and in your rooms where there was nobody but yourself?”

“Plenty, and I did not avail myself of them.”

“So you say; and if you did not, doesn’t it seem to you rather singular that you suggested it on this occasion?”

“No. I thought it would be rather fun.”

“Rather fun? Yet you knew this young man was passionately in love with you?”

“I regretted it afterwards. It wasn’t fair to him.”

“Really, Lady Corven, do you ask us to believe that you, a married woman of experience, didn’t realise the ordeal by fire through which you were putting him?”

“I did afterwards, and I was extremely sorry.”

“Oh, afterwards! I am speaking of before.”

“I’m afraid I didn’t before.”

“You are on your oath. Do you persist in swearing that nothing took place between you in or out of the car on the night of February the third in that dark wood?”

“I do.”

“You heard the enquiry agent’s evidence that, when about two in the morning he stole up to the car and looked into it, he saw by the light of his torch that you were both asleep and that your head was on the co-respondent’s shoulder?”

“Yes, I heard that.”

“Is it true?”

“If I was asleep how can I say, but I think it’s quite likely. I had put my head there early on.”

“Oh! You admit that?”

“Certainly. It was more comfortable. I had asked him if he minded.”

“And, of course, he didn’t?”

“I thought you didn’t like the expression ‘of course,’ but anyway he said he didn’t.”

“He had marvellous control, hadn’t he, this young man, who was in love with you?”

“Yes, I’ve thought since that he had.”

“You knew then that he must have, if your story is true. But is it true, Lady Corven; isn’t it entirely fantastic?”

Dinny saw her sister’s hands clenching on the rail, and a flood of crimson coming up into her cheeks and ebbing again before she answered:

“It may be fantastic, but it’s entirely true. Everything I’ve said in this box is true.”

“And then in the morning you woke up as if nothing had happened, and said: ‘Now we can go home and have breakfast!’ And you went? To your rooms?”

“Yes.”

“How long did he stay on that occasion?”

“About half an hour or a little more.”

“The same perfect innocence in your relations?”

“The same.”

“And the day after that you were served with this petition?”

“Yes.”

“Did it surprise you?”

“Yes.”

“Conscious of perfect innocence, you were quite hurt in your feelings?”

“Not when I thought about things.”

“Oh, not when you thought about things? What exactly do you mean by that?”

“I remembered that my husband had said I must look out for myself; and I realised how silly I was not to know that I was being watched.”

“Tell me, Lady Corven, why did you defend this action?”

“Because I knew that, however appearances were against us, we had done nothing.”

Dinny saw the Judge look towards Clare, take down her answer, hold up his pen, and speak.

“On that night in the car you were on a main road. What was to prevent your stopping another car and asking them to give you a lead into Henley?”

“I don’t think we thought of it, my Lord; I did ask Mr. Croom to try and follow one, but they went by too quickly.”

“In any case, what was there to prevent your walking into Henley and leaving the car in the wood?”

“I suppose nothing really, only it would have been midnight before we got to Henley; and I thought it would be more awkward than just staying in the car; and I always had wanted to try sleeping in a car.”

“And do you still want to?”

“No, my Lord, it’s overrated.”

“Mr. Brough, I’ll break for luncheon.”

❦

Chapter 32

Dinny refused all solicitations to lunch, and, taking her sister's arm, walked her out into Carey Street. They circled Lincoln's Inn Fields in silence.

"Nearly over, darling," she said at last. "You've done wonderfully. He hasn't really shaken you at all, and I believe the Judge feels that. I like the Judge much better than the jury."

"Oh! Dinny, I'm so tired. That perpetual suggestion that one's lying screws me up till I could scream."

"That's what he does it for. Don't gratify him!"

"And poor Tony. I do feel a beast."

"What about a 'nice hot' cup of tea? We've just time."

They walked down Chancery Lane into the Strand.

"Nothing with it, dearest. I couldn't eat."

Neither of them could eat. They stirred the pot, drank their tea as strong as they could get it, and made their way silently back to the Court. Clare, not acknowledging even her father's anxious glance, resumed her old position on the front bench, her hands in her lap and her eyes cast down.

Dinny was conscious of Jerry Corven sitting deep in confabulation with his solicitor and counsel. 'Very young' Roger, passing to his seat, said:

"They're going to recall Corven."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

As if walking in his sleep, the Judge came in, bowed slightly to the Court's presence, and sat down. 'Lower than ever,' thought Dinny.

"My Lord, before resuming my cross-examination of the respondent, I should be glad, with your permission, to recall the petitioner in connection with the point of which my friend made so much. Your Lordship will recollect that in his cross-examination of the petitioner he imputed to him the intention of securing a divorce from the moment of his wife's departure. The petitioner has some additional evidence to give in regard to that point, and it will be more convenient for me to recall him now. I shall be very short, my Lord."

Dinny saw Clare's face raised suddenly to the Judge, and the expression on it made her heart beat furiously.

"Very well, Mr. Brough."

"Sir Gerald Corven."

Watching that contained figure step again into the box, Dinny saw that Clare too was watching, almost as if she wished to catch his eye.

"You have told us, Sir Gerald, that on the last occasion but one on which you saw your wife before you returned to Ceylon — the first of November, that is — you saw her at her rooms in Melton Mews?"

"Yes."

Dinny gasped. It had come!

"Now on that occasion, besides any conversation that took place between you, what else occurred?"

"We were husband and wife."

"You mean that the marital relationship between you was re-established?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Thank you, Sir Gerald; I think that disposes finally of my friend's point; and it is all I wanted to ask."

Instone was speaking.

"Why did you not say that when you were first examined?"

"I did not see its relevance until after your cross-examination."

"Do you swear that you have not invented it?"

"Most certainly I do."

And still Dinny sat braced against the woodwork with her eyes shut, thinking of the young man three rows behind her. Atrocious! But who would see it, here? People's innermost nerves were torn out of them, examined coldly, almost with enjoyment, and put back lacerated.

"Now, Lady Corven, will you go back to the box?"

When Dinny opened her eyes Clare was standing close up to the rail with her head held high and her gaze fixed on her questioner.

"Now, Lady Corven," said the slow rich voice, "you heard that piece of evidence."

"Yes."

"Is it true?"

"I do not wish to answer."

"Why?"

Dinny saw that she had turned to the Judge.

"My Lord, when my counsel asked me about my married life, I refused to go into it, and I do not wish to go into it now."

For a moment the Judge's eyes were turned towards the box; then strayed from it to stare at the unseen.

"This question arises out of evidence given in rebuttal of a suggestion made by your own counsel. You must answer it."

No answer came.

"Ask the question again, Mr. Brough."

"Is it true that on the occasion of which your husband spoke the marital relationship was re-established between you?"

"No. It is not true."

Dinny, who knew that it was, looked up. The Judge's eyes were still fixed above her head, but she saw the slight pouting of his lips. He did not believe the answer.

The slow rich voice was speaking, and she caught in it a peculiar veiled triumph.

"You swear that?"

"Yes."

"So your husband has gone out of his way to commit perjury in making that statement?"

"It is his word against mine."

"And I think I know which will be taken. Is it not true that you have made the answer you have in order to save the feelings of the co-respondent?"

"It is not."

"From first to last, can we attach any more importance to the truth in any of your answers than to the truth in that last?"

"I don't think that is a fair question, Mr. Brough. The witness does not know what importance we attach."

"Very good, my Lord. I'll put it another way. THROUGHOUT have you told the truth, Lady Corven, and nothing but the truth?"

"I have."

"VERY well. I have no more to ask you."

During the few questions put to her sister, in a re-examination which carefully avoided the last point, Dinny could think only of young Croom. At heart she felt the case was lost, and longed to take Clare and creep away. If only that man behind with the hooked nose had not tried to blacken Corven and prove too much, this last mine would not have been sprung! And yet — to blacken the other side — what was it but the essence of procedure!

When Clare was back in her seat, white and exhausted, she whispered:

"Would you like to come away, darling?"

Clare shook her head.

“James Bernard Croom.”

For the first time since the case began Dinny had a full view, and hardly knew him. His tanned face was parched and drawn; he looked excessively thin. His grey eyes seemed hiding under their brows, and his lips were bitter and compressed. He looked at least five years older, and she knew at once that Clare’s denial had not deceived him.

“Your name is James Bernard Croom, you live at Bablock Hythe, and are in charge of a horse-breeding establishment there? Have you any private means?”

“None whatever.”

It was not Instone who was examining, but a younger man with a sharper nose, seated just behind him.

“Up to September last year you were superintending a tea plantation in Ceylon? Did you ever meet the respondent in Ceylon?”

“Never.”

“You were never at her house?’

“No.”

“You have heard of a certain polo match in which you played, and after which she entertained the players?”

“Yes, but I didn’t go. I had to get back.”

“Was it on the boat, then, that you first met her?”

“Yes.”

“You make no secret of the fact that you fell in love with her?”

“None.”

“In spite of that, is there any truth in these allegations of misconduct between you?”

“None whatever.”

And as the evidence he gave to the Court went on and on, Dinny’s eyes never left his face, as if fascinated by its constrained but bitter unhappiness.

“Now, Mr. Croom, this is my last question: You are aware that if these allegations of misconduct were true, you would be in the position of a man who has seduced a wife in her husband’s absence. What have you to say to that?”

“I have to say that if Lady Corven had felt for me what I feel for her, I should have written to her husband at once to tell him the state of things.”

“You mean that you would have given him warning before anything took place between you?”

“I don’t say that, but as soon as possible.”

“But she did NOT feel for you what you felt for her?”

“I am sorry to say, no.”

“So that in fact no occasion to inform the husband ever arose?”

“No.”

“Thank you.”

A slight stiffening of young Croom’s figure heralded Brough’s rich slow voice, saying with peculiar deliberation:

“In your experience, sir, are the feelings of lovers towards each other ever the same?”

“I have no experience.”

“No experience? You know the French proverb as to there being always one who kisses and the other who offers the cheek to the kiss?”

“I’ve heard it.”

“Don’t you think it’s true?”

“About as true as any proverb.”

“According to the stories you both tell, you were pursuing in her husband’s absence a married woman who didn’t want you to pursue her? Not a very honourable position — yours — was it? Not exactly what is called ‘playing the game’?”

"I suppose not."

"But I suggest, Mr. Croom, that your position was not as dishonourable as all that, and that in spite of the French proverb she DID want you to pursue her?"

"She did not."

"You say that in face of the cabin incident; in face of her getting you in to distemper her walls; in face of the invitation to tea and to spend over half an hour with her at nearly midnight in those convenient rooms of hers; in face of the suggestion that you should spend the night with her in a car, and come to breakfast the morning after? Come, Mr. Croom, isn't that carrying your chivalry rather far? What you say has to convince men and women of the world, you know."

"I can only say that, if her feelings for me had been what mine were for her, we should have gone away together at once. The blame is entirely mine, and she has only treated me kindly because she was sorry for me."

"If what you both say is true, she gave you hell — I beg your pardon, my Lord — in the car, didn't she? Was that kind?"

"When a person is not in love I don't think they realise the feelings of one who is."

"Are you a cold-blooded person?"

"No."

"But she is?"

"How is the witness to know that, Mr. Brough?"

"My Lord, I should have put it: But you think she is?"

"I do not think so."

"And yet you would have us think that she was kind in letting you pass the night with her head on your shoulder? Well, well! You say if her feelings had been yours, you would have gone away at once. What would you have gone away on? Had you any money?"

"Two hundred pounds."

"And she?"

"Two hundred a year, apart from her job."

"Flown away and lived on air, eh?"

"I should have got some job."

"Not your present one?"

"Probably not."

"I suggest that both of you felt it would be mad to fling your caps over the windmill like that?"

"I never felt so."

"What made you defend this action?"

"I wish we hadn't."

"Then why did you?"

"She thought, and her people thought, that as we had done nothing, we ought to defend."

"But YOU didn't think so?"

"I didn't think we should be believed, and I wanted her free."

"Her honour didn't occur to you?"

"Of course it did; but I thought for her to stay tied was too heavy a price to pay for it."

"You say you didn't think you'd be believed? Altogether too improbable a story?"

"No; but the more one speaks the truth, the less one expects to be believed."

Dinny saw the Judge turn and look at him.

"Are you speaking generally?"

"No, my Lord, I meant here."

The Judge's face came round again and his eyes studied the unseen above Dinny's head.

"I am considering, you know, whether I should commit you for contempt of Court."

“I am sorry, my Lord; what I meant was that anything one says is turned against one.”

“You speak out of inexperience. I will let it pass this time, but you mustn’t say things of that sort again. Go on, Mr. Brough.”

“The question of damages, of course, didn’t affect you in making up your mind to defend this action?”

“No.”

“You have said that you have no private means. Is that true?”

“Certainly.”

“Then how do you mean that it didn’t affect you?”

“I was thinking so much of other things that bankruptcy didn’t seem to matter.”

“Now, you have said in examination that you were not aware of Lady Corven’s existence until you were on this ship coming home. Do you know a place in Ceylon called Neuralya?”

“No.”

“What?”

Dinny saw a faint smile creep out among the Judge’s folds and wrinkles.

“Put the question another way, Mr. Brough; we generally call it Neuralya.”

“I know Neuralya, my Lord.”

“Were you there in June last?”

“Yes.”

“Was Lady Corven there?”

“She may have been.”

“Wasn’t she in the same hotel as you?”

“No. I wasn’t in an hotel. I was staying with a friend.”

“And you did not meet her playing golf or tennis, or out riding?”

“I did not.”

“Or anywhere?”

“No.”

“Not a large place, is it?”

“Not very.”

“And she’s a conspicuous person, isn’t she?”

“*I* think so.”

“So you never met her till you were both on this ship?”

“No.”

“When did you first become conscious that you were in love with her?”

“About the second or third day out.”

“Love almost at first sight, in fact?”

“Yes.”

“And it didn’t occur to you, knowing that she was a married woman, to avoid her?”

“I knew I ought to, but I wasn’t able.”

“You would have been able to if she had discouraged you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did she in fact discourage you?”

“N-no. I don’t think she was aware of my feelings for some time.”

“Women are very quick in such matters, Mr. Croom. Do you seriously suggest that she was unaware?”

“I don’t know.”

"Did you trouble to conceal your feelings?"

"If you mean did I make love to her on the ship — I did not."

"When did you first make love to her?"

"I told her my feelings just before we left the ship."

"Was there any real reason why you should have gone to her state-room to see those photographs?"

"I suppose not."

"Did you look at any photographs at all?"

"Certainly."

"What else did you do?"

"I think we talked."

"Don't you know? This was an occasion for you, wasn't it? Or was it only one of several occasions of which we have not been told?"

"It was the only time I was inside her state-room."

"In that case surely you remember?"

"We just sat and talked."

"Beginning to remember, eh? Where did you sit?"

"In the chair."

"And where did she sit?"

"On her bed. It was a small cabin — there was no other chair."

"An outside cabin?"

"Yes."

"No chance of being overlooked?"

"No, but there was nothing to overlook."

"So you both say. I suppose it gave you something of a thrill, didn't it?"

Dinny saw the Judge's face poked forward.

"I don't want to interrupt you, Mr. Brough, but the witness has made no secret of his feelings."

"Very well, my Lord. I will put it to him bluntly. I suggest, sir, that on that occasion there was misconduct between you?"

"There was none."

"H'm! Tell the jury why it was that when Sir Gerald Corven came to London you did not go to him and frankly avow your relations with his wife."

"What relations?"

"Come, sir! The fact, on your own showing, that you were seeing all you could of his wife; the fact that you were in love with her, and wanted her to go away with you."

"She did not want to go away with me. I would willingly have gone to her husband, but I had no right to without her permission."

"Did you ask for that permission?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because she had told me we could only meet as friends."

"I suggest she told you nothing of the sort?"

"My Lord, that is asking me if I am a liar."

"Answer the question."

"I am not a liar."

"That is the answer, I think, Mr. Brough."

"Tell me, sir: you heard the respondent's evidence, did it strike you as entirely truthful?"

Dinny saw, and hoped that no one else saw, the quivering of his face.

"Yes, so far as I could judge."

"It was perhaps not quite a fair question. But I may put it this way: If the respondent were to say that she had done, or not done, this or that, you would feel bound in honour to corroborate her statement, where you could, and to believe it where you could not?"

"I am not sure that is quite fair, Mr. Brough."

"My Lord, I submit that it is vital to my case to establish to the jury what the state of the co-respondent's mind has been throughout this business."

"Well, I won't stop the question, but there is a limit, you know, to these generalities."

Dinny saw the first flicker of a smile on young Croom's face.

"My Lord, I don't at all mind answering the question. I do not know what I should feel bound in honour to do, generally speaking."

"Well, let us come to the particular. Lady Corven has said that she could trust you not to make love to her. Would you say that was true?"

Dinny saw his face darken.

"Not quite true. But she knew I did my best not to."

"But now and then you couldn't help it?"

"I don't know what you mean by the expression 'making love'; but now and then I know I showed my feelings."

"Now and then? Mr. Croom, didn't you always show your feelings?"

"If you mean did I always show that I was in love with her — of course I did, you can't hide a thing like that."

"That is a fair admission. I don't want to catch you. I mean more than just showing by your face and eyes that you were in love. I mean downright physical expression."

"Then, no, except —"

"Yes?"

"Kissing her cheek three times altogether, and holding her hand sometimes."

"So much she has admitted, and it is all you are prepared to swear to?"

"I will swear there was no more."

"Tell me, did you sleep at all during that night in the car, when her head was on your shoulder?"

"Yes."

"Considering the state of your feelings, wasn't that singular?"

"Yes. But I was up at five that morning and I'd driven a hundred and fifty miles."

"You seriously expect us to believe that after nearly five months of longing you took no advantage of that marvellous opportunity, but just went to sleep?"

"I took no advantage. But I have told you that I do not expect to be believed."

"I don't wonder."

For a long time the slow rich voice went on asking questions, and for a long time Dinny's eyes remained fixed on that bitterly unhappy face, till a sort of numbness came over her. She was roused by:

"I suggest to you, sir, that from beginning to end of your evidence you have been actuated by the feeling that you must do everything you can for this lady without regard to your own consciousness of what is true? That your attitude, in fact, has been one of distorted chivalry?"

"No."

"Very well. That is all."

Then came the re-examination, and the Judge's releasing remark.

Dinny and Clare arose and, followed by their father, walked out into the corridor, and, as quickly as might be, to open air.

The General said:

“Instone’s made a mess of it with that quite unnecessary point of his.”

Clare did not answer.

“I am glad,” said Dinny. “You’ll get your divorce.”

❦

Chapter 33

The speeches were over, and the Judge was summing up. From beside her father, on one of the back benches now, Dinny could see Jerry Corven still sitting in front beside his solicitors, and 'very young' Roger sitting alone. Clare was not in Court. Neither was young Croom.

The Judge's voice came slowly, as if struggling past his teeth. It seemed to Dinny marvellous how he remembered everything, for he looked but little at his notes; nor could she detect anything that was not fair in his review of the evidence. Now and again his eyes, turned towards the jury, seemed to close, but his voice never stopped. Now and again he poked his neck forward, priest and tortoise for a moment coalescing; then he would draw it back and speak as it were to himself.

"The evidence not being of the conclusive nature which we expect of evidence tendered to this Court"—(No 'calling with a cup of tea,' she thought), "counsel for the petitioner in his able speech laid great stress, and rightly, upon credibility. He directed your attention especially to the respondent's denial that there was any renewal of the marital relationship between the petitioner and herself on the occasion when he went to her rooms. He suggested that there was reason for her denial in her desire to spare the feelings of the co-respondent. But you must consider whether a woman who, as she says, was not in love with the co-respondent, had not encouraged him, or been intimate with him in any way, would go so far as to perjure herself to save his feelings. According to her account, he was from the beginning of their acquaintanceship in the nature of a friend to her and nothing more. On the other hand, if you believe the petitioner on that point — and there seems no sufficient reason for his volunteering perjury — it follows that you disbelieve the respondent, and she has deliberately denied evidence which was in her favour rather than against her. It seems difficult to believe that she would do that unless she had feelings for the co-respondent warmer than those of mere friendship. This is, in fact, a very crucial point, and the decision you come to as to which is true — the husband's statement or the wife's denial of it — seems to me a cardinal factor in your consideration of whether or not to accept the respondent's evidence in the rest of the case. You have only what is called circumstantial evidence to go upon; and in such cases the credibility of the parties is a very important factor. If on one point you are satisfied that one of the parties is not speaking the truth, then the whole of his or her evidence is tinged with doubt. In regard to the co-respondent, though he conveyed an impression of candour, you must remember that there is a traditional belief in this country, regrettable or not, that a man whose attentions have involved a married woman in a situation of this kind must not, in vulgar parlance, 'give her away.' You must ask yourselves how far you can treat this young man, who is quite obviously, and by his own admission, deeply in love, as a free, independent, truthful witness.

"On the other hand, and apart from this question of general credibility, you must not let appearances run away with your judgment. In these days young people are free and easy in their association with each other. What might have seemed conclusive indication in the days of my youth is now by no means conclusive. In regard to the night, however, that was spent in the car, you may think it well to pay particular attention to the answer the respondent gave to my question: Why, when the lights went out, they did not simply stop a passing car, tell the occupants what had happened, and request to be given a lead into Henley. Her answer was: 'I don't think we thought of it, my Lord. I did ask Mr. Croom to follow a car, but it was going too fast.' It is for you to consider, in the light of that answer, whether the respondent really wanted that simple solution of the difficulty they were in, namely, a lead into Henley, where no doubt the damage could have been repaired; or whence at least she could have returned to London by train. It is said by her counsel that to have gone into Henley at that time with a damaged car would have made them too conspicuous. But you will remember that she has said she was not aware that she was being watched. If that was so, you will consider whether the question of conspicuosity would have been present to her mind."

Dinny's gaze by now had left the Judge's face and was fixed upon the jury. And, while she searched the lack of expression on those twelve faces, a 'cardinal factor' was uppermost in her mind: It was easier to disbelieve than to believe. Remove whatever tempering influence there might be from a witness's voice and face, and would not the spicier version of events prevail? The word 'damages' took her eyes back to the Judge's face.

"Because," he was saying, "if you should come to a decision in favour of the petitioner, the question of the damages he claims will arise. And in regard to that I must draw your attention to one or two salient considerations. It cannot be said that claims for damages in divorce suits are common in these days, or indeed looked on with any great favour in this Court.

It has become disagreeable to think of women in terms of money. Not much more than a hundred years ago it was actually not unknown — though illegal even then — for a man to offer his wife for sale. Such days — thank God! — are long past. Though damages can still be asked for in this Court, they must not be what is called 'vindictive,' and they must bear reasonable relation to the co-respondent's means. In this case the petitioner has stated that if any damages are awarded him, they will be settled on the respondent. That is, one may say, the usual practice nowadays where damages are claimed. In regard to the co-respondent's, means, if it should become necessary for you to consider the question of damages, I would remind you that his counsel stated that he has no private means, and offered to provide evidence of the fact. One has never known counsel to make a statement of that sort without being sure of his ground, and I think you may take the co-respondent's word for it that his only means of subsistence are derived from his — er —'job,' which appears to carry a salary of four hundred pounds a year. Those, then, are the considerations which should guide you if you should have to consider the amount, if any, of damages to be awarded. Now, members of the jury, I send you to your task. The issues are grave for the future of these people, and I am sure that I can trust you to give them your best attention. You may retire if you wish to do so."

Dinny was startled by the way he withdrew almost at once into contemplation of a document which he raised from the desk in front.

'He really is an old ducky,' she thought, and her gaze went back to the jury rising from their seats. Now that the ordeals of her sister and Tony Croom were over, she felt very little interested. Even the Court today was but sparsely filled.

'They only came to enjoy the suffering,' was her bitter thought.

A voice said:

"Clare is still in the Admiralty Court when you want her." Dornford, in wig and gown, was sitting down beside her. "How did the Judge sum up?"

"Very fairly."

"He IS fair."

"But barristers, I think, might wear: 'Fairness is a virtue, a little more won't hurt you,' nicely printed on their collars."

"You might as well print it round the necks of hounds on a scent. Still, even this Court isn't as bad in that way as it used to be."

"I'm so glad."

He sat quite still, looking at her. And she thought:

'His wig suits the colour of his face.'

Her father leaned across her.

"How long do they give you to pay costs in, Dornford?"

"A fortnight is the usual order, but you can get it extended."

"It's a foregone conclusion," said the General glumly. "Well, she'll be free of him."

"Where is Tony Croom?" asked Dinny.

"I saw him as I came in. At the corridor window — quite, close. You can't miss him. Shall I go and tell him to wait?"

"If you would."

"Then will you all come to my chambers when it's over?" Receiving their nods, he went out, and did not come back.

Dinny and her father sat on. An usher brought the Judge a written communication; he wrote upon it, and the usher took it back to the jury. Almost immediately they came in.

The broad and pleasant face of her who looked like a housekeeper had a mortified expression as if she had been overridden; and, instantly, Dinny knew what was coming.

"Members of the jury, are you agreed on your verdict?"

The foreman rose.

"We are."

"Do you find the respondent guilty of adultery with the co-respondent?"

"Yes."

"Do you find the co-respondent guilty of adultery with the respondent?"

'Isn't that the same?' thought Dinny.

"Yes."

"And what damages do you say the co-respondent should be ordered to pay?"

"We think that he should pay the costs of all the parties to the action."

Through Dinny passed the thought: 'The more one loves the more one pays.' Barely listening to the Judge's words, she whispered to her father, and slipped away.

"Young Croom was leaning against the stone that framed the window, and she thought she had never seen so desolate a figure.

"Well, Dinny?"

"Lost. No damages, just all the costs. Come out, I want to talk to you."

They went in silence.

"Let's go and sit on the Embankment."

Young Croom laughed. "The Embankment! Marvellous!"

No other word passed between them till they were seated under a plane tree whose leaves were not yet fully unfurled in that cold spring.

"Rotten!" said Dinny.

"I've been a complete fool all through, and there's an end of it."

"Have you had anything to eat these last two days?"

"I suppose so. I've drunk quite a lot, anyway."

"What are you going to do now, dear boy?"

"See Jack Muskham, and try and get another job somewhere out of England."

Dinny felt as if she had grasped a stick by the wrong end. She could only be helpful if she knew Clare's feelings.

"No one takes advice," she said, "but couldn't you manage to do nothing at all for a month or so?"

"I don't know, Dinny."

"Have those mares come?"

"Not yet."

"Surely you won't give that job up before it's even begun?"

"It seems to me I've only got one job at the moment — to keep going somehow, somewhere."

"Don't I know that feeling? But don't do anything desperate! Promise! Good-bye, my dear, I must hurry back."

She stood up and pressed his hand hard.

When she reached Dornford's chambers, her father and Clare were already there, and 'very young' Roger with them.

Clare's face looked as though the whole thing had happened to someone else.

The General was saying:

"What will the total costs come to, Mr. Forsyte?"

"Not far short of a thousand, I should say."

"A thousand pounds for speaking the truth! We can't possibly let young Croom pay more than his own share. He hasn't a bob."

'Very young' Roger took snuff.

"Well," said the General, "I must go and put my wife out of her misery. We're going back to Condaford this afternoon, Dinny. Coming?"

Dinny nodded.

"Good! Many thanks, Mr. Forsyte. Early in November, then — the decree? Good-bye!"

When he had gone Dinny said in a low voice:

“Now that it’s over, what do you really think?”

“As I did at first: If you’d been your sister we should have won.”

“I want,” said Dinny coldly, “to know whether you believe them or not?”

“On the whole — yes.”

“Is it impossible for a lawyer to go further than that?”

‘Very young’ Roger smiled.

“No one tells the truth without mental reservations of some kind.”

‘Perfectly true,’ thought Dinny. “Could we have a taxi?”

In the cab Clare said: “Do something for me, Dinny. Bring me my things to the Mews.”

“Of course.”

“I don’t feel like Condaford. Did you see Tony?”

“Yes.”

“How is he?”

“Rotten.”

“Rotten!” repeated Clare, bitterly. “How could I help what they sprung on me? I lied for him, anyway.”

Dinny, looking straight before her, said:

“When you can, tell me exactly what your feeling towards him is.”

“When I know myself, I will.”

“You’ll want something to eat, darling.”

“Yes, I’m hungry. I’ll stop here in Oxford Street. I shall be cleaning up when you come with my things. I feel as if I could sleep the clock round, and probably I shan’t sleep a wink. When you’re divorced, Dinny, don’t defend — you keep on thinking of better answers.”

Dinny squeezed her arm, and took the taxi on to South Square.

❦

Chapter 34

More deadly than the atmosphere during a fight is that when it is over. You 'keep on thinking of better answers,' and you feel that life is not worth living. The primary law of existence having been followed to its logical and — win or lose — unsatisfying conclusion, the sand is out of your dolly, you loll and droop. Such were the sensations of Dinny, who had but understudied. Unable to feel that she could be of any real help, she fell back on pigs, and had been for a good week in this posture when she received a letter headed:

"Kingson Cuthcott & Forsyte,

"Old Jewry.

"May 17th, 1932.

"MY DEAR MISS CHARWELL —

"I write to tell you that we have succeeded in coming to an arrangement by which the costs of the action will be met without making any call upon either Mr. Croom or your sister. I shall be grateful if you could take an opportunity of relieving their minds and also your father's mind in the matter.

"Believe me, my dear Miss Charwell,

"Very faithfully yours,

"ROGER FORSYTE."

Reaching her on a really warm morning, to sound of mowing machine and to scent of grass, it would have 'intrigued' her if she had not detested the word. She turned from the window and said:

"The lawyers say we need none of us worry any more about those costs, dad; they've come to an arrangement."

"How?"

"They don't say, but they want your mind relieved."

"I don't understand lawyers," muttered the General, "but if they say it's all right, I'm very glad. I've been worrying."

"Yes, dear. Coffee?"

But she resumed her meditations on that cryptic letter. Did something in Jerry Corven's conduct force him to agree to this 'arrangement'? Was there not someone called 'The King's Proctor' who could stop decrees being granted? Or — what?

Abandoning her first idea of driving over to Tony Croom because of the questions he might ask, she wrote to him and to Clare instead. The more, however, she pondered over the wording of the solicitor's letter, the more convinced she became that she must see 'very young' Roger. There was that at the back of her mind which refused quietus. She, therefore, arranged to see him at a teashop near the British Museum on his way homeward from the City, and went there direct from her train. The place was an 'artifact,' designed, so far as a Regency edifice could be, to reproduce such a 'coffee house' as Boswell and Johnson might have frequented. Its floor was not sanded, but looked as if it should be. There were no long clay pipes, but there were long cardboard cigarette-holders. The furniture was wooden, the light dim. No record having been discovered of what the 'staff' should look like, they looked sea-green. Prints of old coaching inns were hung on walls panelled by the Tottenham Court Road. Quite a few patrons were drinking tea and smoking cigarettes. None of them used the long cardboard holders. 'Very young' Roger, limping slightly, and with his customary air of not being quite what he ought to be, uncovered his sandyish head and smiled above his chin.

"China or Indian?" said Dinny.

"Whatever you're having."

"Then two coffees, please, and muffins."

"Muffins! This IS a treat, dear papa. Those are quite good old copper bed-warmers, Miss Cherrell. I wonder if they'd sell them."

"Do you collect?"

"Pick things up. No use having a Queen Anne house unless you can do something for it."

"Does your wife sympathise?"

"No, she's all for the T.C.R., bridge, golf, and the modernities. *I* never can keep my hands off old silver."

"I HAVE to," murmured Dinny. "Your letter was a very pleasant relief. Did you really mean that we should none of us have to pay?"

"I did."

She considered her next question, scrutinising him through her lashes. With all his æsthetic leanings, he looked uncommonly spry.

"In confidence, Mr. Forsyte, how did you manage to make that arrangement? Had it to do with my brother-inlaw?"

'Very young' Roger laid his hand on his heart.

"'The tongue of Forsyte is his own,' cf. Marmion. But you needn't worry."

"I need, or shall, unless I know it wasn't that."

"Make your mind easy, then; it had nothing to do with Corven."

Dinny ate a muffin in complete silence, then spoke of period silver. 'Very young' Roger gave an erudite dissertation on its mark — if she would come down for a week-end, he would turn her into a connoisseur.

They parted cordially, and Dinny went towards her Uncle Adrian's. That uneasiness was still at the back of her mind. The trees had leaved enticingly these last warm days; the Square wherein he dwelled had an air quiet and green, as if inhabited by minds. Nobody was at home. "But," said the maid, "Mr. Cherrell is sure to be in about six, miss."

Dinny waited in a small panelled room full of books and pipes and photographs of Diana and the two Ferse children. An old collie kept her company, and through the opened window seeped the sounds of London streets. She was crumpling the dog's ears when Adrian came in.

"Well, Dinny, so it's over. I hope you feel better."

Dinny handed him the letter.

"I know it's nothing to do with Jerry Corven. You know Eustace Dornford, Uncle. I want you to find out from him quietly whether it's he who is paying these costs."

Adrian pulled at his beard.

"I don't suppose he'd tell me."

"Somebody must have paid them, and I can only think of him. I don't want to go to him myself."

Adrian looked at her intently. Her face was concerned and brooding.

"Not easy, Dinny; but I'll try. What's going to happen to those two?"

"I don't know, they don't know; nobody knows."

"How are your people taking it?"

"Terribly glad it's over, and don't care much now it is. You'll let me know soon, won't you, Uncle dear?"

"I will, my dear; but I shall probably draw blank."

Dinny made for Melton Mews, and met her sister on the doorstep. Clare's cheeks were flushed; there was febrility in her whole manner and appearance.

"I've asked Tony Croom here this evening," she said, when Dinny was leaving to catch her train. "One must pay one's debts."

"Oh!" murmured Dinny, and for the life of her could say no more.

The words haunted her in the bus to Paddington, in the refreshment room while she ate a sandwich, in the railway carriage going home. Pay one's debts! The first canon of self-respect! Suppose Dornford had paid those costs! Was she as precious as all that? Wilfrid had had all of her according to her heart and her hope and her desire. If Dornford wanted what was left over — why not? She dropped thinking of herself and went back to thought of Clare. Had she paid her debt by now? Transgressors by law — ought to transgress! And yet — so much future could be compromised in so few minutes!

She sat very still. And the train rattled on in the dying twilight.

❦

Chapter 35

Tony Croom had spent a miserable week in his converted cottages at Bablock Hythe. The evidence given by Corven on his recall to the box had seared him, nor had Clare's denial anointed the burn. In this young man was an old-fashioned capacity for jealousy. That a wife should accept her husband's embrace was not, of course, unknown; but, in the special circumstances and states of feeling, it had seemed to him improper, if not monstrous, and the giving of his own evidence, directly after such a thrust at his vitals, had but inflamed the wound. A sad unreason governs sex; to be aware that he had no right to be suffering brought no relief. And now, a week after the trial, receiving her note of invitation, he had the impulse not to answer, to answer and upbraid, to answer 'like a gentleman'— and, all the time, he knew he would just go up.

With nothing clear in his mind and that bruise still in his heart, he reached the Mews an hour after Dinny had gone. Clare let him in, and they stood looking at each other for a minute without speaking. At last she said with a laugh:

"Well, Tony! Funny business — the whole thing, wasn't it?"

"Exquisitely humorous."

"You look ill."

"You look fine."

And she did, in a red frock open at the neck, and without sleeves.

"Sorry I'm not dressed, Clare. I didn't know you'd want to go out."

"I don't. We're going to dine in. You can leave the car out there, and stay as long as you like, and nobody the worse. Isn't it nice?"

"Clare!"

"Put your hat down and come upstairs. I've made a new cocktail."

"I take this chance to say I'm bitterly sorry."

"Don't be an idiot, Tony." She began to mount the spiral stairway, turning at the top. "Come!"

Dropping his hat and driving gloves, he followed her. To the eyes of one throbbing and distraught, the room above had an air of preparation, as if for ceremony, or — was it sacrifice? The little table was set out daintily with flowers, a narrow-necked bottle, green glasses — the couch covered with some jade-green stuff and heaped with bright cushions. The windows were open, for it was hot, but the curtains were nearly drawn across and the light turned on. He went straight across to the window, stifled by the violent confusion within him.

"In spite of the Law's blessing, better close the curtains," said Clare. "Would you like a wash?"

He shook his head, drew the curtains close, and sat on the sill. Clare had dropped on to the sofa.

"I couldn't bear to see you in the box, Tony. I owe you a lot."

"Owe! You owe me nothing. It's I—!"

"No! I am the debtor."

With her bare arms crossed behind her neck, her body so graceful, her face a little tilted up — there was all he had dreamed about and longed for all these months! There she was, infinitely desirable, seeming to say: 'Here I am! Take me!' and he sat staring at her. The moment he had yearned and yearned for, and he could not seize it!

"Why so far off, Tony?"

He got up, his lips trembling, every limb trembling, came as far as the table, and stood gripping the back of a chair. His eyes fixed on her eyes, searched and searched. What was behind those dark eyes looking up at him? Not love! The welcome of duty? The payment of a debt? The toleration of a pal? The invitation of one who would have it over and done with? But not love, with its soft gleam. And, suddenly, there came before his eyes the image of her and Corven — THERE! He covered his face with his arm, rushed headlong down those twisting iron stairs, seized hat and gloves, and dashed out into his car. His mind did not really work again till he was far along the Uxbridge Road; and how he had got there without disaster he could not conceive. He had behaved like a perfect fool! He had behaved exactly as he had to! The startled look on her face! To be treated as a creditor! To be paid! THERE! On that sofa! No! He drove again with a sort of frenzy, and was brought up sharply by a lorry lumbering along in front. The night was just beginning, moonlit and warm. He turned the car into a gateway and got out. Leaning against the gate, he filled and lit his pipe. Where was he going? Home? What use? What use going anywhere? His brain cleared suddenly. Drive to Jack Muskham's, release himself, and — Kenya! He had money enough for that. A job would turn up. But stay here? No! Lucky those mares hadn't come! He got over the gate and sat down on the grass. Relaxed against the bank he looked up. Lot of stars! What had he — fifty pounds — sixty — nothing owing! An East African boat — go steerage! Anything — anywhere away! Close to him on the bank were ox-eyed daisies slowly brightening in the moonlight; the air was scented by ripening grass. If in her eyes there had been one look of love! He let his head fall back on the grass. Not her fault she didn't love him! His misfortune! Home — get his kit together, lock up, straight to Muskham's! It would take all the night! See those lawyers — Dinny, too, if possible! But Clare? No! His pipe ceased to draw; the moon and stars, the ox-eyed daisies, the grassy scent, the shadows creeping out, the feel of the bank, lost all power to soothe. Get on, do something, go on doing something, till he was again on shipboard and away. He got up, climbed back over the gate, and started his engine. He kept straight on, instinctively avoiding the route through Maidenhead and Henley. He passed through High Wycombe and approached Oxford from the north. The old town was lit up and in evening feather when he dropped down on it from Headington and threaded into the quiet Cumnor road. On the little old New Bridge over the Upper Thames he stopped. Something special about this upper river, quiet and winding, and withdrawn from human blatancy! In full moonlight now the reeds glistened and the willows seemed to drip silver into the water, dark below their branches. Some windows in the inn beyond were lamp-lit, but no sound of gramophone came forth. With the moon riding so high, the stars now were but a pricking of the grape-coloured sky; the scent from the reedy banks and the river fields, after a whole week of warmth, mounted to his nostrils, sweet and a little rank. It brought a sudden wave of sheer sex-longing — so often and so long had he dreamed of Clare and himself in love on this winding field-scented stream. He started the car with a jerk, and turned past the inn down the narrowed road. In twenty minutes he stood in the doorway of his cottage, looking into the moonlit room he had left sunlit seven hours before. There was the novel he had been trying to read, tipped on to the floor; the remains of his cheese and fruit lunch not cleared away; a pair of brown shoes which he had been going to shine up. The big black beams across the low ceiling and around the big old fireplace rescued from Victorian enclosure and brown varnish, the copper fire-dogs and pewter plates and jugs and bowls he had hardily collected, hoping they would appeal to Clare, all his res angusta domi, welcomed him dimly. He felt suddenly exhausted, drank half a tumbler of whisky and water, ate some biscuits, and sank into his long wicker armchair. Almost at once he fell asleep, and awoke in daylight. He woke remembering that he had meant to spend the night in action. Level sunlight was slanting in at the window. He finished the water in the jug, and looked at his watch. Five o'clock. He threw open the door. Early haze was bright over the fields. He went out past the mares' boxes and their meadows. A track, sloping down towards the river, led over grass broken by bushy scoops and green banks covered with hazel and alders. No dew had fallen, but the grass and every shrub smelled new.

About fifty yards from the river he threw himself down in a little hollow. Rabbits and bees and birds — nothing else as yet awake. He lay on his back staring at the grass and the bushes and the early sky, blue and lightly fleeced. Perhaps because he could see so little from that hollow all England seemed to be with him. A wild bee close to his hand was digging into a flower, there was a faint scent, as of daisy-chains; but chiefly it was the quality of the grass — its close freshness, its true greenness. 'Greatness and dignity and peace!' That play! Those words had given him a choke. Other people had laughed, Clare had laughed. "Sentimental!" she had said. "No country ever had, or will have 'Greatness and dignity and peace.'" Probably not, certainly not — a country, even one's own, was a mish-mash of beauties and monstrosities, a vague generalisation that betrayed dramatists into over-writing, journalists into blurb. All the same, you couldn't anywhere else in the world get just such a spot, or just such grass to feel and see, a scent that was wellnigh none, a tender fleecy sky, tiny flowers, birds' songs, age and youth at once! Let people laugh — you couldn't! Leave grass like this! He remembered the thrill he had felt six months ago, seeing again English grass! Leave his job before it had begun; chuck it back at Muskham, who had been so really decent to him! He turned over on to his face and laid his cheek to that grass. There he got the scent better — not sweet, not bitter, but fresh, intimate and delighting, a scent apprehended from his earliest childhood — the scent of England. If only those mares would come, and he could get at it! He sat up again, and listened. No sound of train or car or airplane, no human sound, no sound of any four-footed thing; just birds' songs, and those indistinguishable and a little far — a long meandering tune wide above the grass. Well! No use making a song! If one couldn't have a thing, one couldn't!

Chapter 36

The moment Dinny had left, Adrian made the not uncommon discovery that he had promised what would need performance. To get one of His Majesty's Counsel to commit himself — how? Too pointed to go to him! Impossible to pump a guest! Em, if he prompted her, would ask them both to dinner, especially if made to understand that the matter concerned Dinny; but even then —? He waited to consult Diana, and, after dining, went round to Mount Street. He found them playing piquet.

"Four kings," said Lady Mont. "So old-fashioned — Lawrence and I and Mussolini. Have you come for something, Adrian?"

"Naturally, Em. I want you to ask Eustace Dornford to dinner, and me to meet him."

"That'll be Dinny. I can't get Lawrence to be chivalrous; when I have four kings he always has four aces. When?"

"The sooner the better."

"Ring, dear."

Adrian rang.

"Blore, call up Mr. Dornford and ask him to dinner — black tie."

"When, my lady?"

"The first evenin' not in my book. Like dentists," she added, as Blore withdrew. "Tell me about Dinny. She hasn't been near us since the case."

"The case," repeated Sir Lawrence, "went much as one expected, didn't you think, Adrian? Any repercussions?"

"Someone has settled the costs, and Dinny suspects Dornford."

Sir Lawrence laid down his cards. "Bit too like a bid for her, that!"

"Oh, he won't admit it, but she wants me to find out."

"If he won't admit it, why should he do it?"

"Knights," murmured Lady Mont, "wearin' a glove, and gettin' killed, and nobody knowin' whose glove. Yes, Blore?"

"Mr. Dornford will be happy to dine on Monday, my lady."

"Put him in my book, then, and Mr. Adrian."

"Go away with him after dinner, Adrian," said Sir Lawrence, "and do it then — not so pointed; and, Em, not a hint, not even a sigh or a groan."

"He's a nice creature," said Lady Mont, "so pale-brown . . ."

With the 'nice creature so pale-brown' Adrian walked away the following Monday night. Their directions were more or less the same, since Dornford was not yet in his new house. To Adrian's relief, his companion seemed as glad of the opportunity as himself, for he began at once to talk of Dinny.

"Am I right in thinking something's happened to Dinny lately — I don't mean that case — but when she was ill and you went abroad together?"

"Yes. The man I told you of that she was in love with two years ago was drowned out in Siam."

"Oh!"

Adrian stole a look. What should Dornford's face express — concern, relief, hope, sympathy? It only wore a little frown.

"There was a question I wanted to ask you, Dornford. Someone had settled the costs granted against young Croom in that case." The eyebrows were raised now, but the face said nothing. "I thought you might have known who. The lawyers will only say that it wasn't the other side."

"I've no idea."

'So!' thought Adrian. 'No nearer, except that, if a liar, he's a good one!'

"I like young Croom," said Dornford; "he's behaved decently, and had hard luck. That'll save him from bankruptcy."

"Bit mysterious, though," murmured Adrian.

"It is."

'On the whole,' Adrian thought, 'I believe he did. But what a poker face!' He said, however:

"How do you find Clare since the case?"

"A little more cynical. She expressed her views on my profession rather freely when we were riding this morning."

"Do you think she'll marry young Croom?"

Dornford shook his head.

"I doubt it, especially if what you say about those costs is true. She might have out of a sense of obligation, but otherwise I think the case has worked against his chance. She's no real feeling for him — at least that's my view."

"Corven disillusioned her thoroughly."

"I've certainly seldom seen a more disillusioning face than his," murmured Dornford. "But she seems to me headed for quite an amusing life on her own. She's got pluck and, like all these young women now, she's essentially independent."

"Yes, I can't see Clare being domestic."

Dornford was silent. "Would you say that of Dinny, too?" he asked suddenly.

"Well, I can't see Clare as a mother; Dinny I can. I can't see Dinny here, there and everywhere; Clare I can. All the same — 'domestic' of Dinny! It's not the word."

"No!" said Dornford fervently. "I don't know what is. You believe very much in her, don't you?"

Adrian nodded.

"Enormously."

"It's been tremendous for me," said Dornford, very low, "to have come across her; but I'm afraid so far it's been nothing to her."

"Much to allow for," suggested Adrian. "'Patience is a virtue,' or so it used to be before the world went up in that blue flame and never came down again."

"But I'm rising forty."

"Well, Dinny's rising twenty-nine."

"What you told me just now makes a difference, or — doesn't it?"

"About Siam? I think it does — a great difference."

"Well thank you."

They parted with a firm clasp, and Adrian branched off northwards. He walked slowly, thinking of the balance-sheet that confronts each lover's unlimited liability. No waterings of capital nor any insurance could square or guarantee that shifting lifelong document. By love was man flung into the world; with love was he in business nearly all his days, making debts or profit; and when he died was by the results of love, if not by the parish, buried and forgotten. In this swarming London not a creature but was deeply in account with a Force so whimsical, inexorable, and strong, that none, man or woman, in their proper senses would choose to do business with it. 'Good match,' 'happy marriage,' 'ideal partnership,' 'life-long union,' ledgered against 'don't get on,' 'just a flare up,' 'tragic state of things,' 'misfit'! All his other activities man could insure, modify, foresee, provide against (save the inconvenient activity of death); love he could not. It stepped to him out of the night, into the night returned. It stayed, it fled. On one side or the other of the balance sheet it scored an entry, leaving him to cast up and wait for the next entry. It mocked dictators, parliaments, judges, bishops, police, and even good intentions; it maddened with joy and grief; wantoned, procreated, thieved, and murdered; was devoted, faithful, fickle. It had no shame, and owned no master; built homes and gutted them; passed by on the other side; and now and again made of two hearts one heart till death. To think of London, Manchester, Glasgow without love appeared to Adrian, walking up the Charing Cross Road, to be easy; and yet without love not one of these passing citizens would be sniffing the petrol of this night air, not one grimy brick would have been laid upon brick, not one bus be droning past, no street musician would wail, nor lamp light up the firmament. A somewhat primary concern! And he, whose primary concern was with the bones of ancient men, who but for love would have had no bones to be dug up, classified and kept under glass, thought of Dornford and Dinny, and whether they would 'click' . . .

And Dornford, on his way to Harcourt Buildings, thought even more intensively of himself and her. Rising forty! This overmastering wish of his — for its fulfilment it was now or never with him! If he were not to become set in the groove of a ‘getter-on,’ he must marry and have children. Life had become a half-baked thing without Dinny to give it meaning and savour. She had become — what had she not become? And, passing through the narrow portals of Middle Temple Lane, he said to a learned brother, also moving towards his bed:

“What’s going to win the Derby, Stubbs?”

“God knows!” said his learned brother, wondering why he had played that last trump when he did, instead of when he didn’t . . .

And in Mount Street Sir Lawrence, coming into her room to say ‘Good-night,’ found his wife sitting up in bed in the lace cap which always made her look so young, and, on the edge of the bed, in his black silk dressing-gown, sat down.

“Well, Em?”

“Dinny will have two boys and a girl.”

“Deuce she will! That’s counting her chickens rather fast.”

“Somebody must. Give me a nice kiss.”

Sir Lawrence stooped over and complied.

“When she marries,” said Lady Mont, shutting her eyes, “she’ll only be half there for a long time.”

“Better half there at the beginning than not at all at the end. But what makes you think she’ll take him?”

“My bones. We don’t like being left out when it comes to the point, Lawrence.”

“Continuation of the species. H’m!”

“If he’d get into a scrape, or break his leg.”

“Better give him a hint.”

“His liver’s sound.”

“How do you know that?”

“The whites of his eyes are blue. Those browny men often have livers.”

Sir Lawrence stood up.

“My trouble,” he said, “is to see Dinny sufficiently interested in herself again to get married. After all, it IS a personal activity.”

“Harridge’s for beds,” murmured Lady Mont.

Sir Lawrence’s eyebrow rose. Em was inexhaustible!

❦

Chapter 37

She whose abstinence from interest in herself was interesting so many people, received three letters on Wednesday morning. That which she opened first said:

"DINNY DARLING —

"I tried to pay, but Tony would have none of it, and went off like a rocket; so I'm a wholly unattached female again. If you hear any news of him, let me have it.

"Dornford gets more 'interesting-looking' every day. We only talk of you, and he's raising my salary to three hundred as compensation.

"Love to you and all,

"CLARE."

That which she opened second said:

"MY DEAR DINNY —

"I'm going to stick it here. The mares arrive on Monday. I had Muskham down yesterday, and he was jolly decent, didn't say a word about the case. I'm trying to take up birds. There is one thing you could do for me if you would — find out who paid those costs. It's badly on my mind.

"Ever so many thanks for always being so nice to me.

"Yours ever,

"TONY CROOM."

That which she read last said:

"DINNY, MY DEAR —

"Nothing doing. He either didn't, or else played 'possum,' but if so it was very good 'possum.' All the same, I wouldn't put it past him that it WAS 'possum.' If you really set store by knowing, I think I should ask him point-blank. I don't believe he would tell YOU a lie, even 'a little one.' As you know, I like him. In my avuncular opinion he is still on the gold standard.

"Your ever devoted

"ADRIAN."

So! She felt a vague irritation. And this feeling, which she had thought momentary, she found to be recurrent. Her state of mind, indeed, like the weather, turned cold again and torpid. She wrote to Clare what Tony Croom had written of himself, and that he had not mentioned her. She wrote to Tony Croom, and neither mentioned Clare nor answered his question about the costs; she concentrated on birds — they seemed safe, and to lead nowhere. She wrote to Adrian: "I'm feeling I ought to be wound-up, only there'd be no dividend for the shareholders. It's very cold and dull, my consolation is that little 'Cuffs' is beginning to 'sit up and take real notice' of me."

And then, as if by arrangement with the clerk of the course at Ascot, the weather changed to 'set warm'; and, suddenly, she wrote to Dornford. She wrote on pigs, their breeds and sties, the Government and the farmers. She ended with these words:

"We are all very worried by not knowing who had settled the costs in my sister's case. It is so disquieting to be under an obligation to an unknown person. Could you by any means find out for us?" She debated some time how to sign herself in this her first letter to him, and finally wrote "Yours always, Dinny Charwell."

His answer came very quickly:

"MY DEAR DINNY —

"I was delighted to get a letter from you. To answer your last question first. I will do my best to get the lawyers to 'come clean,' but if they won't tell YOU, I can't imagine their telling me. Still, I can try. Though I fancy that if your sister or young Croom insisted they'd have to tell. Now about pigs"— there followed certain information, and a lamentation that agriculture was still not being properly tackled. "If only they would realise that all the needed pigs, poultry, and potatoes, nearly all the vegetables, much of the fruits, and much more than the present dairy produce, can really be produced at home, and by a graduated prohibition of foreign produce encourage, and indeed force, our home growers to supply the home market, we should, within ten years, have a living and profitable native agriculture once more, no rise to speak of in the cost of living, and a huge saving in our imports bill. You see how new I am to politics! Wheat and meat are the red herrings across the trail. Wheat and meat from the Dominions, and the rest (bar hot climate fruits and vegetables) home-grown, is my motto. I hope your father agrees. Clare is becoming restive, and I'm wondering if she wouldn't be happier in a more active job than this. If I can come across a good one, I shall advise her to take it. Would you ask your mother whether I should be in the way if I came down for the last week-end this month? She was good enough to tell me to let her know any time I was coming to the constituency. I was again at Cavalcade the other night. It wears well, but I missed you. I can't even begin to tell you how I missed you.

"Your ever faithful

"EUSTACE DORNFORD."

Missed her! After the faint warmth those wistful words aroused, she thought almost at once of Clare. Restive! Who would be otherwise in her anomalous position? She had not been down at Condaford since the case. And that seemed to Dinny very natural. However one might say it didn't matter what people thought, it did, especially in a place where one had grown up, and belonged, as it were, to the blood royal of the neighbourhood. And Dinny thought, unhappily: 'I don't know what I want for her — and that's lucky, because one day she'll see exactly what she wants for herself.' How nice to see exactly what one wanted for oneself! She read Dornford's letter again, and suddenly faced her own feelings for the first time. Was she or was she not ever going to marry? If so, she would as soon marry Eustace Dornford as anyone — she liked, admired, could talk to him. But her — past! How funny it sounded! Her 'past,' strangled almost from birth, yet the deepest thing she would ever know! "One of these days you'll have to go down into the battle again." Unpleasant to be thought a shirker by one's own mother! But it wasn't shirking! Spots of colour rose in her cheeks. It was something no one would understand — a horror of being unfaithful to him to whom she had belonged in soul if not in body. Of being unfaithful to that utter surrender, which she knew could never be repeated.

'I am not in love with Eustace,' she thought; 'he knows it, he knows I can't even pretend it. If he wants me on those terms, what is it fair for me — what is it possible for me to do?' She went out into the old yew-hedged rose garden, where the first burst of roses had begun, and wandered round, smelling at this and that, followed half-heartedly by the spaniel Foch, who had no feeling for flowers.

'Whatever I do,' she thought, 'I ought to do now. I can't keep him on tenterhooks.'

She stood by the sundial, where the shadow was an hour behind its time, and looked into the eye of the sun over the fruit trees beyond the yew hedges. If she married him, there would be children — without them it would not be possible. She saw frankly — or thought she did — where she stood in the matter of sex. What she could not see was how it would all turn for herself and for him in the recesses of the spirit. Restless, she wandered from rose-bush to rose-bush, extinguishing the few greenfly between her gloved fingers. And, in a corner, with a sort of despair, the spaniel Foch sat down unnoticed and ate a quantity of coarse grass.

She wrote to Dornford the same evening. Her mother would be delighted if he would come for that week-end. Her father quite agreed with his views on agriculture, but was not sure that anyone else did, except Michael, who, after listening to him carefully one evening in London, had said: "Yes. What's wanted is a lead, and where's it coming from?" She hoped that when he came down he would be able to tell her about those costs. It must have been thrilling to see Cavalcade again. Did he know a flower called meconopsis, if that was the way to spell it, a sort of poppy of a most lovely colour? It came from the Himalayas, and so would be suitable for Campden Hill, which she believed had much the same climate. If he could induce Clare to come down it would rejoice the hearts of the aborigines. This time she signed herself 'always yours,' a distinction too subtle to explain even to herself.

Telling her mother that he was coming, she added:

"I'll try and get Clare; and don't you think, mother, that we ought to ask Michael and Fleur? They were very sweet to put us up so long."

Lady Charwell sighed.

"One gets into a way of just going on. But do, dear."

"They'll talk tennis, and that'll be so nice and useful."

Lady Charwell looked at her daughter, in whose voice something recalled the Dinny of two years back.

When Dinny knew that Clare was coming, as well as Michael and Fleur, she debated whether to tell Tony Croom. In the end she decided not to, sorrowfully, for she had for him the fellow feeling of one who had been through the same mill.

The camouflage above her father's and mother's feelings touched her. Dornford — high time, of course, he was down in the constituency again! Pity he hadn't a place of his own — didn't do to get out of touch with the electors! Presumably he'd come by car, and bring Clare; or Michael and Fleur could call for her! By such remarks they hid their nervousness about Clare and about herself.

She had just put the last flower in the last bedroom when the first car slid up the driveway; and she came down the stairs to see Dornford standing in the hall.

"This place has a soul, Dinny. It may be the fantails on the stone roof, or perhaps the deep way it's settled in, but you catch it at once."

She left her hand in his longer than she had meant to.

"It's being so overgrown. There's the smell, too — old hay and flowering verbena, and perhaps the mullions being crumbled."

"You look well, Dinny."

"I am, thank you. You haven't had time for Wimbledon, I suppose?"

"No. But Clare's been going — she's coming straight from it with the young Monts."

"What did you mean in your letter by 'restive'?"

"Well, as I see Clare, she must be in the picture, and just now she isn't."

Dinny nodded.

"Has she said anything to you about Tony Croom?"

"Yes. She laughed and said he'd dropped her like a hot potato."

Dinny took his hat and hung it up.

"About those costs?" she said, without turning.

"Well, I went to see Forsyte specially, but I got nothing out of him."

"Oh! Would you like a wash, or would you rather go straight up? Dinner's at quarter-past eight. It's half-past seven now."

"Straight up, if I may."

"You're in a different room; I'll show you."

She preceded him to the foot of the little stairway leading to the priest's room.

"That's your bathroom. Up here, now."

"The priest's room?"

"Yes. There's no ghost." She crossed to the window. "See! He was fed here at night from the roof. Do you like the view? Better in the spring when the blossom's out, of course."

"Lovely!" He stood beside her at the window, and she could see his hands clenched so hard on the stone sill that the knuckles showed white. A bitter wind swept through her being. Here she had dreamed of standing with Wilfrid beside her. She leaned against the side of the embrasured window and closed her eyes. When she opened them he was facing her, she could see his lips trembling, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes fixed on her face." She moved across to the door.

"I'll have your things brought up and unpacked at once. Would you answer me one question: Did you pay those costs yourself?"

He gave a start and a little laugh, as if he had been suddenly switched from tragedy to comedy.

"*I*? No. Never even thought of it."

"Oh!" said Dinny again. "You've lots of time." And she went down the little stairway.

Did she believe him? Whether she believed him or not, did it make any difference? The question would be asked and must be answered. ‘One more river — one more river to cross!’ And at the sound of the second car she went hurrying down the stairs.

❦

CHAPTER 38

During that strange week-end, with only Michael and Fleur at ease, Dinny received one piece of enlightenment as she strolled in the garden.

"Em tells me," said Fleur, "you're all worked up about those costs — she says YOU think Dornford paid them, and that it's giving you a feeling of obligation?"

"Oh? Well, it IS worrying, like finding you owe nothing to your dressmaker."

"My dear," said Fleur, "for your strictly private ear, *I* paid them. Roger came to dinner and made a song about hating to send in such a bill to people who had no money to spare, so I talked it over with Michael and sent Roger a cheque. My Dad made his money out of the Law, so it seemed appropriate."

Dinny stared.

"You see," continued Fleur, taking her arm, "thanks to the Government converting that loan, all my beautiful gilt-edgeds have gone up about ten points, so that, even after paying that nine hundred-odd, I'm still about fifteen thousand richer than I was, and they're still going up. I've only told YOU, in confidence, because I was afraid it would weigh with you in making up your mind about Dornford. Tell me: Would it?"

"I don't know," said Dinny dully; and she didn't.

"Michael says Dornford's the freshest egg he's come across for a long time; and Michael is very sensitive to freshness in eggs. You know," said Fleur, stopping suddenly, and letting go her arm, "you puzzle me, Dinny. Everybody can see what you're cut out for — wife and mother. Of course, I know what you've been through, but the past buries its dead. It is so, I've been through it, too. It's the present and the future that matter, and we're the present, and our children are the future. And you specially — because you're so stuck on tradition and continuity and that — ought to carry on. Anybody who lets a memory spoil her life — forgive me, old thing, but it's rather obviously now or never with you. And to think of you with 'never' chalked against you is too bleak. I've precious little MORAL sense," continued Fleur, sniffing at a rose, "but I've a lot of the commoner article, and I simply hate to see waste."

Dinny, touched by the look in those hazel eyes with the extraordinarily clear whites, stood very still, and said quietly:

"If I were a Catholic, like him, I shouldn't have any doubt."

"The cloister?" said Fleur sharply: "No! My mother's a Catholic, but — No! Anyway, you're not a Catholic. No, my dear — the hearth. That title was wrong, you know. It can't be both."

Dinny smiled. "I do apologise for worrying people so. Do you like these Angèle Pernets?"

She had no talk with Dornford all that Saturday, preoccupied as he was with the convictions of the neighbouring farmers. But after dinner, when she was scoring for the four who were playing Russian pool, he came and stood beside her.

"Hilarity in the home," she said, adding nine presented by Fleur to the side on which she was not playing: "How did you find the farmers?"

"Confident."

"Con —?"

"That whatever's done will make things worse."

"Oh! Ah! They're so used to that, you see."

"And what have YOU been doing all day, Dinny?"

"Picked flowers, walked with Fleur, played with 'Cuffs,' and dallied with the pigs. . . . Five on to your side, Michael, and seven on to the other. This is a very Christian game — doing unto others as you would they should do unto you."

"Russian pool!" murmured Dornford: "Curious name nowadays for anything so infected with religion."

"Apropos, if you want to go to Mass tomorrow, there's Oxford."

"You wouldn't come with me?"

"Oh! Yes. I love Oxford, and I've only once heard a Mass. It takes about three-quarters of an hour to drive over."

His look at her was much as the spaniel Foch gave when she returned to him after absence.

"Quarter past nine, then, in my car . . ."

When next day they were seated side by side, he said: "Shall we slide the roof back?"

"Please."

"Dinny, this is like a dream."

"I wish my dreams had such a smooth action."

"Do you dream much?"

"Yes."

"Nice or nasty?"

"Oh! like all dreams, a little of both."

"Any recurrent ones?"

"One. A river I can't cross."

"Ah! like an examination one can't pass. Dreams are ruthlessly revealing. If you could cross that river in your dream, would you be happier?"

"I don't know."

There was a silence, till he said:

"This car is a new make. You don't have to change gears in the old way. But you don't care for driving, do you?"

"I'm an idiot at it."

"You're not modern, you see, Dinny."

"No. I'm much less efficient than most people."

"In your own way I don't know anybody so efficient."

"You mean I can arrange flowers."

"And see a joke; and be — a darling."

It seemed to Dinny the last thing she had been able to be for nearly two years, so she merely replied:

"What was your college at Oxford?"

"Oriel"

And the conversation lapsed.

Some hay was stacked and some still lying out, and the midsummer air was full of its scent.

"I'm afraid," said Dornford suddenly, "I don't want to go to Mass. I don't get so many chances to be with you, Dinny. Let's make for Clifton and sit in a boat."

"Well, it IS rather lovely for indoors."

They turned off to the left, and, passing through Dorchester, came to the river by the bend and bluffs at Clifton. Leaving the car, they procured a punt and after drifting a little, moored it to the bank.

"This," said Dinny, "is a nice exhibition of high purpose, I don't think. 'Something done' isn't always what was attempted, is it?"

"No, but it's often better."

"I wish we'd brought Foch; he likes any kind of vehicle where he can sit on one's feet and get a nice sick feeling."

But in that hour and more on the river they hardly talked at all. It was as if he understood — which, as a fact, he did not — how, in that drowsing summer silence, on water half in sunlight, half in shade, she was coming closer to him than ever before. There was, indeed, to Dinny something really restful and reassuring in those long lazing minutes, when she need not talk, but just take summer in at every pore — its scent, and hum, and quiet movement, the careless and untroubled hovering of its green spirit, the vague sway of the bulrushes, and the clucking of the water, and always that distant calling of the wood pigeons from far trees. She was finding, indeed, the truth of Clare's words, that he could 'let one's mouth alone.'

By the time they were back at the Grange, it had been one of the most silent and satisfactory mornings she had ever known. But between his: "Thank you, Dinny, a heavenly time," and his real feelings, she could tell from his eyes there was a great gap fixed. It was unnatural the way he kept his feelings in check! And, as became a woman, compassion soon changed in her to irritation. Anything better than this eternal repression, perfect consideration, patience, and long waiting! And all that afternoon she saw as little of him as she had seen much all the morning. His eyes, fixed on her with longing and a sort of reproach, became an added source of vexation, and she carefully refrained from seeming to notice them. "Verra pavairse," her old Scottish nurse would have said.

Bidding him 'Good night' at the foot of the stairs, she felt a keen pleasure at the dashed look on his face, and an equally keen sense that she was 'a beast.' She entered her bedroom in a curious turmoil, at odds with herself, and him, and all the world.

"Damn!" she muttered, feeling for the switch.

A low laugh startled her. Clare, in her pyjamas, was perched on the window-seat, smoking a cigarette.

"Don't turn up, Dinny; come and sit here with me, and let's puff out of the window together."

Three wide-opened casements laid bare the night under a teazle-blue heaven trembling with stars. Dinny, looking out at it, said:

"Where have you been ever since lunch? I didn't even know you were back."

"Have a gasper? You seem to want soothing."

Dinny expelled a puff of smoke.

"I do. I'm sick of myself."

"So was I," murmured Clare, "but I feel better."

"What have you been doing, then?"

Again Clare laughed, and in the sound was something that made Dinny say:

"Seeing Tony Croom?"

Clare leaned back and her throat showed pale.

"Yes, my dear. The Ford and I went over. Dinny, we've justified the law. Tony no longer looks like a bereaved orphan."

"Oh!" said Dinny, and again: "Oh!"

Her sister's voice, warm and languid, and satisfied, made her cheeks go hot and her breath come quickly.

"Yes, I prefer him as lover to a friend. How sane is the law — it knew what we ought to have been! And I like his converted cottages. Only there's a fireplace upstairs that still wants opening up."

"Are you going to get married, then?"

"My dear, how can we? No, we shall live in sin. Later, I suppose, we shall see. I think this 'nisi' period is very thoughtful. Tony will come up in the middle of the week, and I shall go down at the week-end. And all so legal."

Dinny laughed. Clare sat up, suddenly, clasping her knees.

"I'm happier than I've been for ever so long. It doesn't do to make other people wretched. Also, women ought to be loved, it suits them somehow. Men, too."

Dinny leaned out of the window, and the night slowly cooled her cheeks. Beautiful and deep it was, out there, the shapes unstirring, dark and as if brooding. Through the tense stillness came a far drone, swelling to the rightful sound of a passing car, and, between the trees, she could see its travelling light burnish up the hedgerows for flying moments, and die beyond the angle of vision. Then the drone grew faint and fainter, and stillness recommenced. A moth flew by, and a little white feather from a fantail on the roof floated down, turning over in the quiet air. She felt Clare's arm come round her waist.

"Good-night, old thing! Rub noses."

Withdrawing from the night, Dinny clasped that slim pyjamaed body. Their cheeks touched, and to each the warmth of the other's skin was moving — to Clare a blessing, to Dinny an infection, as though the lingered glow from many kisses was passing into her.

When her sister had gone, she moved restlessly up and down her dark room.

"It doesn't do to make people wretched! . . . Women ought to be loved. . . . Men, too." Quite a minor prophet! Converted by lightning, like Paul on his way to wherever it was. Up and down, up and down, till at last, quite tired, she turned on the light, threw off her clothes, and sat down in a wrapper to brush her hair. Brushing away at it, she stared at her image in the glass with fascination, as if she had not seen herself for a long time. The fever with which she had been infected seemed still in her cheeks and eyes and hair, she looked unnaturally vivid to herself; or was it that the sun, while she and Dornford were sitting in that punt, had left her with this hot feeling in the veins? She finished brushing, shook back her hair, and got into bed. She had left the casements open, the curtains undrawn; and the starry night confronted her lying on her back in the darkness of her narrow room. The hall clock struck midnight faintly — only three hours or so before it would be light! She thought of Clare sunk in beauty sleep close by. She thought of Tony Croom, deep-drugged with happiness, in his converted cottages, and the old tag from The Beggars' Opera ran in her mind: 'With blisses her kisses dissolve us in pleasure and soft respose.' But she! She could not sleep! She felt, as sometimes when a little girl, that she must roam about, explore the strangeness of the dead of night, sit on the stairs, peep into rooms, curl up in some armchair. And, getting up, she put on her dressing-gown and slippers and stole out. She sat on the top stair, clasping her knees and listening. Not a sound in the old dark house, except a little scraping noise, where some mouse was at work. She rose, clutched the banister, and crept downstairs. The hall smelled musty already, too much old wood and furniture to stand enclosure by the night. She groped across to the drawing-room door and opened it. Here flowers and last year's pot-pourri and stale cigarette smoke scented the air with a heavy reek. She made her way to one of the French windows, drew the curtains back, and opened it. She stood there a minute taking deep breaths. Very dark, very still, very warm. By starlight she could just see the sheen on the magnolia leaves. Leaving the window open, she sought her favourite old armchair, and curled up in it with her feet tucked under her. There, hugging herself, she tried to recapture the feeling that she was a child again. The night air came in, the clock ticked, and the hot feeling in her veins seemed to cool away in measure with its rhythm. She shut her eyes fast, and the sort of cosiness she used to feel in that old chair, as if she were all clasped and protected, stole upon her; but still she did not sleep. Behind her from the window with the rising of the moon a presence had stolen in, a sort of fingering uncanny light, slowly lifting each familiar object into ghostly semblance of itself. It was as if the room had come awake to keep her company; and the feeling she had sometimes had, that the old house had a life of its own, felt, saw, knew its spells of wakefulness and of slumber, tingled once more within her. Suddenly, she heard footsteps on the terrace and sat up startled.

Someone said: "Who is that? Is anyone there?"

A figure stood in the open window; by the voice she knew that it was Dornford, and said:

"Only me."

"ONLY you!"

She saw him come in and stand beside the chair, looking down. He was still in his evening clothes, and, with his back to the faint light, she could hardly see his face at all.

"Anything the matter, Dinny?"

"Just couldn't sleep. And you?"

"I've been finishing a bit of work in the library. I went out on the terrace for a breath, and saw this window open."

"Which of us is going to say: 'How marvellous'?"

Neither of them said anything. But Dinny unclasped herself and let her feet seek the ground.

Suddenly, Dornford put his hands to his head and turned his back on her.

"Forgive my being like this," she murmured, "I naturally didn't expect —"

He turned round again, and dropped on his knees beside her. "Dinny, it's the end of the world, unless —"

She put her hands on his hair and said quietly: "— it's the beginning."

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CHAPTER 39

Adrian sat writing to his wife.

"Condaford: August 10.

"MY VERY DEAR —

"I promised to give you a true and particular account of how Dinny went off. Look in The Lantern for their conception of 'the bride and bridegroom leaving the church.' Fortunately, the lens of that enquiring organ caught them just before they pushed off — except in movies the camera simply cannot record movement; it always gets the sole of one foot cocked towards the eye, flannelises the knee of the other leg, and upsets the set of the trousers. Dornford looked quite good value — in this style, fourteen-and-six; and Dinny — bless her! — without the 'bride's smile,' almost as if she saw the joke. Ever since the engagement, I've wondered what she's really feeling. Love such as she gave Desert it certainly is not, but I don't believe there's any physical reluctance. When, yesterday, I said to her: 'In good heart?' her answer was: 'No half heart, anyway.' We both of us have reason to know that she can go all out in what she does for other people. But she's really doing this for herself. She'll be carrying on — she'll have children — and she'll count. That's as it should be, and so I believe she feels. If she hasn't what hopeful youth calls 'a crush on' Dornford, she admires and respects him, and I think quite rightly. Besides, he knows from me, if not from her, what she's capable of, and won't expect more until he gets it. The weather held up all right, and the church — wherein, by the way, your special correspondent was baptized — in the word of Verdant Green never looked 'berrer.' The congregation was perhaps a trifle Early English, though it seemed to me you could have got most of the faces at Woolworth's.

"At the top of the nave, in the more holy positions, came our own gang, County and would-be County. The more I looked at County the more I thought how merciful that the states of life into which it has pleased God to call us have prevented the Charwells of our generation from looking County. Even Con and Liz, who have to stick down here all the time, haven't got quite the hang of it. Remarkable, if you think, that there is such a thing as 'County' left; but I suppose it'll last while there's 'huntin' and shootin'. I remember, as a boy, out hunting (when I could screw a mount out of our stables or somebody else's), I used to lurk out of reach of people for fear of having to talk to them, their words and music were so trying. Better to be human than County or even would-be County. I must say that Clare, after all her jollification in the courts, carried it off amazingly, and so far as I could see, nobody had the nerve to show any of the feelings which, as a fact, at this time of day, they probably hadn't got. Then, a little less holy, came the village in force — Dinny's a great favourite with them — quite a show of oldest inhabitants. Some real faces; an old chap called Downer, in a Bath chair, all 'Whitechapel' whiskers and beard, and shrewd remaining brown spaces. He perfectly remembered Hilary and me falling off a hay-cart we oughtn't to have been on. And old Mrs. Tibwhite — a sweet old witch of a thing, who always let me eat her raspberries. The schoolchildren had a special holiday. Liz tells me not one in twenty of them has ever seen London, or indeed been ten miles out of the village, even now. But there's a real difference in the young men and maidens. The girls have most excellent legs and stockings and quite tasteful dresses; and the youths good flannel suits and collars and ties — all done by the motor bike and the film. Lots of flowers in the church, and a good deal of bell-ringing and blowy organ-playing. Hilary did the swearing-in with his usual rapidity, and the old rector, who held the sponge, looked blue at the pace he went and the things he left out. Well, you want, of course, to hear about those dresses. The general effect, as they stood in the aisle, was what you might call delphinian. Dinny, even in white, has that look, and, consciously or not, the bridesmaids were togged up according; and what with Monica and Joan and two young Dornford nieces being slim and tall, they really looked like a planting of blue delphiniums, preceded by four blue tots, sweet, but none as pretty as Sheila. Really, that chickenpox was very perverse; you and your two were terribly missed, and Ronald as a page would just have topped everything up. I walked back to the Grange with Lawrence and Em, an imposing steel-grey presence slightly marred where 'tears had got mixed with her powder sometimes.' In fact, I had to stop her under a stricken tree and do some good work with one of those silk handkerchiefs you gave me. Lawrence was in feather — thought the whole show the least gimcrack thing he had seen for a long time, and had now more hope of the pound going still lower. Em had been to see the house on Campden Hill; she predicted that Dinny would be in love with Dornford within a year, which started another tear, so I called her attention to the tree which had in fact been struck by lightning while she and I and Hilary were standing under it. 'Yes,' she said, 'you were squits — so providential; and the butler made a penholder out of the wood; it wouldn't hold nibs, so I gave it to Con for school, and he cursed me. Lawrence, I'm old.' Whereon Lawrence took her hand, and they walked hand in hand the rest of the way.

"The reception was held on the terrace and lawn; everybody came, schoolchildren and all, a quaint mix-up, but jolly, it seemed to me. I didn't know I was so fond of the old place. However much one may believe in levelling-up chances, there's something about old places. They can't be re-created if they're once let slip, and they focus landscape in a queer kind of way. Some villages and landscapes seem to have no core — you can't explain why, but they feel hollow, and shallow and flat. A real old place puts heart into a neighbourhood. If the people who live in it are not just selfish pigs, it means a lot in a quiet way to people who have no actual ownership in it. The Grange is a sort of anchor to this neighbourhood. I doubt if you'd find a single villager, however poor, who grudged its existence, or wouldn't feel the worse for its ruination. Generations of love and trouble, and goodness knows not too much money, have been spent on it, and the result is something very hand-made and special. Everything's changing, and has got to change, no doubt, and how to save the old that's worth saving, whether in landscape, houses, manners, institutions, or human types, is one of our greatest problems, and the one that we bother least about. We save our works of art, our old furniture, we have our cult — and a strong one — of 'antiques,' and not even the most go-ahead modern thought objects to that. Why not the same throughout our social life? 'The old order changeth'— yes, but we ought to be able to preserve beauty and dignity, and the sense of service, and manners — things that have come very slowly, and can be made to vanish very fast if we aren't set on preserving them somehow. Human nature being what it is, nothing seems to me more futile than to level to the ground and start again. The old order had many excrescences, and was by no means 'all werry capital,' but, now that the housebreakers are in, one does see that you can smash in an hour what has taken centuries to produce; and that, unless you can see your way pretty clearly to replace what admittedly wasn't perfect with something more perfect, you're throwing human life back instead of advancing it. The thing is to pick on what's worth preserving, though I don't say there's very much that is. Well, that's all very portentous! To come back to Dinny — they're going to spend their honeymoon in Shropshire, round about where Dornford comes from. Then they come back here for a bit, then settle in on Campden Hill. I hope this weather will last for them. Honeymooning in wet weather, especially when one is keener on the other than the other is on the one, should be very trying. Dinny's 'going away' frock, you may like to know, was blue, and suited her not quite down to the ground. We had a minute together. I gave her your love, and she sent you hers, and said: 'Well, I'm very nearly over, Uncle dear. Wish me luck!' I felt like piping my eye. Over what? Well, anyway, if wishes for luck will help, she goes wreathed with them; but all that kissing business is hard to get through. Con and Liz took theirs down at the car. I felt rather a brute, looking at their faces when she'd gone. They went away in Dornford's car, with himself driving. After that I confess that I slunk off. They're all right, I know, but it didn't feel like it. There's such cursed finality about a wedding, however easy divorce is or may become; besides, Dinny is not the sort who would take someone who loved her and then let him down; it's the old-fashioned 'for better for worse' there, but I think it'll be 'for better'— in the long run, anyway. I sneaked out of sight into the orchard and then up through the fields to the woods. I hope it was as gorgeous a day with you as it was here. These beech-woods on the slopes are more beautiful than the careful beech-clumps they plant on downs, though even those have a sort of temple-like effect, in spite of being meant as landmarks or to give shade to sheep. I can assure you that wood about half-past five was enchanted. I went up the slope and sat down and just enjoyed it. Great shifting shafts of sunlight coming in below and splashing the trunks; and ever-so-green cool spaces between — only one word for it, holy. The trees, many of them, go up branchless for a long way, and some of the trunks looked almost white. Not much undergrowth and very little 'life' except jays and a brown squirrel. When you're in a wood as lovely as that, and think of death duties and timber, your heart turns over and over as if you'd supped entirely off Spanish onions. Two hundred years in His sight may be as yesterday, but in mine I confess they're like eternity. These woods are no longer 'shot,' and anybody can come into them. I suppose the young folk do — what a place to wander about in, lovering! I lay down in a patch of sunlight and thought of you; and two small grey wood-doves perched about fifty yards off and talked cosily to each other, so that I could have done with my field-glasses. Willow-herb and tansy were out where trees have come down and been cleared away — foxgloves don't seem to flourish round here. It was very restful, except that one ached a bit because it was green and beautiful. Queer, that 'beauty' ache! Lurking consciousness of mortality, perhaps knowledge that all things must slip away from one in time, and the greater their beauty the greater the loss in store! Mistake in our make-up, that. We ought to feel: The greater the earth's beauty, the more marvellous the screen of light and wind and foliage, the lovelier nature, in fact — the deeper and sweeter our rest in her will be. All very puzzling! I know the sight of a dead rabbit out in a wood like that affects me more than it does in a poulterer's shop. I passed one as I was going back — killed by a weasel; its soft limpness seemed saying: 'Pity I'm dead!' Death may be a good thing, but life's a better. A dead shape that's still a shape moves one horribly. Shape IS life, and when life's gone one can't see why shape should remain even for the little time it does. I'd have liked to stay and see the moon come up and peer about in there, and slowly fill it all up with ghostly glistening; then I might have caught the feeling that shape lives on in rarefied form, and all of us, even the dead rabbits and birds and moths, still move and have their being — which may be the truth, for all I know or ever shall. But dinner was at eight, so I had to come away with the light still green and golden — there flows alliteration again like a twopenny brook! Outside, on the terrace, I met Dinny's spaniel, Foch. Knowing his history, it was like meeting a banshee — not that he was howling; but it reminded me sharply of what Dinny has been through. He was sitting on his haunches and looking down at nothing, as dogs — especially spaniels — will when things are beyond them, and the one and only scent is no more, for the time being. He'll go with them, of course, to Campden Hill when they come back. I went up and had a bath, and dressed, and stood at my window, listening to the drone of a tractor still cutting corn, and getting a little drunk on whiffs from the honeysuckle that climbs and flowers round my window. I see now what Dinny meant by: 'Over.' Over the river that she used to dream she couldn't cross. Well, all life is crossing rivers, or getting drowned on the way. I hope — I believe — she's touching shore. Dinner was just like dinner always is — we didn't talk of her, or mention our feelings in any way. I played Clare a game of billiards — she struck me as softer and more attractive than I've ever seen her. And then I sat up till past midnight with Con, in order, apparently, that we might say nothing. They'll miss her a lot, I'm afraid.

"The silence in my room, when I got up here at last, was stunning, and the moonlight almost yellow. The moon's hiding, now, behind one of the elms, and the evening star shining above a dead branch. A few other stars are out, but very dim. It's a night far from our time, far even from our world. Not an owl hooting, but the honeysuckle still sweet. And so, my most dear, here endeth the tale! Good night!

"Your ever loving

"ADRIAN."

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